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Matthew 1:18-25
SEE THE TRUSTING FAITH OF JOSEPH

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The season of Advent certainly is a call to faith and trust in the promises of God. The first Sunday calls us to believe that our Lord Jesus will return in glory to judge the world. He will come unexpectedly like a thief in the night. The Second Sunday tells us that the Messiah has come as John the Baptist preaches a message of repentance at the Jordan River. The Third Sunday calls us to reexamine our expectations of the Messiah while the final Sunday points to a miracle, the miracle of the Virgin Birth.

What would you do if you found that your girlfriend was pregnant and you knew that you were not the father of that child? In today's world you might have a public confrontation on national television with all kinds of name calling and public humiliation. It might get pretty good ratings. Joseph would never allow that. But we know that Joseph was concerned, very concerned. His fiancée Mary was pregnant and he knew that he was not the father of that child. What would he do? God would give him an explanation that sounds as crazy today as it did 2000 years ago. But it was absolutely true. SEE THE TRUSTING FAITH OF JOSEPH in his love for Mary and in his love for God's Word.

Joseph truly loved Mary. They were engaged to be married. Engagement meant a lot more in the world then than it does today. Both of them were from the small town of Nazareth in Galilee. They were distantly related. Both could trace their family trees all the way back to King David. In all likelihood Joseph was older than Mary. In those days, most men would not enter into marriage until they were at least 25 years old. At the same time, most girls got married shortly after puberty, at the age of fifteen or so. Joseph was a craftsman, a carpenter.

In those days marriage was usually arranged by the parents, but don't think that love had nothing to do with it. Joseph and Mary both lived in the small town. In all likelihood they knew each other, perhaps for many years. Perhaps Joseph made mention to his parents that he was interested in marrying that village girl Mary. Joseph's parents would discuss it among themselves, give their approval to his choice and then contact Mary's parents. They would then agree to a marriage contract. Mary and Joseph would speak vows of promise to one another. They would then be married in the future. This was a binding agreement. If Joseph would have died before the actual marriage ceremony, Mary would have been his legal widow.

But then something happened. Mary said something about going away for a while. She was going to the hill country of Judea to visit a relative named Elizabeth who was going to have a baby. There was talk about this being some sort of miracle. Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah were unable to have children and were both well along in years. Now she was suddenly pregnant. Mary told Joseph that she was going to visit her relative and Joseph would give his blessing on that. Mary went and stayed for three months until John was born.

Now Mary had returned. All it took was one look from Joseph to see that Mary was showing. What would he do? He really had three options. First of all, he could marry Mary immediately and hope that the people of Nazareth couldn't count to nine. That probably wasn't going to happen. It would be a difficult situation for Joseph to sort out his feelings. The second thing he could have done was to "expose her to public disgrace." He could publicly charge her with adultery and if he really pressed the matter he could demand that she be stoned to death for adultery. At the very least,

she would be forever publicly shamed before her hometown friends and relatives. That wasn't going to happen either. Joseph did not want to hurt her. He wanted to deal with her in love and forgiveness. Finally, he could divorce her quietly, giving her a bill of divorcement. He would not have to state any charge against Mary. He could hide the real reason under some mild expression such as incompatibility.

Because Joseph loved Mary very much, he would choose the third option. He was a righteous man. He knew what God's Word said about adultery and unfaithfulness, but he was still concerned about Mary's welfare. He did not want her to be publicly shamed, but at the same time, he felt that under the circumstances he could not take her as his wife.

Perhaps we ask the question: "Why didn't Mary tell Joseph?" We know that she was visited by the angel Gabriel and told that she would be the mother of God's Son. She would miraculously conceive through the power of the Holy Spirit. She accepted this in humble faith. But she received no information from the angel what she should do in the matter of informing Joseph. What could she say that would prove her innocence in the matter? "Honey, I'm pregnant! Do you remember that prophecy from Isaiah where the virgin would conceive and bear a son? Well, I'm the fulfillment of that prophecy!" That would be very difficult for Joseph to accept. It would be difficult for anyone to accept. Therefore Mary would leave the matter in God's hands. She had to trust that God would take care of it for her.

God would do exactly that. "But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.'" Angels made important appearances in the life of Christ. Here we see how an angel served the Lord while Jesus was still in Mary's womb. The angel would dismiss Joseph's fears. He addressed Joseph as "son of David." Implied in these words was the fact that if the Savior was to come from the royal line of King David as the Scriptures had promised, Joseph and Mary would have to remain husband and wife. Joseph's descent from the line of David would be needed legally. The royal line of King David seemingly had died out long ago. It appeared to be a useless stump. But as Isaiah and Jeremiah had prophesied, a Branch would come from the stump of Jesse. The King of kings was coming and he would rule forever!

"She will give birth to a son, and you will give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.' The precise wording of the angel's message made it clear to Joseph that the child born to Mary would not be Joseph's biological son. The angel did not tell Joseph, "Mary will give birth to your son." Rather the angel said, "Mary would give birth to a son." God was the real father. God would give birth to God. Joseph understood his role as the foster father of the Christ.

That child would be given a special name. It was a common name in those days. There were many children who were given the name Jesus or its Old Testament equivalent Joshua. The name means "the Lord is salvation." But this Jesus would physically fulfill the meaning of that name. He would be the Savior of the world. Just as Joshua led God's Old Testament people into the Promised Land of Canaan, Jesus came into the world to bring his people to the Promised Land of heaven. He would save us from our sins. He would do that by living a perfect life of obedience and by offering that perfect life on the cross from the sin of the world. That would be his mission. He would be the one chosen by God.

It was more than that. Jesus wasn't merely the one chosen by God. He was God himself. Joseph would be assured of that. "All this took place for fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' which means 'God with us.'" When we study Matthew's Gospel, we are reminded that it is the very first book of the New Testament. St. Matthew was writing to a Jewish audience that was

very familiar with the Old Testament and the prophecies that it contained. We see again and again in the Gospel of Matthew the fulfillment of prophecy.

Here we see the fulfillment of our Old Testament lesson. Everything in Jesus' life would be a fulfillment of prophecy. His birth would fulfill a number of prophecies. He would be born in Bethlehem. He would be descended from Abraham. He would be descended from King David. And he would be born of a virgin. He would be born without the original sin that all of us have.

He would be called Immanuel. That name means "God with us." It wasn't merely that when we look at the life of Jesus, that God was with us in some way. God actually took on human flesh and became one of us. As we look into the manger and see the tiny baby in it, we see that the baby is God himself in human form. He left the glories of heaven and entered our world of sin to be our Savior. This is an amazing miracle that shows God's infinite love for us. We will not be able to comprehend it any more than Joseph and Mary could on that first Christmas Eve. We simply rejoice that God has come to us to bring life and salvation to a world filled with sin and death.

And Jesus still is Immanuel! He promised his disciples that he is with us always, even to the very end of this age. Even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, he is still there with us, comforting us with his rod and staff. He invites us to come to him in prayer. He promises to hear us. Yes, he is with us always.

Joseph would do as God directed him. He would take Mary home as his wife. The Scriptures would be fulfilled. Jesus would be born as the legal son of Joseph and David. Joseph would be the legal father, the protector and provider of the Savior to be born of Mary. He would willingly take the role that divine grace had assigned to him.

Truly we have much to admire about Joseph. He loved Mary and he loved God's Word. He would love the Son who would be born to Mary. But even more he knew that his Son would be the ultimate love for him and for the world. Even though he could not understand everything by human reason, he would trust God and believe that somehow his eternal salvation would be wrapped up in this child. May God give us all a trusting faith like Joseph and grant us a blessed Christmas! AMEN.