

Joseph's Perspective

Matthew 1:18-25

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

December 24, 2017 – Christmas Eve

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In the name of the Father, and of † the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Tonight's Gospel is far different in many ways from the story you may be more accustomed to hearing. There is no mention of shepherds, angel choirs, or a trip to Bethlehem – and most disappointingly from our standpoint, there isn't even a manger scene. Instead, what we have is the story of the Nativity from Joseph's perspective as he pondered the miracle of this holy birth. Now on the surface some might conclude that Joseph had suffered a great injustice. After all, he undoubtedly thought he already had everything under control. He had probably gone to great lengths to put his life in order, and now he was preparing to get married and start a family. Scripture tells us that Joseph was a "just man" – a man faithful to God's promises – a man who had a cheerful, benevolent heart – who was simply trying to follow the Law as God had handed down to him.

So how was it that Joseph now found himself in the midst of this scandal – a scandal which was threatening to possibly tear apart any hope he might have had of a peaceful, married life? For it must have appeared to him that his beloved bride, Mary, had already been unfaithful and gotten herself pregnant. Joseph knew the baby in her womb was certainly not his. He knew people were not only going to talk, but – as required by the Law – they would also have had to throw stones at his adulterous wife-to-be. Undoubtedly he felt he had no choice but to act quickly before the situation got ugly. Perhaps he even recalled the ancestor who shared his name – Joseph from the book of Genesis – one of the twelve sons of Jacob. If you recall *that* Joseph's life, you probably remember how he also seems to have received a raw deal.

Like this one who was about to become the husband of Mary, God also revealed His plan to that other Joseph by way of dreams. And when that Joseph brazenly recounted those dreams to his brothers, they threw him into a well and sold him into slavery. It wasn't until he was much older that he would see any of his family again. If you recall how that story ended, Joseph eventually became fabulously wealthy and held a much-coveted position as the second-in-command over all the land of Egypt – but that was after many long years of unfair incarceration in a foreign dungeon. So then, that Joseph from of old – as well as his namesake from Matthew's Gospel, the fiancé of Mary – also seems to have suffered a great injustice.

But now consider how our Lord Christ suffered an even greater injustice. The eternal Son of God is the Word through whom the worlds were created. In the beginning God had planned for man to live in perfect communion with Him in paradise. And so He prepared everything to make Adam and Eve ready for this life of eternal bliss. Sin would have no part in it, for that was not what God desired for this new creation. Still, mankind – God's beloved, precious creation – rebelled against Him. Our first parents ate the fruit from the forbidden tree which stood in the midst of the Garden. And before long a full-blown cosmic scandal had ripped you, me, and all mankind from the loving embrace of our heavenly Father. Any possible hope of peace or heavenly security was shattered forever in a moment so horrible that now all of us have been stricken by the hideous disease of sin which rules over both us and this fallen world in which we live.

But our God is perfectly just – far beyond what any of us could ever imagine. He loves us so much that He resolved from eternity to send His only-begotten Son to be our Savior. Not

only did God the Son have to suffer the injustice of our ancestors' rebellion in Eden, He also suffered an even greater injustice when He assumed our nature and became true Man, born of the Virgin Mary. And *this* is where the life of God's Son is joined with the life of Joseph, the man who would become His foster father. The stigma and scandal that scathed Joseph would one day be laid squarely upon the shoulders of his adopted Son, Jesus – along with your sins and mine – who would take those sins to the cross and put them to death forever. From the very moment His Virgin mother, Mary, wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, it would be His mission to die for the sin of the world. Though innocent Himself of any wrongdoing whatsoever, He would suffer the greatest injustice of all by dying the death of a criminal on Calvary's cross for the sake of a world that hated Him. Could anything be more unfair?

Recall for a moment what the first Joseph – after having been elevated to his high position in the land of Egypt – said to his brothers when they came to him for aid. They cringed before him in the awful realization that their now-powerful brother could do whatever he wanted with them. They knew they had sinned against him, and that if he wanted payback for all they had done, he would surely have it. However, Joseph didn't do as they expected – neither did he say, "Oh, that's all right, I know you didn't mean it," because he knew they had meant it. What he did – after acknowledging that what they had done was evil – was he said to them: "God meant it for good, to bring it about so that many people should be kept alive."

And that, dear Christian, that is precisely what Jesus says to you this most holy night as we are gathered here to celebrate His birth. Though once He was crucified, died, buried, and placed in a tomb, He is now risen from the dead. He has fully conquered the scandals and sins which had been thrust upon Him, and He

has now ascended to His Father's right hand. As we come into His presence, we're reminded of the many terrible offenses we've committed – against both Him and our neighbor. We know full-well He could do with us whatever He wants – but thanks be to God, what He wants is to forgive. He doesn't excuse our sin, or act as if it hasn't happened, rather, He takes it from us and relieves us of that awful burden we've placed upon ourselves. You and I, we don't have to do anything to please God, because He is already pleased with Jesus, and God counts that to our favor. What you, I, and all sinful flesh meant for evil in the bloody crucifixion of Jesus, God meant for our eternal good, so that many would be kept alive forever.

This is Good News for Joseph, who suffered injustice for his role in God's mighty plan of salvation, and yet believed in the Savior he was privileged to raise as his own Son. But most especially this is Good News for you. This is Good News because in Christ you have been given forgiveness and a salvation far greater than any injustice you may have suffered – indeed, far greater than heaven and earth itself. God has given it to you as a gift spoken into your ears, poured out over your body in Holy Baptism, and placed into your mouth as the very body and blood of our Savior – the very same body and blood which was born of the Virgin, raised under the care of Joseph, and suffered injustice on the cross for all. As you receive this medicine of immortality, the full, intimate, perfect communion God desired to have with you from the beginning has once more begun to take place – and it will continue until that Day when our Lord Christ comes to take all of us home to live with Him forever. May it always be so for Jesus' sake. 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.