

## Saint Joseph – the Betrothed

Matthew 1:18-25

### Trinity Lutheran Church

December 9, 2015 – Advent II



In the name of the Father, and of the † Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. When we came together last week our focus was on John the Baptizer – and next week we'll be looking to Mary – but tonight, we consider Joseph, the foster father of our Lord. If you think about it, compared to John and Mary, Joseph really gets very little attention. In fact, if Joseph gets any press at all, it's usually in the picture of the holy family as they make their way to Egypt with Mary atop the donkey, Jesus in her arms, and Joseph leading the way. Even in the manger scenes, Joseph is the one who is almost always standing off to one side, while Mary is kneeling and praying over the manger. Christian legend has it that Joseph was an older man – perhaps a widower who already had grown children. Of course this is nothing more than pious speculation. The truth is that Joseph simply disappears from the pages of Scripture after he and Mary momentarily lose Jesus among the teachers of the Temple when He was twelve years old. By the time Jesus reaches the ripe old age of thirty – at the wedding in Cana of Galilee – it's only His mother, Mary, who is with Him. And when Jesus was crucified, He entrusted His mother alone to the care of one of His disciples.

Joseph was a quiet, humble believer. And in fact the Bible doesn't record that he ever spoke a single syllable – which might lead to the conclusion that he was known more for his works than his words. Like his namesake in the Old Testament, Joseph apparently was a dreamer. Indeed, three times an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream – at the conception of Jesus, before the holy family traveled to Egypt to escape the wrath of King Herod, and on their return to Nazareth. Three times, Joseph was commanded by an angel to do something, and three times he did it.

That's how we remember St. Joseph – as a man who believed the Word of God, and whose works reflected his faith. No matter the cost, or how great the inconvenience, Joseph did whatever God asked him to do. That's really something, isn't it – especially when you consider how most people hate to be inconvenienced! Doesn't it drive *you* crazy when someone gets in your way when you're trying to go somewhere – when they want *you* to adjust *your* agenda – or when they force *you* to change *your* plans? But really, when was the last time you changed your plans due to your beliefs? Have you ever lost out on a business deal because you insisted on being honest – broke off a relationship with someone because your morals clashed – missed a big event on Sunday morning because you wanted to attend the Divine Service – or lost a friend because you spoke out when everyone else was turning the other cheek and keeping silent?

Unfortunately I suspect these things happen much less often than we'd like to believe. Indeed, most of us, I'm afraid, would prefer our faith to be more convenient. But, who ever said Christianity was supposed to be convenient – or that daily dying and rising was going to be easy? There ought to be times when your Baptism gets in the way of what you want – when your faith causes you to change your plans – or when being a child of God means you have to do things differently. If you find yourself feeling put out when called upon by God's Word to do something you'd rather not do, think of Joseph. There he was, making his wedding plans, when the news came to him that Mary was pregnant. You men, imagine being told by the woman you're planning to marry that she's pregnant with a Child conceived by the Holy Spirit! And you women, imagine having to tell the man you're

going to marry that God is the Father of your Child!

Joseph, to his credit, was a just man. He didn't want to publicly shame Mary, so he decided to break off the engagement privately. But while Joseph was weighing his options, an angel appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save his people from their sins." Joseph was offered no evidence as to how this could have happened. It was simply stated as fact. Here in Mary's womb was the long-awaited "Seed of the woman" promised in Paradise – the heel-bruised Head-Crusher of Genesis 3:15, who would be the undoing of Adam's sin – who would defeat the devil by dying – through whom alone comes life, peace, and forgiveness – and who will save from sin all who cling to Him by faith. Joseph would be the one who would raise this Child who was, in fact, also His Lord. The creature would be the one to provide for Him who was Creator – and be the protector of this helpless Infant who was His Savior. How incredibly inconvenient of God to do it this way!

Now Joseph's wedding plans would have to be altered. Any thoughts he and Mary may have had regarding a romantic wedding night were now completely out the window. Whatever dreams they may have had regarding their new life together would have to be put on hold. And Joseph would have to bear the scandal of the Incarnation together with his wife. If Joseph ever had any doubts, Scripture doesn't speak of them. If he ever wavered in his trust of God, the evangelists never reported it. All we know is that Joseph awoke from his dream and did what angel commanded. He took Mary to be his bride, and when her Child was born, he called His name Jesus. Had Joseph refused in unbelief to do what God commanded, the prophesy concerning Christ would have been compromised – and God's plan might not have been carried out.

It all sounds pretty complicated, but then, God never does things the easy way. When He came to save us, He came by way of a virgin engaged to a carpenter – by way of weakness and humility – through a crib and a cross. He hid His glory in human flesh as the Son of Mary and the carpenter's Step-son. But know this, dear friends, His coming was entirely for your sake. And today Jesus still comes in that same humble manner – in the words of Holy Scripture, in the water of Baptism, and in the bread and wine of the Supper. Today God still bids you, even as He bid Joseph, to trust not in your own reason or senses in matters pertaining to salvation – but only in His Word which informs us that our rebirth and renewal rest entirely in the life and merit of Jesus – that the word of forgiveness you hear from your pastor is God's forgiveness – that the bread offered you to eat, and the wine given for you to drink, are Christ's very own body and blood – once born in Bethlehem and offered on Calvary's cross for you – and all of it to save you from your sins.

So tonight give thanks to God for the gift of Joseph – for his quiet, humble faith – for his readiness to receive God's gifts, no matter how "inconvenient" – for his faithful hearing of God's Word – for his willing obedience to take Mary as his wife so that Jesus might rightly be called the Son of David – for his hasty flight to Egypt to protect this precious Child – and finally, for his settling in Nazareth, that Jesus might be called a "Nazarene" – and all of this was done so as to fulfill the Word of the Prophets. Tonight I pray that God would grant each of you the faith of Joseph – to trust God and His Word – to do faithfully what you're called to do as spouses and parents – and to cling steadfastly to the One he once named Jesus – the One who saves us from our sins. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.