

Joseph and the Mess of Advent – Matt 1:18-25

Introduction – When Christ comes into your life, it is a good thing. It just doesn't seem like it all the time. When we celebrate Advent and Christmas, part of what we are celebrating is that reality doesn't always go according to plan, at least not our plans. And through it all, we learn to lean on the supreme sovereignty of God in all things. This is illustrated in the story of Joseph. Advent is a season of watching God make a mess of your life, even a God-honoring life, as He brings Christ to you – and learning to trust, ponder, and trust some more with rejoicing.

Overview – While Joseph and Mary were betrothed but not yet married, Mary found she was with child (v18). Joseph's reasonable and merciful reaction was to quietly divorce her (v19). As he made plans, an angel appeared to him in a dream and explained the situation (v20), including the fact that this Son of Mary would be the promised Savior (v21). This fulfilled and explained the promise given by Isaiah the prophet regarding a virgin bearing a child and His name being "God with us" (vv22-23). Joseph arose and obeyed the Lord, taking Mary to himself as his wife and giving the boy the name Jesus (vv24-25).

The Genesis of Jesus – In many ways, Matthew's gospel parallels the stories of the first Israel. After Jesus, the "New Israel" is born, He flees to Egypt (2:13ff) until it is safe to return. Just as Israel was baptized in the Red Sea, so Jesus was baptized (Matt 3) and just as Israel was then led in the wilderness of temptation for forty years, so Jesus was tempted for forty days (Matt 4). There are many parallels in our text as well.

"Genesis" is translated "birth" in v18. Jesus is born of a virgin because God is doing something new by means of His Holy Spirit, reminiscent of the Spirit hovering over the earth at the first creation. Joseph, reminding us of Adam, awakens from a sleep and takes his wife. She will bring forth the One who will save God's people from their sins, reversing the curse of the first couple and fulfilling the promise made to the first mother. This One will then be the firstborn from the dead; a new world will be filled with this blessing.

Joseph's Story – And so it was that Jesus came into Joseph's life. And everything changed; but it didn't seem to be for the good. Mary was found to be with child; this was nothing less than a scandal for Joseph and for his family. Imagine his disappointment and shame. Most would want to vindicate their own name, yet while he had the right to bring a lawsuit against her (Deut 22:23f), Joseph, a just man, shows mercy and concern for Mary.

Joseph's Dream – Just as another Joseph (favored son of Jacob) had a dream, so his namesake has a dream. In it, an angel addresses him as the "son of David" and tells him not to fear; the baby in Mary's womb is begotten of the Holy Spirit. He should also not fear this work and what it means, but take Mary as his wife. And just like the other Joseph, the results of this dream would radically change his life – and not necessarily make it easier. In the story of the first Joseph, we often forget that decades go by before he is finally able to say to his brothers, "God meant it for good" (Gen 50:20). In the gospels, after the incident in the temple when Jesus is twelve, we never hear about Joseph again and most guess that he died before the public ministry of Jesus, before any public vindication of Joseph's reputation could be made. Instead, he is left homeless in Bethlehem, helps Mary give birth in an animal-stall, flees out of the country and when he returns has to relocate in Galilee. For Joseph, this is what it meant that Jesus had come into his life.

Your Advent Story – Divine instruction does not guarantee a peaceful life. Knowing that Christ is coming, receiving Christ, obeying Christ and trusting Him does not mean that life will go easy. Disciples of Jesus find themselves overwhelmed with the circumstances of life in little things and enormous events. These are often directly connected to faithfully following Jesus. We learn from Joseph (and from the Scriptures) what we are to do –

Psalms 94:19 – *In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul.*

Psalms 143:8 – *Cause me to hear Your lovingkindness in the morning, For in You do I trust; Cause me to know the way in which I should walk, For I lift up my soul to You.*

Isaiah 26:3 – *You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You.*

The Faith of Advent – "Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took to him his wife" (v24). Joseph, by faith, gets up and obeys the Lord. It didn't matter what it cost his reputation; it didn't matter what others thought. It didn't matter what little or large inconveniences it cost him. What has it cost you? What inconveniences has it brought you? What wrongdoings have yet to be made right?

Christ Comes – And it is not about making our lives neat and tidy. Just ask the parents of one-two year olds raising their boys in the same neighborhood as Jesus (Matt 2:16). It's about God's kingdom coming and the salvation of the world.

Christ Comes – And no matter the inconvenience you experience, it is nothing compared to the humility the Second Person of the Trinity suffered (Phil 2:5-8).

Christ Came – We celebrate the coming of Christ and the world and your eternal future will never be the same. Even in the chaos, we know God is accomplishing His perfect plan (Psalm 72:8).

Just as the Holy Spirit came upon Mary and brought forth something New, so the Spirit is still at work upon the body of Christ, bringing forth newness all the time. But just as that first work of the Spirit brought messiness to lives of even those who were faithfully following God, so His continuing work will bring forth messiness in our lives – to a glorious end.