

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service 7:00 PM Dec 24 COVID-19 precautions will be observed. **Because space is limited, it will be necessary to sign up for seating in advance.**

This can be done by calling the church office (724-932-2101), from now through December 22:

Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 1- 3:30 PM

Tuesday and Thursday from 8:00 to 11:30 AM.

You may leave a message but space will not be reserved until you have spoken directly with the church secretary to confirm your seating.

December Sunday Duties:

Close-Up: Ron McClimans

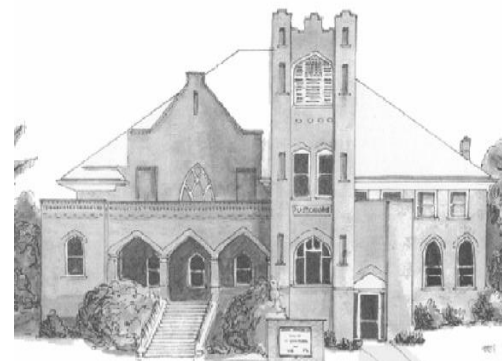
Counting the Offering: Mike Henegan

Deacon for December: All Deacons - If you know of anyone in the hospital or in need of assistance please contact any of our Deacons.

Organist today: Cindy Loveridge

Happy
Birthday

12/28 Beth Arnett
01/07 William Love
01/08 John Yovanovich



JAMESTOWN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Website: jamestownpres.org

*Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord
with gladness; come before him with joyful songs
Psalm 100: 1-2a*

December 20, 2020

Fourth Sunday of Advent

GOD CALLS US TO WORSHIP HIM

Prelude

Welcome and Sharing News of the Kingdom

Call to Worship & Lighting of the Advent Wreath

One: We have come to worship God, our Creator and King,

All: Who has compassion on the weak and afflicted.

One: At just the right time, God sent us a Savior:

All: His only-begotten Son, Christ Jesus, our Lord.

One: The first three candles on the Advent wreath are reminders of the hope, peace and joy Jesus brings;

All: The fourth candle reminds us that God's love is most fully revealed in the Person and work of Jesus. How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God!

“Considering Joseph”

Matthew 1: 18-25

I wanted to take time this morning to consider the faithfulness of Joseph. We hear a lot about Mary, and rightly so. She was, after all, the mother of Jesus, and Scripture speaks of her presence in his life from birth all the way to his death on the cross. But what do we know about Joseph? In all the New Testament he never even says one word. Yet, he’s one of the principal figures in the Christmas drama. And so, let’s take just a moment to give Joseph his due.

Tradition has it that Joseph was a simple man: a carpenter from Nazareth. Sometimes you see Sunday school pictures showing him in a wood shop making furniture. But the Greek word “carpenter” in Joseph’s day referred to a skilled craftsman who might have worked in a wide range of materials. Joseph could have just as easily worked with metal or stone, as with wood. The regional capital, Sepphoris, was being constructed during that time, and it was within walking distance of Nazareth. It’s very possible that Joseph was one of the stone masons there.

In any case, craftsmen had strong backs and callused hands. They learned their trade by serving an apprenticeship. Their place was respectable but not on one of the higher rungs of the social ladder. Remember the flap in the synagogue in Nazareth when Jesus preached his first sermon? The elders raised their eyebrows and asked, “Isn’t this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judah, and Simon?” (Mark 6:3)

Jesus’ father was neither a rabbi nor a scribe nor a civic leader. He had only two qualifications for his role as Jesus’ foster-father: he was a descendent of King David and – much more significantly – he was God’s choice. I like to think that Joseph is someone with whom we can all identify – ordinary in many ways, yet determined to be obedient to God’s will for his life.

His place in the Christmas story, of course, is that of Mary’s husband. According to Matthew, Joseph and Mary were “betrothed,” but not yet married. William Barclay explains that there were three steps in a Jewish marriage: The engagement, which was often arranged by the parents when the boy and girl were youngsters; the betrothal, which was a formal ratification of the marriage-to-be, usually done a year before the couple was married; and the wedding itself, which lasted a whole week, at which time the marriage was consummated. During the betrothal, the couple was legally bound to each other so that, if the man died before the actual wedding took place, the woman was considered to be a widow. They were actually referred to as husband and wife, though they did not live together and they refrained from sexual intimacy.

It’s at this particular stage in their relationship – while they were betrothed -- that Joseph learned that Mary was pregnant. Scripture isn’t specific at this point, I think it’s safe to imagine his reaction. He would’ve

been angry and upset, to say the least; filled with a sense of betrayal and wounded pride. After all, if Mary were pregnant, the only logical explanation would've been that she'd been unfaithful with another man. And if that was true, Joseph had the legal right to publicly accuse her and have her stoned to death.

It's at this point that Joseph demonstrates his faithfulness, first to Mary and then, more importantly, to God. According to Matthew, when Joseph learned that Mary was pregnant, he was "not willing to make her a public example, intended to put her away secretly." (Matthew 1:19)

Joseph was a man of quiet strength. He was a man of integrity, true to his convictions. Yet, he was compassionate and considerate of others. He found himself in a no-win situation. He couldn't in good conscience go on with the wedding; yet, he couldn't bring himself to humiliate Mary either, much less put her to death. Breaking off the relationship, but not making a big deal of it, seemed to be the most honorable thing to do, and if that's what he had decided, we could understand and respect him as a man of faith.

But that's not what happened. Matthew tells us Joseph had a dream in which an angel of the Lord appeared to him and told him that the child in Mary's womb was of the Holy Spirit and that he should raise the child as if he was its own father. Now, it'd be tempting for us, reading the story some two thousand years after the fact – knowing the rest of the story – simply to say, "Well, there you have it. The angel explained everything and Joseph went ahead with the wedding. Simple as that."

But – was it *really* that simple? We've all had dreams, haven't we? And we know how bizarre and elusive dreams can be. I don't know many folks who make major life decisions based upon what they saw or heard in a dream. Do you? Yet, according to Matthew, Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded. What's truly remarkable is that Joseph didn't brush off the dream. He didn't stick with his original course of action – the very *logical* decision to quietly break the betrothal and go on to live his life without Mary.

Instead, Joseph chose to trust that the angel's message really was a message from God. He chose to trust that God was doing something different, and much greater, than Joseph had envisioned. So, Scripture says, he "took Mary home as his wife, but he did not consummate the marriage until she gave birth to her firstborn son." (Matthew 1:25)

And then, in one further act of obedience to God, Joseph publicly named the child. Matthew says simply, "he named him Jesus." In so doing, he claimed the child as his own, placing him within the lineage of a noble house, making him a descendent of King David. Because of the faithfulness of Joseph, Jesus would have a father and Joseph would have a place in the story of God's salvation.

To the world, the faithful obedience of Joseph may seem unrealistic or even foolish. But Joseph's decision will strike a familiar chord in the hearts of all followers of Jesus. Think about it: aren't we – aren't *all* Christians -- called to let go of our own agendas, and embrace God's plan for our lives?

How many times in life are we faced with a choice between “our way” and “God’s way”? You know what I mean. It might not be something as dramatic as the choice faced by Joseph. But haven’t we all faced times when the society around us tells us we have every RIGHT to do such-and-such but we know, deep in our spirit, that God is calling us to take a different path, in order to serve a greater good, a greater purpose?

I’m not talking about being a doormat. I’m talking about being open to what God has in store for us and for the world in which we live, when we say “Not my will, but Thine, be done.”

Let us pray ...