

Chris Murphy

December 28, 2025

Scripture: Matthew 1: 18-25

Sermon Title: The Joy of God with Us

## Matthew 1:18-25

18 Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah[a] took place in this way.

When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they

lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. 19

Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose

her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. 20 But just

when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to

him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to

take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy

Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he

will save his people from their sins.” 22 All this took place to fulfill

what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

23 “Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son,

and they shall name him Emmanuel,”

which means, “God is with us.” 24 When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife 25 but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son,[b] and he named him Jesus.

This is the Word of God....

Please pray with me.

Introduction:

If you are like me, Christmas Eve and Christmas Day are wonderful days to celebrate the Christmas season. They are the culmination of nearly a month of Advent, when we are waiting to fully celebrate the birth of Jesus. After Christmas you may feel a bit of a let down or even a sense of relief, since this holiday often requires a lot of energy. And yet, I want to remind us this morning that Christmas is

actually not over yet. For Christians following the church calendar, we are still in the heart of Christmas. Rather than rushing onto the New Year, we are still pausing to gaze on the infant Jesus. We are taking the slower path of spiritual formation and we are savoring the joy of Christmas, the joy of Emmanuel, God with us.

If I am honest, my favorite stories related to Christmas are about women. I like Mary's encounter with Gabriel, the way she ponders in her heart the words spoken to her. I like Mary's Magnificat. I enjoy her interaction with her relative Elizabeth, who is pregnant with the one who will become the famous John the Baptist. I really enjoy these two women and how they contribute to the story of Christmas.

But despite my love of these women in Scripture, today I am going to remind you of another key figure in the story of Christmas. I want to remind you of Joseph. Joseph shows up in a big way in the story of the birth of Jesus. Scripture does not tell us much of Joseph, but he has a key role.

In our Scripture reading today, we learn that Mary is pregnant by the Holy Spirit and yet is also engaged to Joseph. We also discover that Joseph, being a righteous fellow, but also someone who is clearly surprised by this news has decided to dismiss Mary quietly. In other words, he doesn't want her to be disgraced publicly, so he wants a quiet ending to the betrothal.

And if we all are fair at this point, we can understand that Joseph is in a tough place. I think Joseph probably thinks Mary is either lying to him about the Angel or that Mary may be a bit delusional. He's probably not sure what to think, but thinking with his head, he decides how to fix the problem by dismissing Mary most likely to the care of her parents, who will maybe try to hide her away until she gives birth.

Joseph wants to fix what appears to be a problem for him. He is by trade a carpenter and is used to fixing things and moving on, but

God thankfully has another plan that will actually bring great joy to Joseph, if he can be open to his new reality.

During the night Joseph is visited by an angel. Maybe, it is the same angel Gabriel that met Mary before. We do not learn the name of this angel, but we know this angel appears to Joseph in a dream and encourages him to not be afraid to take Mary as his wife. The angel reassures Joseph that the baby to be born to Mary is from the Holy Spirit and he is to name him Jesus. This Jesus will save his people from their sins and his coming will fulfill the prophet Isaiah's words that a young woman will conceive and bear a son, who will be called Emmanuel, God with us.

When Joseph wakes up from the dream, he follows his heart and trusts the experience he had with the angel. Then he takes Mary as his wife and has no marital relations with her until after Jesus is born.

What I love about Joseph in this story is that he goes to bed convinced in his mind that he will dismiss Mary, but after a spiritual experience with the angel, he follows his heart and renewed mind by taking her as his wife. He no longer is afraid. Instead he has confidence that God is with him and his new family.

Can you relate to Joseph? Have you had moments in your life, when your intellect or problem solving has prepared you to make one decision and then after a time of prayer or some spiritual experience you feel guided to do something else. Have you ever moved from fear to faith after an experience with God.

Joseph wanted to solve the problem of his relationship with his betrothed by quietly dismissing her, but God wanted this couple to stay together and raise the Savior of the world. For Joseph to understand what God was doing, Joseph needed to follow his heart and be open to the mystery of God and an angel.

I remember when I was a young man, I asked my dad about his prayer life. I think I was in my twenties and I noticed that my dad would spend time in his office chair just praying. I wanted a prayer life like my dad. My dad told me that prayer was not just preparation for the work of ministry, it was the real work of ministry. He also shared that often in the early morning hours before getting up from bed, he would lay in bed in prayer.

Now that I am in my fifties and a pastor, I feel like my dad. I often spend part of my early waking hours, before getting out of bed, in prayer. I have a lot of conversations with God, Holy, Spirit, Jesus, and with angels during the night. It is often in the early hours of the day or even in the middle of the night that God or an angel wakes me up to talk. Sometimes, I wake up and start the conversation with Jesus. I ask him questions and wait for his answer. Usually, my sermon each Sunday flows from these conversations, along with the ones I

have with my wife and sometimes members of our congregation or other people.

I try to live my life from a place of surrender to God in prayer. I try to have my life led from my heart more than my head. Our minds are wonderful things and of course as some of you know very well, the brain is always working in partnership with the heart physically, but from a metaphorical sense what I want to remind us today is that our spiritual experiences are important in guiding our lives. If we only rely on our own ideas and do not leave space for God to reveal God's self to us, we will miss opportunities for great joy. Spiritual experiences can happen in many ways. Often, they happen when you enjoy the beauty of nature or maybe when you take time to gaze into the face of another person, such as a child.

It is unfortunate that this whole Christmas season often goes by and many people miss the most important reason for the season. The most important gift to remember during Christmas is the birth of

Jesus. Joseph almost missed the gift of his wife Mary and the gift of his son Jesus. Joseph, thankfully was met by an angel. He had a spiritual experience that moved him from trying to fix a problem, to taking responsibility for his own heart and his own calling to be a father and a husband.

And what is beautiful about God, is that he sends the angel. Friends, God is sending us spiritual experiences to help us be faithful to our callings. God is inviting us to walk by the Holy Spirit, to be people of prayer. God shows up in the beauty of nature, in the beauty of each other. God shows up in vulnerable people. God wants to make sure we do not miss the truth of Jesus as Emmanuel, God with us.

And when we are open to the gift of the incarnation, the gift of God with us in Jesus, we will be filled with great joy. We have joy because we are not alone in this world. We have God with us. Even in times of grief, we can experience the gift of joy in the presence of Jesus. Joy is not the absence of sorrow; it is the presence of love in the midst of

happiness and sadness. We have Jesus with us born of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

We too can follow the example of Jesus and spread God's love to a world in need. A world that is often trying to fix things without spiritual empowerment, a world that too often denies the spiritual and relies on intellect rather than faith and mystery to engage the world.

Friends, may we remember the wisdom of Joseph who listened to the angel's guidance. May we embrace the mystery of the incarnation and follow our hearts as we follow Jesus. Deep down my friends, we are all spiritual beings having an earthly experience. In some ways, our lives are not that much different than Jesus. We are created in the image of God. We are gifts of God and incarnations of God's love in the world. We follow our Savior Jesus, who reminds us that we come from a God of love, we are made in the image of God, and we will one day return to this God of love as will all of God's

creation. One day all of creation will be fully restored and union with God will be a felt experience that will not be denied.

For now, our church by the grace of the Holy Spirit and these Holy Scriptures that remind us of the story of Christmas, will help us be open to the power of the Holy Spirit for today. God only asks us to humble ourselves and receive the good news. Let us follow the wisdom of the angels. Let us embrace that the spiritual is actually what is natural, when we open our hearts to the reality of the divine in and among us.

Friends, the joy of Christmas is here! (Pray for people to experience the gift of Emmanuel, God with us)