

Pardon the Interruption: Joseph
Mathew 1:18-25
November 29, 2015, First Sunday of Advent
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I love Christmas!! And here we are at the First Sunday of Advent. We begin today a sermon series entitled "Pardon the Interruption." Speaking of Pardon the Interruption.....we have Interrupted our regular platform area.....to set an atmosphere of this special season. We have an Advent wreath, we have the evergreen, and white lights on a tree, and yes we have some outdoor scenery.....we will be using all of them this Advent and Christmas season. Our narthex has the beautiful Chrismon tree and even our office entryway and Multi-Purpose Room have been interrupted....by decorations.

I love Christmas!! And I love DVR and TIVO and recording television shows and movies....let me explain. Through the years as pastor I have learned to deal with interruptions. I remember one particular time years ago I was on call as volunteer Chaplain of a local hospital. I was watching an old movie on TV it was in about the last 20 minutes when all of a sudden my hospital beeper went off. For those of you who do not know what beepers are....it's like a text, but not really because you still have call to find out what the message means. Anyhoo...my pager went off my movie was interrupted and off to the hospital I went. Man....I was looking forward to seeing that movie. I love DVR and TIVO and recording shows! Interruptions seemingly come at the worst time.

Most interruptions are usually annoying. Cell phones ringing in the middle of a movie or a place where we should have our phones off. In fact....it's interesting when that happens that people around give "the look"----why how dare they have their cell phone on.....and then the next thing you know they are checking yours to make sure yours is off. MY CELL PHONE RINGS.....oops, Pardon the Interruption.

We will find in our sermon series that the main characters surrounding the birth of Christ had interruptions....interruptions that made a difference in their life. How do you handle interruptions? Do you get annoyed? Frustrated? Disappointed? Or even angry? Do you realize that sometimes interruptions can be good things.

A couple of Thursdays ago I was in my home office, (the catacombs) working on my sermon. I was on a roll....God was given me some thoughts and words and I was typing away.....and then right in the middle of I'm sure a profound sermon illustration....my phone begins to beep....Ugh....I hate interruptions.....I'm in the middle of a sermon here.....and then I was put into my place as the phone interruption was a reminder alert that is 1551, that is 3:51 and it was time for me to pray for the church. I was ashamed that I was so upset about the interruption and call to prayer. By the way....thank you to all who participated in the 1551 prays....and I hope that each of you will continue to pray....not necessarily at 1551 (3:51 p.m.), but that you will pray each day for the church to be doing what the Lord wants and that the Holy Spirit will lead and guide us.

Since 2001 on the TV sports station ESPN there has been a show hosted by Tony Kornheiser and Michael Wilbon called PTI---Pardon the Interruption. They begin the show by saying, “Welcome to PTI boys and girls....in today’s episode.....///and then highlights are given.

So...welcome to PTI boys and girls...in today’s episode we find that Joseph was awakened from a dream in which he was told by an angel to do something miraculous.

Joseph had a plan, but that plan was interrupted by God....don’t you hate when that happens? How dare God interrupt what we had as our plans! Joseph was betrothed to Mary. Now let’s stop and explain this interesting word....betrothal. We don’t use that word anymore. In the historical context betrothed means more than just being engaged. Betrothed means there is a legal contract for marriage. In fact those betrothed are called husband and wife, although they did not live together until the time of the marriage. A betrothal could only be broken by the formal process of divorce. Of course according to Jewish law there were only a few select things for which one could get a divorce and still be in accordance with keeping the religious intent of the law.

It is revealed to Joseph that Mary, his “betrothed wife”, even though she was living in another house was going to have a baby. Joseph had some decisions to make. According to Old Testament law he could have had Mary stoned to death. But we notice that Joseph was a just man and unwilling to put her to shame. He resolved not to put her death, but to divorce her quietly.

However as he was considering these things and angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. This was a common occurrence in these days of how the Lord spoke to His people. There are several examples in the Old Testament of God speaking to people through dreams.

The angel calms Joseph and tells him not to be afraid to take Mary and proceed with the wedding and marriage. But now let’s think this through.....if he goes ahead with this means that people would be talking about he and Mary. Making fun of the, turning their head in disgust with them. Wondering why Joseph didn’t have his betrothed wife stoned or at least divorce her.

