

Title: Keep Calm and Carry On
Text: Matthew 1:19-25
Preacher: Edward Bellis
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We are four days away from Christmas. Close enough now to smell cinnamon warming in kitchens and coffee cups, close enough to feel that low hum of expectation under our feet. And yet, still far enough away that the world feels unfinished. Not quite ready. Not quite peaceful.

Some of us arrive here carrying hope we didn't expect. Maybe we arrive with joy that surprises us. And some, perhaps many, may arrive with love that feels costly, and our peace that has been hard to come by.

Advent gives us four candles—hope, peace, joy, love—as though preparation could be managed, measured, lit in sequence. But the first Christmas had no candles at all. No gentle buildup. No soft music swelling at just the right moment. That first Advent arrived like a knock on the door in the middle of the night, unexpected, unplanned, and unwrapped.

And if we listen carefully to today's Scripture, we can almost hear a voice behind that knock. Not an angel's voice. Not yet. But we hear a human one. Joseph's voice. Quiet. Stunned. "Pregnant? What do you mean... pregnant?"

That is how Matthew begins the story. Not with glory. Not with choirs. But with a sentence that opens the wound before it offers the balm: "Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way..." "In this way." This human way. This is an awkward, painful, confusing, deeply uncomfortable way.

Matthew tells the Christmas story from Joseph's side of the door. He is betrothed—legally bound. Not together yet. Not consummated. But already married in the eyes of the village. And in a small town, in a long year, news travels faster than truth.

Joseph measures time differently now. Not by seasons, but by looks. Not by calendars, but by silence. A year marked by whispers, by shame he did not earn, by questions he cannot answer.

And Scripture says, almost quietly: "Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly."

This is not righteousness that majors in rule-keeping. This is righteousness that majors in mercy. Joseph is doing the kind thing. The decent thing. The costly thing. And it will cost him nearly everything.

Then Matthew adds a phrase we might rush past if we are not careful: "After Joseph had considered all this..."

After the sleepless nights. After the rehearsed conversations. After the tears, no one saw him run out of explanations.

Then God speaks.

Why wait so long? Why let him sit there? Because faith is not formed in answers alone. Faith grows muscle in the waiting.

And then the dream. And the angel who calls him by a name he may have forgotten still mattered: “Joseph, son of David.”

You belong to this story. Your life matters more than you know. God is doing something, and you are needed.

“Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.”

And Joseph wakes up.

Matthew gives us no reaction, no speech, no prayer—just obedience. Joseph does as the angel commanded.

Because when Love shows up—holy, disruptive, inconvenient Love—you either open the door, or you do not.

Years ago, while serving a small church, a couple met with me to plan their wedding. We stepped into the sanctuary, and above the pulpit hung a sign left over from a mission meeting. It read: “Worth the Risk.” The couple smiled and said, “That’s it. That’s our theme.”

That sign might as well have been hanging over Joseph’s dream. Love is worth the risk.

Joseph takes Mary. Joseph receives a child who is not his own. Joseph hangs his reputation on a dream and a God who whispers in the night.

Courage, we are told, is not reserved for battlefields. It shows itself when the room is empty—when you are misunderstood. Joseph was misunderstood almost immediately. And still—he stayed.

During World War II, the British government printed a poster meant to steady a frightened nation. It read: KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON.

Not denial. Not pretending nothing is wrong. But resolve.

You cannot control the storm. But you can choose how you walk through it.

That is Joseph. That is Mary. That is Matthew 1.

Peace is not the absence of chaos. Peace is God’s calm within it.

And here we are, on this fourth Sunday of Advent, in a beautiful town that carries both light and weight. Holiday cheer and quiet grief. Full calendars and tired souls. A world that looks festive—and still aches.

And into this world—our world—Matthew says: This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place.

Not when everything was calm. Not when the world was ready. But when it needed Him.

Love still costs something. Love still risks something. Love still asks more than fear ever will.

So today we light the Candle of Love. When this sermon is echoed on Christmas Eve, our four candles will no longer stand alone but come together as *the Christ Candle is lit*, and what Joseph

trusted in the dark will be named in the light. Not sentimental love. Not easy love. But love that risks. Love that obeys. Love that opens the door.

We are four days from Christmas. The cookies may not be done. The packages may not be wrapped. The world is restless. Our hearts may be too.

But Advent tells the truth every year: Love will knock. Peace will whisper. God will come—ready or not.

And when Love shows up at the door, we remember Joseph.

But listen carefully—because the angel does not actually say, “Keep calm and carry on.”

That was Britain’s slogan.

What the angel actually says is simpler.

“Do not be afraid,” because nothing will be lost. Not because this will be easy. Not because the road ahead will make sense. Do not be afraid... because God is with you.

And that turns out to be enough.

So, in these final days before Christmas—when the cookies aren’t done, the packages aren’t wrapped, and the world is still unfinished—hear this good news: God did not wait for calm. God did not wait for certainty. God did not wait for readiness. God came.

And if God can come into Joseph’s fear, God can come into ours.

That is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place. On Christmas Eve, we will finish this sentence not with an explanation, but with a name. Emmanuel. God with us. *Jesus*. Amen.