

First Baptist Church Smiths Falls

December 31, 2017

Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25 (NKJV)

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. 19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. 20 But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." 22 So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: 23 "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us." 24 Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, 25 and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus.

Message: "A Carpenter's Dream"

Introduction:

(With slight amusement) I am Joseph, the husband of Mary, who is the mother of the baby, Jesus, whom you so often sing about. It's quite possible you have given little thought to my role in the Christmas story. After all, I was pretty much in the background of that holy event.

(Matter-of-fact) Oh, yes, I am in the pictures. You've seen the depictions of me leading a donkey laden with my pregnant wife, as we made our way toward Bethlehem. You've seen the picture of me pleading at the innkeeper's door for a room. You've placed me in your Nativity scenes beside Mary, with shepherds, sheep and cattle mingling around the manger which held the Christ child. Oh, yes, I'm in the pictures.

Perhaps you have always thought I had an insignificant role in the birth of Jesus, and in many ways you might well be right. But I never thought so ... once I understood. (Emphatically) I felt I was the most privileged of all men to be the guardian of the Christ child. What an incredible honour God had bestowed upon me! What trust, to give me the care of His Son! Therefore, let me tell you the Christmas story from my perspective.

(Sadly, regretfully) At first, I did not understand. When Mary came telling me she was expecting a child, I thought my heart would break. Why would she do this to me - how could she be

unfaithful to me? After all, we were engaged to be married. Then, when she told me that she had conceived by God's Holy Spirit, confusion was added to my grief. I had heard many excuses before, but this one was rare indeed! Was Mary trying to tell me God approved of her promiscuous ways? How could God possibly condone such behaviour?

Surely, something had happened to Mary. She was the last woman in the world I would suspect of such an act. Of all the people I knew, Mary was undoubtedly the most devout. When I found out that she was pregnant, I was overwhelmed. At first, I became angry because I thought someone had taken advantage of her; and she was trying to protect him.

As the truth grew on me, grief and pain and frustration were my constant companion. And I knew something had to be done. After all, when her pregnancy became known, my own good name would be threatened. I knew I had to deal quietly with Mary. I had to break our engagement, but I loved her. (With much feeling) Oh,

how I loved her! (Still with regret). I could not bring myself to hurt her or to see her hurt, especially by the religiously pious people who love to hurt others in the name of God. I knew they would treat her without mercy. The law was so severe on matters like that. I could not have lived with myself had I allowed the law to punish my dear, dear Mary. I decided to make it a private matter.

But, oh, it was breaking my heart to tell Mary it was all over!

So I therefore spent long hours in prayer asking God if I was doing the right thing and doing it the right way. I fell asleep in my prayers, and in my sleep God opened my eyes to His Spirit. (With wonder) The angel of the Lord appeared to me in a dream and told me not to fear in taking Mary as my wife. He also assured me her pregnancy was an act of His Holy Spirit. Even in my dream it must have been apparent that I needed more convincing.

So, in my vision, the angel seemed to take me back through time.

Suddenly, I was looking in on Abraham, and God was saying to him, *"I will bless you and make your seed as sand of the sea. I will*

establish with you and your descendants an everlasting covenant, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” I saw all the patriarchs when God was renewing His covenant with His people through them. I saw Joseph in Egypt and Moses looking over the Land of Promise. I heard God challenge Joshua and all Israel to be strong and of great courage, because God had many plans for His people. The angel allowed me to see the judges of Israel, as they led the people in their struggling determination to keep the land God had given them. Never before had I understood the sacrifices of my forefathers, Surely, God had a mighty plan. Then I found myself in Jerusalem, the capital of God's people filled with all His hopes and dreams. Later, I was to see Solomon display the Temple as a God’s showpiece for all the world to see. Here again, God's covenant was reviewed, and a commitment from the people was renewed. Once more, my vision took me through the years. I was looking over Isaiah's shoulder as he wrote, *"The people who walk in darkness have seen a great light. To those who*

