

## Matthew 1:18-25

Advent 4; December 18 & 19, 2022

It was not much to look at. Nazareth was a backwater village of around 50 houses about four acres in size. At the most, it was a town of maybe 300—400 people. It was a town where everyone knew everyone. Everyone knew what was going on in each other's lives. A scandal was about to rock the town of Nazareth. Matthew lays out the scandal. **"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."** How did Joseph feel when he heard these words? He **"considered this."** The Greek word translated, **"considered,"** has two meanings. One meaning is the idea of *considering or pondering*. But a second meaning is also *"becoming angry."* He became very *"upset."* For some reason, we have the impression that Joseph wasn't angry at all. But Joseph was a human being. On hearing the news that his fiancé was pregnant; was he expected to just sit quietly and *"consider"* this matter? Or would he have felt disappointed and even anger of betrayal. Yet, even though his understanding of justice led him to *do the right thing* and treat her in a humane fashion, it didn't prevent him from having the anger of betrayal.

Yet, he didn't want the scandal to get worse than it already was. So, what does Joseph decide to do? Matthew writes: **"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."** Most scandals are ugly, aren't they? This *situation* with Mary had all the makings of an ugly scandal in a small town. We know very little of Joseph. The Bible doesn't even record a single word that Joseph spoke. Joseph met a young lady who he had fallen in love with. They became engaged. They were considered to be husband and wife, even though they had not yet begun to live together. He was most likely getting their home ready for his bride. Mary had gone off to see her cousin, Elizabeth, for 3 months. When she returned home, Joseph had the surprise of his life. He would have to deal with something he NEVER would have expected. His Mary was pregnant. Suddenly, all his plans were put on hold. Joseph must have been devastated.

We can only imagine the thoughts that were going through Joseph's mind. How could this happen? What would people think? Where was God? Even IF Joseph WANTED to believe Mary about who this child was going to be, he just couldn't. Joseph jumped to the only conclusion that he could with the information that he had. Mary was pregnant. He wasn't the father. Mary must have been unfaithful. His plans for a happy home with the woman he loved were dashed before his eyes. His life, as well as hers, had been interrupted. His emotions were most likely all over the place. The only way out of the engagement was divorce.

But God had a much bigger plan for Joseph and Mary. They looked at this as an ugly scandal. God looked at this as a fulfillment of a prophecy that he had given hundreds of years before Mary or Joseph breathed their first breath on the earth. I wonder, how many times Joseph and Mary may have heard those words of the prophet Isaiah: **"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us."** God could not have been clearer. Joseph knew that promise. I'm sure he believed that promise. But how could this be happening to him. Why would God choose him and his wife? They were both descendants of King David. But who were they? They were no-bodies. That promise in Isaiah was the farthest thing out of Joseph's mind. All Joseph could see was the problem and not the big picture.

So, God stepped in to Joseph's life to connect the dots and fill in the blanks for him. God was going to take this "trouble" and turn it into something good, not just good for them, but for this entire world. He sent an angel with the message: **"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."**

**"Do not be afraid."** Joseph had good reason to be afraid. What would people think about Mary and Joseph? Even if they would BOTH believe the angel, who would believe them. God was asking Joseph to risk everything for Him. The challenges that he and Mary faced in the eyes of people, wouldn't end with Jesus' birth. People would probably talk about his mother. There would still be the rumors that surrounded them. This was not going to be easy. So, what does Joseph do? **"He did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife."** Joseph would need to let go of *his* life. Instead, he would need to put himself into God's hands, and trust him. This was going to take a

big leap of faith on Joseph's part. **"They will call him Immanuel – which means, 'God with us.'"** God was coming down to live with his people. God was coming to pay for everyone's scandals. He was coming to pay for every wrong words or evil words they had spoken. God was coming into this world not just to tolerate us. He was coming to wipe our slates of sins clean. God was opening Joseph's eyes to see something much bigger. That same God is asking us to trust him. It's not always easy. This wasn't going to be easy for Mary and Joseph. But God was going to be with them every step of the way. May God help all us to trust him. Amen.