

St. Brendan's
Matthew 1:18-25
December 21, 2025
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So now we have finally arrived at the last Sunday in Advent. All during these weeks we've been encouraged to slow down, to wait and to watch. However, amid all the preparations for Christmas, if we are honest, we might find ourselves drawn more to the twinkling lights and the sweet scent of balsam, the familiar hymns and images of shepherds and wisemen than we are to facing the reality of what a brutal time this was for Joseph and Mary. Pastor David Lose says, "*Whether by hearing this passage read in hushed tones by candlelight or because of our beloved hymns which cast a rosy hue around Matthew's words, it's so easy to forget that Joseph and Mary were real people.*"

I think it's fair to say that Matthew didn't get the memo from Hallmark about the manger surrounded by sweet lambs and donkeys, shepherds with their sheep as the pretty star shone above the stable. It is the Christmas card version of this moment that is most familiar to us, in which Mary dressed in blue robes is seated next to the manger in which a baby boy is swaddled and warm while Joseph stands by her side being paternal and kind.

But that is far from the reality. Imagine how scared Mary must have felt having to give birth away from her family and community. She was just a young teenager. Think of how cold it must have been in that leaky stable behind the inn. There was only a rickety manger filled with straw instead of a warm crib.

And what do we think was Joseph's state of mind? Think of all the emotions Joseph must have been struggling with, especially given the laws of the ancient world. Joseph and Mary were engaged but it was hardly romantic. It was a binding legal contract between Mary and Joseph that basically said they were married without the benefit of

living together. So, if we are to understand Joseph as a real person, we must also recognize the hurt and confusion he must have felt when he finds out Mary is pregnant. What else could he have thought but that Mary had been unfaithful to him.

Because Matthew tells us more about Joseph in this passage, we can only guess what the real Mary was experiencing ... In addition to probably fear and uncertainty about her future, there is the guilt she might have felt for having to put her husband through all of this. Mary knows that Joseph has 2 choices going forward. Either he divorces or dismisses her quietly, or he publicly declares Mary has been unfaithful and he shoves her out the door to be stoned by the community.

In this season of Advent, we too are fearful, anxious, despairing and deeply saddened by what is happening in our world right now. Advent promises us that light is coming...that there is hope...but right now the truth is, the world is very dark.

Advent doesn't minimize Joseph and Mary's heartbreak nor does it minimize our pain. But then the light of God's love breaks through the darkness and an angel of the Lord appears. It's not that the angel comforts Joseph or gives him an escape route. The angel simply assures him he doesn't have to be afraid. It is at that very moment God willingly intervenes in Joseph and Mary's struggles ...just as God will intervene in our struggles.

You see God does not choose some hot shot celebrity, but an unwed peasant girl to bear the Savior of the world. God doesn't use some hot shot tech expert but a simple carpenter with the same doubts and fears that we all have ...people just like us.

The reason it is important to recognize that Mary and Joseph were real people is that we are real people. If God comes to them than we can have the hope that God will meet us in our dark hour. If you take anything away from today, I hope it is faith that despite our faults and

flaws and failures, the light of God's love will always meet us where we are.

Many years ago a friend reminded me of this passage in Matthew when I was considering becoming a priest. How many times did I question myself. I said I am not good enough, why would God choose me? ...but as my friend said to me one day, "no one is good enough"....the question is will you, like Mary and Joseph, not be afraid to answer God's call to serve.

Yolanda Pierce, professor and Dean at Vanderbilt University, wrote recently, "*Maybe it's not the beatific scene of the nativity, a sleeping infant cradled by an apparently well-rested mother and surrounded by reverent visitors that should be seared into our memory. Perhaps images of refugees seeking sanctuary, of the unhoused searching for shelter and of the outcast striving for recognition are more faithful to the story of a God who journeys with us through the most difficult moments of our personal and collective histories.*"

If God journeys with us than we like Mary are all God bearers. The God we carry in our hearts is just waiting to burst into the world through our love for each other...that is the poor, the sick, even our enemies.

Matthew's Advent story points us to the miracle of the Incarnation, the Christ child embodied God with us. It is only right then that Matthew tells us this child shall be called, Emmanuel, God with us.

The late great preacher, Charles Spurgeon said this: "*Then if Jesus Christ be God with us; let us come to God without any question or hesitancy. Whoever you may be, you need no priest or intercessor to introduce you to God, for God has introduced himself to you.*"

Thanks be to God. There is light...there is hope...God is with us now and always. *Amen.*