live in a dark land, on them the light will shine. For unto us a child is born; unto us a Son is given. And the government shall be upon his shoulders. And his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, and of the increase of his government there shall be no end." The days of Isaiah were dark but he saw the coming Messiah. I was carried to the countryside where Micah, under the inspiration of God, was writing of a time when a true king would come. This is what I saw him write: *"But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be the ruler in Israel. Whose goings forth have been from of old from everlasting."* The Messiah was to come, and God gave Him to me as my own son, (With growing excitement) As my dream ended, the angel reminded me of Isaiah's sign of the coming Messiah: *"Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bring forth a Son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which means 'God with us.'"* The angel also told me that Isaiah's virgin was none

other than my own dear Mary who I was to marry, and I was to give my son the name of Jesus, as He shall save His people. Instantly my fear disappeared. (Excitedly) When I awoke, things began to clear up. If God's Son was going to be born into this world, then only the purest virgin could bear that seed. My own dear Mary was chosen by God for this awesome assignment! (Slightly facetiously) Apparently, I had pretty good taste in women.

I could hardly wait to tell Mary about my dream! I was so ashamed of myself for doubting her integrity. (With amazement) Isn't it wonderfully strange how God works? He turned my anger and fears into a divine mission. He gave me more love for Mary than I ever imagined was possible! Not only was I going to be the husband of my dear, dear Mary, I was going to be the custodian of God's dear Son. (With great excitement) We began immediately to make plans for our wedding. It was as though God Himself performed the ceremony and the angels in heaven were our

attendants.

But another change alerted our lives. Near the time Mary was to deliver her child, we had to go to Bethlehem because of a census of Caesar Augustus. It seemed like a cruel thing for Mary to make the trip to Bethlehem in her condition. But we had to leave Nazareth and go to Bethlehem.

I wondered if her child might be born in Bethlehem. In fact, I rather expected it. Deep within me, I kept hearing Micah say, "*But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall come a ruler.*"

As we suspected, the long trip prompted her labour and there we were in crowded Bethlehem, desperately needing a room. The only thing we could get was the innkeeper's stable. At best, it was mere protection from the cold night air. We had little time, however, to worry about the crude surroundings. We had to do the best we could with what we had, for in a short time after we arrived, Mary delivered her Son. (Dreamily, with a sense of wonder) It was then

our simple stable was changed into a palace! The straw glistened like gold, as a special star shone from above. The sky burst forth with brilliance, and all heaven seemed to celebrate the birth of God's Son, Mary's and my boy! Angels sang in the distance,

"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will to all."

Sometime later, wise men came with their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. (With regret) But soon, our celebration ended. King Herod became furious when he learned of the Christ child's birth, and we had to escape for our lives into Egypt and remain there until Herod's death.

(Pensively) On returning to Nazareth, a note of sadness settled upon my soul, as the words of Isaiah kept echoing in my mind.

"He was wounded for our transgression. He was bruised for our iniquity. The chastisement of our peace was upon him and by his stripes we are healed." I kept wondering what lay ahead for the

Christ child, for my son, for Jesus. Whatever it was, God was doing a marvellous thing for His people. Although there would be

pain for God's dear beloved Son, for Jesus, He would bring peace to all hearts which are opened and loving toward Him. (Spends a few moments in thoughtful silence.)

Conclusion:

(Pointedly to audience) May I leave you with two thoughts?

One is that I am grateful to God for allowing me to be the guardian of His Son. And although I was much in the background, He gave me a part in salvation's drama. Always remember that no matter how small your duty for God may seem, God sees it all as a mighty ministry.

A second thought is that God has done all of this for you. Just as I am in the picture of your Nativity scene, so you are in it too, because God so loved you (He begins his exit) that He *"...gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever shall believe in Him, shall not perish but have everlasting life."* (Adopted from "Voices From the Bible" by

Calvin S. Metcalf 1990)