It makes me wonder what type of man was Joseph. You see we do not have a whole lot of Biblical references to Joseph. The last time we really know of his presence is later at the temple when Jesus was 12. Jesus is later referred to as the son of a carpenter, so we know Joseph’s occupation. Some believe that Joseph died before Jesus began his public ministry. And most assume that Joseph was already dead at the time of the crucifixion....because Jesus commends the care of his mother, Mary, to John.....if Joseph had been alive there would have not been a reason to do that.

Joseph, Pardon the Interruption..... “I know you are sleeping.....I know you have discovered that Mary is with child....but I want you to go ahead and take her as your wife....because that child growing within her has been conceived by the Holy Spirit.”

Talk about an interruption.....talk about a dream.....felt like a nightmare.....but we find the true character of Joseph because he obeys the instructions from the angel. Think about it....why was Joseph chosen to be the earthly father of the Son of God. He is indeed a Bible Hero. The boys and girls received a handout this morning talking about Joseph. Boys and girls look at the handout....it asks “What are the things that make a great father?” It gives you a place to right those things. I believe Joseph was a great father. One of the things that makes him great is that he obeys God.

The angel tells Joseph more. There is no gender reveal party....because it is clear that this she is to bear a son....and the angel says to call his name Jesus. The name Jesus specifies what this child does....you see the name Jesus means... He saves. The transliteration of the Greek is IHSOUS....pronounced Iesous, similar to Hebrew, Yeshua....which is like Joshua. You will notice on some crosses that there is IHS. That is the first 3 letters of Jesus name in Greek. Later some in would say it was Latin for In Hos Signo....in this sign. That is the sign of the cross. We as Methodists sometimes that IHS stands for 1 hour Service. No....IHSOUS. He will save his people from their sins.

Now here is where the interruption gets really exciting. Back about 700 years the birth of Jesus, the prophet Isaiah spoke these words, “Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel.” (Isaiah 7:14). You see what he does is saves...Jesus....who He is Immanuel....which means God with us.

And so after waiting over 700 years....indeed...they sang in their heart..... “Come thou long expected Jesus.” This afternoon at 3 p.m. we will have a Blue Christmas Service....there is information in the bulletin about this. For those that have lost loved ones or are perhaps lonely during the holidays we need to know that God is with us....and so this afternoon we will sing, “O Come, O Come Emmanuel.” You see Emmanuel means God is with us.

As the Gospel of John puts it.... In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the word was God. God became flesh and dwelt among us. I particularly like the common, earthy phraseology of The Message Bible.....John 1 The Message (MSG)

1¹⁻² The Word was first, the Word present to God, God present to the Word. The Word was God, in readiness for God from day one. ³⁻⁵ Everything was created through him; nothing—not one thing!—came into being without him. What came into existence was Life, and the Life was Light to live by. The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness; the darkness couldn’t put it out.

The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.

We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish.

Pardon the Interruption Joseph, but God is moving into the neighborhood.

Indeed He is Emmanuel, God with us. From this birth announcement to the last chapter and last line of the Gospel of Matthew when Jesus is giving final instructions to His disciples---Jesus says, "I am with you always to the end of the age."

Oh beloved that is hope. That is consolation. That is encouragement. That is what keeps us from despair....God is with us.

So....Joseph awakens from his dream....and scripture says.... "He did as the angel of the Lord commanded him." (Matthew 1:24)

Place yourself in Joseph's sandals. What would you have done?

What about today? How do you handle interruptions? Social pressure could have tempted Joseph to make one decision, but he listened and obeyed. And scripture doesn't say what happened concerning the any ridicule or harassment, but we do know that he allowed God to speak during this interruption.

Do we see interruptions as a way that God might allow us to depend more on Him?

Do we see interruptions as a way we can be more attentive to God's plan and not our plan?

Do we turn our interruptions over to God?

Joseph the earthly father of Jesus....Jesus who at his first miracle would turn water into wine, would later open the eyes of the blind. Jesus, the Son of God. Jesus....the one who saves. Jesus...God with us.

They shall call his name Emmanuel. And Emmanuel means God with us.

Did you hear that? God is with us.

God is with us.

Let me tell you that means....

It means our God is Healer,
It means our God is Awesome in Power.
It means our God is greater,
It means our God is stronger,
Yes, Our God is higher than any other.
Our God! Our God!

Our God is for us.....Through Jesus who came to save us... our God has moved into the neighborhood.... And therefore our God is with us.