

Advent 2022 Week 3

Joseph's Yes

We spent the first two Sundays of Advent focused on Mary and her "Yes" to the angel Gabriel's message. Mary wasn't the only one who had a decision to make. She was engaged to a man named Joseph. Mary's unexpected and miraculous pregnancy presented her fiancé with a decision to make. Turn to Matthew's gospel and let's look at another piece of the story.

Matthew tells us, **"This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. 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. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to 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 Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus." Matthew 1:18-25

We don't know much about Joseph. He was a carpenter. Some traditions say he was older than Mary, perhaps a widower with children but the bible is silent about that. He may have in fact been around 18-20 years of age, the typical age for a Jewish man to marry. Their parents likely arranged the marriage with Mary and Joseph's consent. He was of the lineage of David. After a reference in Luke 4, where Jesus spoke in the synagogue in Nazareth and the people responded, "Isn't this Joseph's son?" Joseph is not mentioned again so it is assumed he died somewhere around that time. We know he was a godly man, faithful in keeping the law and willing to risk everything in order to say "Yes" to the voice of God.

At the time Matthew's account begins, Joseph must have felt hopeful and excited about the future. He was engaged to a fine young woman, Mary. She was part of the same family tree, a descendant of David herself, a good Jewish girl. They were no doubt making big plans for their future. Joseph was a carpenter, a tradesman that could work with wood and stone so he could

make a living and provide for his family. He came from a good family himself and they could trace their roots all the way back to King David, all the way back to Abraham. He felt securely planted, well situated, ready for the next step in life when suddenly, everything changed. One conversation with Mary, one word, one moment and Joseph's world was turned upside down.

Have you been there? One minute you're on top of the world and the next minute you are in despair. One phone call, one doctor's visit, one conversation, one knock at the door. "I'm sorry to inform you...we're having to cut our staff size and I'm afraid we have to let you go...I just don't love you anymore...I'm afraid there's been some trouble and your daughter's been arrested." The list can go on. One moment in time.

Perhaps Joseph felt some of that when Mary said, "Joseph, there is something I have to tell you. I know this will be hard to believe, but an angel appeared to me and told me I am going to have a child, a son." "Well, Mary, that's great isn't it? After the marriage and we get settled, it will be wonderful to welcome a son an angel prophecied would be born." "Yes, well, that's not exactly what the angel said. He said this child would be conceived of the Holy Spirit. The angel meant now. What I'm trying to say is, I'm pregnant." "What do you mean you're pregnant? How can this be? How could this happen? I don't understand?"

Have you felt that way? Overwhelmed? Incredulous? That must have been the way Joseph felt. Dumbfounded at first. Then I wonder if the incredulity gave way to anger and then to hurt at what must have appeared to him as betrayal. "Mary, how could you do this to me?" Joseph was disappointed, embarrassed. I imagine he was thinking of the public humiliation he would feel when word got out among his family and the townspeople of Nazareth. What else would people think other than that Mary had been with another man... or with Joseph! His reputation might be on the line as well! Any way you looked at it, from Joseph's standpoint, it meant scandal and any way you looked at it, from Joseph's standpoint, he didn't deserve this. "I didn't ask for this, didn't sign up for this, this isn't my fault. Why did this have to happen to me?"

Once again, many of us can relate to how Joseph might have been feeling. Victimized! What now? What should he do? Joseph had some options and according to the Scripture, he made plans to divorce her. "How could he divorce her if they weren't married yet?" you ask. Let me explain a bit about Jewish engagement and marriage.

Mary was betrothed or engaged to Joseph. This was much different from our engagement period. In Jewish law, betrothal was a binding contract that lasted for about a year. It could be terminated only by death, which left the betrothed a widow or widower – or it could be terminated by a divorce. The man was already considered the husband but the woman remained in her father’s house. The marriage was completed when the husband took the betrothed home to his house (his father’s house basically) in a public ceremony which is what Joseph did in verse 24. The marriage then was consummated in sexual union. Notice, Joseph took Mary as his wife, meaning he took her to his house to protect her from further shame, but verse 25 tells us he kept her as a virgin, i.e. they did not consummate their marriage until after she gave birth to Jesus.

One other piece to this. Under Old Testament law, adultery, and that included infidelity during a betrothal, carried a death penalty. If a man marries and finds that his wife is not a virgin she is to be stoned to death! “She has done a disgraceful thing in Israel by being promiscuous while still in her father’s house. You must purge the evil from among you.” Deuteronomy 22:21. It was a serious matter, but by this time divorce was allowed instead. Joseph could divorce her publicly, accusing her of adultery and expose her to shame. A woman with a child, divorced for infidelity would find it difficult to find another husband and would be left destitute. Joseph didn’t want to publicly humiliate her, so he decided to divorce her quietly, privately.

Common sense told him to divorce her. She had conceived a child. By the Holy Spirit? Come on! Who ever heard of anything like that. Never in history. It was as far out then as it is now.

