

December 19th, 2010
Sermon for the Fourth Sunday in Advent
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Matthew 1:18-25

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). ²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

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¹ *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version.* Wheaton : Standard Bible Society, 2001

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

For the next few church services, we will be hearing readings like these again and again. We heard them referred to in the Advent services; referred to in the Christmas program...they will be heard again on Christmas Day and probably a little bit next Sunday too.

Non-Christians might wonder...why in the world do they keep harping on those same few verses? How can those preachers and teachers come up with so many things to talk about when there is only one version of the story?

Perhaps even some Christians might wonder or even think the same thing..."Well, it's just the same ole same ole; I can skip this service or that; I still got the message."

And it's not just about Christmas, it brings in Lent, Easter and the rest of the church year. "Great, Christ was born, He lived; He died. End of story, nothing new here."

But we deal with the living Word of God. It continues to speak to us. The more we read God's Word, the greater our understanding. We might read a passage one day and it might not mean a whole lot, but in God's time when we read it again, it might mean the world!

Look at Joseph in our Text. He was a just man. Some have described him as devout...yet he missed all of the prophecies that told of the Christ, the Messiah, being born of a virgin in the house of David.

David was his direct ancestor, Mary was a virgin, which he believed or he would not have gotten betrothed to her...she conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and was carrying the Son whose name was Immanuel, God with us!

We all face this challenge. Every member of this church...every member of the Body of Christ. All that call themselves Christians all too often take their Lord and Savior...for granted.

Remember the third Commandment? "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy" And Luther's explanation? "We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it."

But it is not only a problem with the young folks. This challenge goes out to all who are here today...or not here. What example are we setting for our children or grandchildren...or anyone we know for that matter?

Are we adults of the church following the Third Commandment? Are we despising the Word of God? Are we holding it sacred? God's Law is black and white. He doesn't take rationalization into account. If yourself rationalizing why you can miss church then you are having a problem with the Third Commandment. Anytime that we rationalize about something that we know we should be doing, it is a pretty safe bet that it involves a sin of some sort.

Let's take a look back at Joseph. He had every reason in the world to leave Mary. He knew what he had done and not done...and he knew for sure that Mary's child was not his. Yet Joseph was planning on taking the honorable route. He rationalized that this wasn't his responsibility and no one would fault him.

After all; conceived by the Spirit? Prophecy is all well and good when it doesn't strike too close to home.

But when the Angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph in the dream; the rationalization time was over. He stepped forward, and took Mary as his wife; no longer considering his pride or comfort; and gave the Child the name he was told; the name of Jesus.

Joseph stepped forward to care for Mary, the mother of our Lord. He stepped up when many others would have stepped back. In fact many did step away from God's Son.

Those that did not want to hear His words of salvation, turned their backs on Him. The religious leaders of the day that felt their positions threatened spoke against Him and in the end; even His most trusted followers not only turned away, but ran.

But our Lord; the one that Joseph named Jesus as he was told in the dream, did as His step-father had done some 30 years earlier and stepped forward to pay for your sins. He left the splendor of Heaven and arrived in this world in to be laid in a rude wooden manger. He grew up in common surroundings working for a living when He deserved to be waited upon hand and foot. He spoke only the truth and was called a liar and He stepped forward to be nailed to a rough wooden cross...take your punishment, for your sins as well as the sins of the entire world.

If anyone could have rationalized His way out of a situation; Jesus could have because we have no excuse or right to have our sins taken away from us.

We do not deserve the gift of forgiveness...yet this was God's plan of salvation. That plan included Joseph stepping forward to take responsibility; it also included Jesus stepping forward to take responsibility...for your sins. Joseph didn't fail and neither did Jesus.

You too are part of God's plan. As Your sins were paid for; as the Holy Spirit works in your life, you are called to carry the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ to the nations. It begins right here. Oh, great things happen overseas, but our own mission field is ripe for the harvest.

Leave your rationalizations at the door because God has some great plans for you. Don't have the time? NO excuse, Joseph made the time. Don't know what to do? The Spirit led him...and He will lead you too. Whatever rationalization you can make; it's already been overcome. Read your Bible and you'll see, all of the excuses have been made. If we aren't involved in an outreach program, we should be planning one; if we aren't planning we should be doing.

But that is enough law for one Sunday. Today is Sunday, a day of celebration. Furthermore, this is the fourth Sunday of advent ...the celebration of our Lord's birth is just around the corner. But most of all, a celebration for the gift of God through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He came to die for your sins, even the sins that stem from our rationalizations.

We have full and complete salvation through Him. All of our sins confessed through Him are forgiven by His blood. If you miss a Sunday or a month of Sundays, if you fail to evangelize or any sin for the matter,

and are truly repentant, you are forgiven. None of us are perfect. God knew that. He knew that we would fail, yet He still sustains us...He still sustains the whole world because of Christ!

What a blessing we have through Jesus Christ. God's Word says it best and we will close with that Word. Speak along if you like.

John 3:16 (KJV) ¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Amen.

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

Amen.