



Expecting Jesus...
Like Joseph
Matthew 1:18-25

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December 2, 2007

If God is calling to you today to fulfill a purpose, what is that purpose and will you be as obedient as Joseph? Is there something more that God would have you do today? Has God privileged you to be his agent? Are you listening for God's message? Are you willing to obey it if and when you hear it?

Scripture

Matthew 1:18-25

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly.

²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do 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 as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' ²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

²³ 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel', which means, 'God is with us.' ²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

Sermon

In my junior year at Whitworth I tried out for the musical *Damn Yankees*. I really kind of backed into it. I had been in another play my freshman year, and I had a couple of buddies who were trying out for this play. So I auditioned and I received the role of “Applegate” – the devil. Oh, the irony.

We rehearsed the play, and I learned my lines and practiced my solo, a terrifying thought for someone who was told in third grade chorus to simply “mouth the words.” They tried to teach me a dance to accompany my solo; eventually they just told me to wave my arms around in circles to the beat of the song. As the performance drew near my excitement grew but my nervousness grew even more.

On the night of the first performance, the cast gathered downstairs below the main stage. I sat in a chair and let the stage folks apply makeup to my face and gray to my hair and beard (an act that is sadly no longer necessary). I became more and more nervous. My reaction in times like this is to get my “game face” on. Everything that is in me that is still a high school jock gets real quiet and real intense. I go way inside myself and I get serious and very still.

Unfortunately, I was surrounded by choir geeks. Choir geeks do not get quiet in these moments; they do not go deep inside. They get giddy, and they get loud. I remember trying to ignore the migration of butterflies inside my stomach while the rest of the cast merrily starting singing the “hippopotamus song.” I could have hit them. I didn’t know what I had been thinking when I signed up for the play, I didn’t know what I should have expected from these fellow students and cast members in that moment, but I would have loved for them to have shut up and for the first hit of the game.

The musical turned out great. It appears that maybe I was born to play the devil. But just prior to the play starting I had had no idea of what to expect, and no way to enter into the silence that I so desperately sought.

Our Advent series is about those people in the Gospels who first encounter Jesus. Our title is, “Expecting Jesus.” And each week we will explore the outcome of these characters who were expecting the birth of the Messiah. The truth is, though, that Joseph was not expecting Jesus. Although Joseph found himself in a difficult circumstance – his fiancée was pregnant and he knew he was not the Father – Joseph didn’t see the coming of the Chosen Child of God as imminent or a part of his solution.

All we know about Joseph, besides the fact that he was engaged to Mary, is that he was, according to Matthew, a “righteous man. Righteousness in the Jewish context that Matthew would have been using connotes more than just our understanding of righteousness as good moral content. Righteousness for the Jew ascribes to walking in right relationship with God, high praise for Joseph from Matthew.

Jerry Lynch’s story this morning is reminiscent in that sense to the Joseph story. Jerry’s life was one of good moral conduct, and Jerry felt little in his life was missing. He wasn’t necessarily seeking God,

and he didn't necessarily feel a void in his life either. Jerry was a good guy who was surprised to find out that a great God had a powerful call in store for him as he encountered Jesus.

It's the same for Joseph. He's a good man, leading a good life. In Joseph's case, a life recently troubled, but this was a good man with a noble heart. But then Jesus came into Joseph's life and a good life became a great life. And that life took on purpose and meaning in ways that Joseph could have never anticipated.

For Joseph, the coming of Christ, the one that the Angel says is to be named Jesus, "God saves," comes to Joseph not just to save him *from* sin but to save him *to* a life of great purpose and eternal consequence. I suspect that the notion of being saved into a life of greater, eternal purpose has appeal to many of us. Even for those who are living lives that could be described as "righteous" there may be something missing, or at least an inkling that there may be something greater out there for us.

Joseph is an example for us that in God's blessing in our lives we are called to something greater than just living good lives. While certainly the grace of Christ calls us to live lives of righteousness, God also calls us to live lives of purpose. Joseph is called to name Jesus, to protect Christ, to go out on the move (eventually to Egypt and then back to Nazareth). In order for Joseph to fulfill his purpose, he needed to accept God's call, he needed embrace the woman that society had told him to leave, he needed to embrace the child that needed an earthly father, he needed to be an agent of God's mission to the world.

If God is calling to you today to fulfill a purpose, what is that purpose and will you be as obedient as Joseph? Is there something more that God would have you do today? Has God privileged you to be his agent? Are you listening for God's message? Are you willing to obey it if and when you hear it?

There is one thing that I have noticed about Joseph and his obedience to God's call that may resonate with some of you here this morning. Joseph is a very quiet man. Even as he contemplated divorcing Mary, he planned to do so, according to Matthew, quietly. Indeed, Joseph is never quoted in scripture. We know he named Jesus according to the instruction of the angel but we are never privy to actually hear Joseph speak.

Many of my favorite everyday Christians follow the Joseph model. They advance the Gospel of Christ more with their actions than they do with their words. And when they speak the consistency of their actions gives weight and authority to those words.

Noisy Christians can grate like choir folks singing Hippopotamus scales. That is particularly true if those scales are all that's sung, rather than the rich hymn of a life lived consistently in the grace and mercy of Christ. Quiet Christians who model the quiet grace and mercy of Jesus, whisper – and those around them long to hear what they say.

Joseph knew God, and knew Jesus intimately. God called him, through Jesus, out of a life of goodness to a life of greatness. Joseph obeyed, with real quietness and great power. Of such is the grace of Christ.