Self-protection told him to get a divorce. “I’m the victim here. There is no reason for my reputation to be ruined by this. I’m not the father. I shouldn’t have to raise someone else’s child.”

Pride told him to divorce her. “She’s embarrassed me in front of my family and friends. In front of the whole town. I’ll have to divorce her in order to hold my head up in town.”

Family, friends, opinion polls, Facebook trolls, everyone said you have to divorce her, Joseph. There is no other choice. Divorce seemed like the only option but then, God stepped in! Listen to what I’m about to say. **You haven’t run out of options until you’ve heard from God!** It doesn’t matter what common sense is telling you, what pride and self-preservation is telling you, what everyone on the planet is telling you, not if you’ve heard from God. Sometimes common sense gives way to faith and faith leads to the miraculous!

After Joseph had considered all this and had made his plans, God spoke to him in a dream and told him to risk it all, to trust God and trust Mary, to live by faith, to forget about what everyone else would think and say “yes” to God’s plan for Mary and for himself.

“Don’t be afraid to take Mary home as your wife.” Go ahead Joseph. Say yes to the plan. Say yes to your place and your role in what God wants to do to save his people from their sins. Regardless of personal cost, regardless of the risk, dare to trust God and do what he says to do. **Joseph, go ahead and say “Yes” to God!**

Verse 19 says Joseph was a righteous man. He wanted to show mercy to Mary and the Lord wanted to show mercy to Joseph. “Don’t be afraid, Joseph. This change in plans, this divine interruption is nothing to fear. It’s all part of God’s good plan of mercy and redemption.”

The angel called him “Joseph son of David.” The angel of the Lord reminded him of his lineage and heritage. “Joseph you’re a child of the king. You’re part of God’s plan. Trust him. This is just the next step for you Joseph. “ The angel told him “what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.” Don’t be afraid of anything the Holy Spirit is doing.

Let me say it again. **Don’t be afraid of anything the Holy Spirit is doing in your life.** Never fear what God wants to birth in your life or birth through your life. Don’t fear what God wants to do or what he wants to produce in your life. I believe God wants to birth something new in this church in the coming year. It may be painful because birth pains are real, but God has something good in store and the end will be something miraculous. We have to say Yes to what God wants to do. Don’t let fear or your own desires cause you to abort what God has planned for you, for your family, for His church.

The angel told Joseph, “She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.” Joseph has a role to play. “You are part of this too, Joseph. As his father you will give him his name.” This wasn’t the life Joseph and Mary were planning. All the questions, the sacrifice. They would have to leave family and friends and live in hiding in Egypt for a time. “Here’s the thing Joseph. It is going to require sacrifice on your part and on Mary’s part as well. But the reality is, God needs a man, a son of David, who will say “yes” to His plan and purpose and to His call. He’s found a woman in Mary. We have her “yes”. Now Joseph, God is calling you to be that man. Will you say “yes” to the call?”

The bible says **“When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she**

gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.” Matthew 1:24-25 Joseph was willing to say yes. He was willing to sacrifice, to risk it all in obedience to the word of the Lord.

He was willing to risk his reputation. “Hey, did you hear about Joseph and Mary? Yes, expecting a baby before their marriage.” Or “Did you hear about Joseph and Mary? What a schmuck, marrying that girl and he doesn’t even know whose baby she’s carrying.” Joseph’s reputation no longer mattered, he just wanted to obey God.

Joseph was willing to say yes even though he had to leave the country. It seemed he was no longer in control of his destiny, but he was saying “Where he leads me, I will follow.”

Joseph was willing to say yes even though it meant denying himself and his rights. He had no union with his wife until she gave birth to a son. He denied his flesh, his rights as a Jewish husband. None of that was as important as obeying God and fulfilling his role in God’s plan and purpose.

What’s the point for us today? **God is looking for men and women like Joseph and Mary who are willing to say “Yes” to His plan and purpose!** Yes, even though God’s plan interrupt your plans. Yes, even though it means a new call, a new direction, a walk of faith, a shake up of the status quo. It may mean sacrificing your carefully crafted reputation. It may surprise your family and friends. It may mean living in a foreign country, it may mean bible school instead of that university degree and career you planned. It may mean believing God and trusting in Him when everyone else things you’re crazy. It may mean, like Joseph, loving and caring for and raising someone else’s child, or caring for someone you hadn’t planned on. God is looking for people who will risk it all for Jesus just as Mary and Joseph risked it all for Jesus. Are you willing to say yes? Forget about your pride, lay aside your plans and surrender everything to Jesus. Listen for his direction, his instructions and then say yes to all he asks. Purpose in your heart to obey God and then walk on in obedience, regardless.

Was it worth it Joseph? Was it worth the trouble, the sacrifice, the loss, the inconvenience? “Are you kidding? We named him Jesus, just as the angel said, because He saved us from our sins.” Be the next Joseph and Mary. Say yes to Jesus!