

Pastor T.C. Arnold
Christmas Eve
Matthew 1:18-25
December 24th, 2013

Scandalous! A scandal big enough for the front page of the tabloids. Seen through the eyes of the world, the story we gather to hear on this blessed night, is a scandal. A young unwed woman by the name of Mary. She's a good girl, no one would have expected it. She would never do anything like that. Joseph was betrothed to Mary – they weren't married yet. Consider betrothal as being a legally binding engagement. Joseph would never do anything like that. And they didn't.

A righteous man was Joseph. He didn't want this scandal to get out of hand. As was customary, Joseph would need to break the engagement betrothal in a "legal" way. He would resolve to do it quietly so that Mary would not be put to shame.

So, Mary is pregnant, Joseph wasn't involved... and now the scandal deepens. How devastated Joseph must have been. But an angel of the Lord would set Joseph straight. And this "thought-to-be" mind-blowing scandal would turn out to be a righteous work that God would use to save humanity. The angel said to Joseph, "... *do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for he will save His people from their sins.*"

These are the words from the Gospel of St. Matthew. Normally we hear the familiar words of Luke chapter two when it comes to the birth of Jesus as we did already this evening. However, Matthew starts his Gospel in a slightly different way. He starts with the genealogy of the family tree of Jesus... and you want to talk about scandals.

The family tree of Jesus includes prostitutes, adulterers, violent men, and other sinners of all description. Perhaps a family tree filled with these types of people – or – any kind of scandal is the last thing we think about when calling to mind the Christmas story. We think of a pregnant woman sitting on a donkey accompanied by a man walking beside her trying to get to Bethlehem before it's too late. We think of a manger and a stable – angels singing to shepherds who are peacefully guarding their sheep at night. These are the pictures of Christmas. It's hard to imagine that the story behind the story is one for the front cover of the Galilean tabloids.

Though when we think of all that surrounds this blessed story – and it all might surprise us – the truth is there were no people other than sinners to make up the genealogy of Jesus. His ancestors needed a Savior just like we do. Jesus is born into this scandalous world. Words of disgrace may have surrounded the virgin's birth – no one can stop people from spreading rumors. But He was not disgraced. He broke into a world made up of sinners, a world corrupted by sin, but yet this Christ child was perfect in every way.

You ever think what the perfect little baby must look like. Some of you parents will recall the first time you laid eyes on your child. You didn't think about the imperfections – only that he is perfect... she is perfect. It's only when they are around a while that we realize – they are not perfect... but still a magnificent blessing.

The blessing of Jesus would turn what Joseph thought was a terrible scandal... "My betrothed is pregnant and I'm not the father... "What do I do? How do I do what is best of my Mary. I will divorce her quietly. This will allow her to save-face – at least a little. Perhaps her

critics won't be so harsh. Perhaps they will be more accepting of her little one." You see, the law called for betrothed women to be stoned to death if they are found guilty of adultery. Joseph was trying to save her life. Quite a man, the earthly father of Jesus was.

Then Joseph was told what was up – by the angel as mentioned earlier. What kind of emotions did this man go through? Anger, terrible sadness, then after that heavenly revelation, perhaps surprise, fear and joy. I can't imagine. None of us can. We don't have to. Joseph would shoulder the burden of being the earthly father of the Savior – along with all the fear, joy, trepidation as well as all the questions, "So, Joseph, whose son is this really? Wasn't Mary pregnant before you got married?" There was no scandal. But I'm sure that didn't stop others from thinking and talking like there was.

Joseph was a sinner, raising the Son of God. Mary was a sinner giving birth and raising the Son of God. And their ancestors, they were sinners too. If God, in His grace, can use such flawed and sinful people, how much more can He bless and use sinners who witness the Messiah's sinless sacrifice and believe in Him today? How much more, for you and me, who gaze into the manger on a blessed evening like today reflect on the way our Savior came... so humble... so pure and righteous? How much more, knowing this lovely act took place for you and me, does this cause us to rejoice and praise our Lord who put into action a plan to send His only begotten Son to die so we will live in heaven forever?

Beloved, think of Joseph, what he went through, as this blessed story unfolded before him. How was he going to explain this scandal? What was he going to do? Mary might be stoned to death, how can I save her? Besides the fear, think of the anger and confusion Joseph must have been going through. Now, think of the way the stories in your life have evolved and developed. Not the same as Joseph for sure... but the same emotions have been present... fear, anger, confusion, etc. But just like for Joseph as it is for us, the Lord is with us. As the angel quoted from the prophet Isaiah, "*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,*" God indeed is with us, for that is what Immanuel means. So, instead of a scandal being born in Bethlehem, the one to come, Jesus, would be the one to put an end to it all.

Brothers and sisters in Christ our newborn King, there is no scandal. Jesus did exactly what He was born to do and the Scriptures make it clear. Jesus was born in the line of sinners, for the sake of sinners – yet He was without sin. He was born of Mary and the Holy Spirit. He was born undefiled to die for the defiled. The newborn King has come to put an end to eternal death for those who believe in Him. Come and worship the King!! Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen,