

Good Shepherd Episcopal Church

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The Fourth Sunday of Advent (A)

December 22, 2019

A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

“They shall name him Emmanuel”

DRAFT

The Holy Gospel according to

Matthew 1:18-25

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they

lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. 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. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Look, the virgin shall conceive

and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.” When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

Come to us, O Emmanuel, abide with us, O God, as we await with bated breath the coming of our Savior. Amen.

After re-reading the gospel today several times, I thought to myself, I wonder what comes next? How does the Gospel

according to Matthew depict Christmas?

And the answer, which I guess I should have known, is that the Gospel according to Matthew more or less completely misses Christmas. The next story after the angel's announcement to Joseph in a dream that he was to take the pregnant Mary to be his wife and followed by a somewhat off the cuff naming of his adopted son, Jesus, the very next story is of the Epiphany, which we celebrate on January 6, two weeks from today. Matthew omits Christmas almost entirely--no shepherds in the fields, no serenading by the heavenly hosts, no manger; suddenly Matthew immediately

goes ahead possibly a year or more in time when the Holy Family are in a house, and the magi follow a star in the east to come to bring the child, not the baby, Jesus gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Matthew pretty much completely skips the lovely Christmas story which we will hear here next Saturday night and Sunday morning. So, we bid you not to miss next Saturday and Sunday, or Christmas will simply be gone.

Joseph's role in the whole scenario was downplayed by the Church for a millennium until the tenth century when the veneration

of St. Joseph began formally.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Joseph

Before the tenth century, the Church's focus was more or less entirely on Jesus' mother, Mary, who in Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches is 'ever virgin.' And in that version, Joseph is simply the namer of Jesus and not much more. Most Protestants however cling to the word in the Gospel for today, "until"--Joseph had no marital relations with Mary "until" she had given birth to Jesus. So we Protestants allow conjugal happiness for Joseph and note that the James in the Book of Acts, Chapter 15,

Verse 13, and in Galatians Chapter 1, Verse 19, who is probably the head of the first church council in Jerusalem, is named by Paul as “Jesus’ brother”. And perhaps that taint of Joseph that disallows his and Mary’s own perpetual celibacy colored some of the Church’s history of Christmas and its consideration or lack of consideration of Joseph as playing any particularly significant role in the whole panoply of Christmas. But in the tenth century the church pretty much officially began to recognize the importance of Joseph. However, during those thousand years

Joseph's role in the birth narrative was largely downplayed.

Pastor Maxwell Grant wrote: “For Joseph, to hear the call of God's love was the dawn of a distinctly countercultural vision. And the Christmas that lives in the heart remains profoundly countercultural, too. At its core, Christmas is foreign to everything about us but the power of our capacity to love and be loved. And [Christmas'] bold claim is that, in the end, it is our capacity to love and be loved that is the most important thing about us.”

“Advent invites us to let go of all expectations. Advent calls us to remember

the love of Jesus and Joseph and the love of God. It calls us to let God's peace gradually warm our souls, freeing us for new expectations and the birth of something within us and for us: the arrival of Emmanuel--God with us. Advent calls us to wait for the arrival of hope and to see the shadowy outline of a new world that is just beginning to dawn.

Sam Chandler, the Episcopal Dean of Atlanta wrote: "We too often forget about poor Joseph. Every year, we tend to focus on the story of Mary. But this year, it's Joseph." So, "if the angel can appear to Mary, and then also appear to Joseph, there's

a lesson in that. That means that the angel can appear to you and me, too. In the Bible, the annunciation does not occur only once, but twice--not just to a woman, but also to a man. The Bible, then, carries an implicit message that God does appear over and over again, to various sorts of folks. Matthew and Luke both have it right, but they are different stories. God continues to come into the world, but we must trust other sources!

“What are you giving for Christmas this year? I do not mean what are you getting. We all want something wonderful, I am

sure. But what are you giving for Christmas?

“The greatest gift you can give this year is to believe in someone's dreams. The greatest gift you can give is to have faith in someone else; believe in their dreams.

Believe in the dreams of the person you love. Believe in the dream of your husband. Believe in the dream of your wife. Believe in the dreams of your children. Believe in the dream of your hero, your leader, your friend. Believe in their dreams!

<http://day1.org/1070->

[believe in the dreams of the person you love](#)

Pastor Edward Markquart found this
poem:

“When Jesus called that Christmas week
I wasn’t at my best;
And the house was much too cluttered to
entertain a guest.
He seemed to notice everything, the card
still unaddressed,
The gifts piled high awaiting wraps, the
baking and the rest.
He eyes fell on the evergreen and the
presents ‘neath the tree,

It's my birthday that you celebrate--what are you giving me?

'What am I giving him?' I thought; ashamed no words I found.

So many costly things I'd bought, he looked at me and frowned.

I prayed he'd let the question pass, but when he did persist,

I blurted out the truth at last, you were not on my list." By Louise Teisberg

http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series_a_the_birth_of_christ_and_christmas.htm

“In the Old and New Testament, there are two meanings to the word, “virgin.” There is an Old Testament meaning, and a New Testament meaning. A Hebrew meaning and a Greek meaning. The first meaning is this: the word, “virgin,” simply means, “young woman.” Such as in the passage from Isaiah 7:14 that was read for today. Would you closely look at that passage? In Isaiah 7:14, it says that, “a young woman shall conceive and give birth to a child.” The word simply says “young woman.” Circle those words, young woman, in your mind. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, and the Hebrew word for young woman is “alma.”

We have a person in our parish by the name of Alma, Alma Edvartsen. In Hebrew, her name simply means “young woman, Edvartsen.”

But there is a second meaning of the word as well. Look carefully at the Gospel reading for today in Matthew 1:23: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and his name shall be called Emmanuel.”

Highlight in your mind the word, “virgin.”

The New Testament was written in Greek,

and the Greek word means someone who

has not been sexually active with another

person, who has never had sexual

relationships with another, who has not had

sexual intercourse. Eventually, the Hebrew Bible was translated into the Greek language, and the meaning of the word changed from young woman to sexual virginity. ... So, in the Bible, there are two meanings to the word: In the Old Testament, virgin means young woman and in the New Testament, virgin means someone who has not had sexual intercourse.



According to my research, at that time in Jewish history, their families had arranged the engagement and marriage of Mary and Joseph. Mary and Joseph were probably second or third cousins. Mary was very

young, perhaps a thirteen or fourteen year-old girl. The engagement was very serious and called a “betrothal.” They were engaged before two witnesses. The man would give the woman a present; her father would pay a dowry. If the man died, she would be called a widow. If the woman died, he would be called a widower. If the engagement broke up, it would be called a divorce. During the time they were engaged, they were called husband and wife. While they were engaged, they were to be virgins and they were to have no sexual intercourse prior to marriage. The engagement was to last one year and then

they were to be married. If a woman became pregnant by another man, she could be stoned to death.

During that year they were engaged, an angel or divine messenger visited Mary.

Mary was told that she was to become pregnant. She asked the divine messenger, “How can I become pregnant? I have no husband. I am not married yet. I am engaged to Joseph, and we cannot do that kind of stuff. How can I become pregnant?”

The angelic messenger said, “The Holy Spirit will come over you, and the Holy Spirit shall cause you to conceive and give

birth to a child.” Mary waited. And waited. And waited. She missed her first period. Her second period. She started to have morning sickness, and it was now time to have that important and delicate conversation with Joseph.

We have no Biblical record of that conversation, but we do have our imaginations, and we can imagine a delicate scene. This conversation was not at all pleasant. Mary said, “Joseph, I have something to tell you. I don’t understand it, and it is hard for me to tell you because there is no way I can comprehend what is going on.” ... “Go ahead, Mary. Tell me. I

can handle it.” ... “Joseph, I don’t know how to tell you.” ... “Tell me; we can handle anything.” ... “I am pregnant.” ... There was a long silence. Truly, a pregnant pause. This was an awkward moment between them. Joseph automatically assumed she was pregnant by another man. He had been humiliated. Their relationship had been humiliated. This woman had betrayed him. She had been fundamentally dishonest with him and he was upset. He knew the legal consequences. He knew the Old Testament law. She could die for this. So could the other man. ... So he asked the question, “Who? Who got you pregnant? Whom

have you been with?” ... A divine messenger visited me and told me that this was going to happen. The Holy Spirit got me pregnant.” ... “Sure Mary. Sure.” ... The Bible said that he resolved to divorce her quietly. Look carefully at the text; it clearly implies that Joseph did not believe her. ... “What do you do? What do you do when the woman you trusted is pregnant by another man? She can die for this. So can he. What should I do in this nasty situation?”

In the passage in the Bible, it says, “Joseph was a just man.” That means that Joseph was a good man, a kind man, an

honorable man. The Bible uses the word, “righteous.” Joseph was a righteous man.

Then we come to the next beautiful line, “Joseph was unwilling to put her to shame.” That line says mountains to us about Joseph. He didn’t want to hurt Mary. He didn’t want to destroy her. He was not punitive. He was not revengeful. He wasn’t out for a pound of her flesh. Instead, Joseph had these feelings of grace towards her, and so he resolved to divorce her quietly. Not tell her parents. Not tell his parents. Not tell the Jewish rabbi. Not to tell the Jewish court so he could get his money back. ... So, the first story about the birth of Jesus is a story of

compassion, a story of grace, a story of a man who had been enormously violated by a pregnant woman and he vowed not to punish her. He had been deeply violated, yet he still cared for her and took care of her. This is the gospel.

But the story continues. An angel or divine messenger appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Mary is pregnant by the Spirit of God. The Spirit hovered over her and she is now pregnant. You are to marry her and name the child Jesus for he will save the people from their sins. Call him Immanuel because God is always with us.” And so, Joseph remained with Mary because

he believed the dream and the message of the angel.

The purpose of the story for today is not to tell us that Joseph was religious or righteous. The primary purpose of the story today is to tell us that Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus. That is the point of the story. Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus. Joseph was the legal father. Joseph was the adopted father. But he was not the biological father of Jesus and that is what the story is all about.

Many Christians stumble over different aspects of the Christian faith, and some

Christians stumble over the virgin birth story. These Christians emphasize that the virgin birth was unimportant to the Gospel of Mark, the Gospel of John and the Apostle Paul. Mark, John and Paul do not use the concept of the virgin birth in their understanding of Jesus, but they still believed that Jesus was the Son of God. So also, with some of these Christians. They believe that Jesus is the Son of God, but they trip up on the story of the virgin birth.”

May we come to know Christ more closely this Advent and Christmas season. Jesus has put great meaning into our lives.

May we pass along that meaning of God's
love in our midst to others.

Amen

Description: Jesus is birthed in Matthew's gospel without a manger, without the fanfare of the shepherds or of the angelic hosts singing. But Matthew clearly knows the true spirit of Christmas: when we give someone the thing of their dreams, we can give nothing better. That is what God gave all humanity for Christmas, the hope of years to come, the hope of eternity with God.

Tags: Mary, Joseph, Jesus, Christ, God, Matthew, Luke, virgin, birth, Christmas, Advent, compassion, grace, pregnant, star, angel, Christians, Holy Family, engaged

More stories:

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The Rev. Maxwell Grant is the senior minister of Second Congregational United Church of Christ in Greenwich, CT.

http://day1.org/5462-expecting_christmas

“Joseph didn't know that Christmas was even coming; but if you ask me, he heard the call of Advent just the same. He heard its

quiet, insistent longing for a world that follows different rules. A world that seeks to live in the light of great promises and which is no longer trapped by familiar expectations. Joseph heard Advent's invitation to live a life in which, at last, love dares to speak its name. And somehow, in that moment, Joseph knew that love's name is the only one that matters.

But we know that the love that Jesus talked about--the love he stood for--the love he died for--was just that kind of rule-changing, deep-seeing kind of love...just that kind of non-abandoning, instinctive,

sheltering, protecting, guiding love...just that kind of patient, quiet, healing love.

Advent invites us to let go of all those expectations. Advent calls us to remember the love of Jesus and Joseph and the love of God. It calls us to let God's peace gradually warm our souls, freeing us for new expectations and the birth of something within us and for us: the arrival of Emmanuel--God with us. Advent calls us to wait for the arrival of hope and to see the shadowy outline of a new world that is just beginning to dawn.

Love that was strong enough to grasp for something different undeterred by conventions and expectations and limitations. And that's the love of Jesus. And the love of his father, Joseph. And the love of God.

The time we spent searching for the perfect gift is matched by an eleventh hour, "Gee it's just something to open" shrug of a present in return.

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for new expectations and the birth of something within us and for us: the arrival of Emmanuel--God with us. Advent calls us to wait for the arrival of hope and to see the shadowy outline of a new world that is just beginning to dawn.

For Joseph, to hear the call of God's love was the dawn of a distinctly countercultural vision. And the Christmas that lives in the heart remains profoundly countercultural, too. At its core, Christmas is foreign to everything about us but the power of our capacity to love and be loved.

And its bold claim is that, in the end, it is our capacity to love and be loved that is the most important thing about us.

In these final days before Christmas, I don't know what different kinds of music you'll encounter as you go about the work of preparing. But underneath it all, may you hear the quiet hymn that is God's great love song to you and to us all.

And may it strengthen you to follow love's call with joy and purpose, letting go of everything else.

Let every heart prepare him room.

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The Very Rev. Samuel G. Candler is Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip in the Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta, GA.

<http://day1.org/1070->

[believe in the dreams of the person you love](#)

In the Christmas carol, “O Little Town of Bethlehem” by Phillips Brooks is the line: “The hopes and dreams of all the years are met in thee tonight.”

Now, take a look at the carol with me, “Silent Night”. It's No. 210 in the hymnbook. I want you to look in stanza three at a little phrase that occurs at the end of the stanza before the refrain. And the phrase is, “...the dawn of redeeming grace.” The dawn of redeeming grace: that's what Christmas is; that's what the Nativity is; that's what the Advent of Jesus is: it's the dawn of redeeming grace: redemption which had been promised down through the centuries of the Old Testament, going back all the way to Genesis 3:15: “...the seed of the woman” that would “bruise the head” of Satan.

And now, finally all the promises, all of the allusions to the coming of the Savior have joined together. <> In the words of the carol <>, O Little Town of Bethlehem by Phillips Brooks, “the hopes and dreams of all the years are met in Thee tonight.” And that's what Bethlehem is. That's what the birth of Jesus is. It's the dawn of redeeming grace. It's not the end, it's not the culmination: it's the dawn of it. It's the promise finding fulfillment in the birth of Jesus. But there's much more, of course, to come.

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Imagine young Mary, minding her own business, suddenly being overcome with news of a great conception, a great presence of the divine. It's something to have an angel speak to you. Even folks who are not religious might turn their heads.

Wouldn't it be great to know that such a revelation might happen again? Here's my reply to that kind of question: Well, you know what? It did happen again.

The angel did appear to someone besides Mary. The story is recorded right in the Bible. The angel appeared not just to Mary.

The angel did appear to someone else. The angel appeared to Joseph.

We too often forget about poor Joseph.

Every year, we tend to focus on the story of Mary. But this year, it's Joseph.

Now, if the angel can appear to Mary, and then also appear to Joseph, there's a lesson in that. That means that the angel can appear to you and me, too. In the Bible, the annunciation does not occur only once, but twice-not just to a woman, but also to a man.

The Bible, then, carries an implicit message that God does appear over and over again, to various sorts of folks. Matthew and Luke both have it right, but they are different stories. God continues to come into the world, but we have to trust other sources!

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gift you can give is to have faith in someone else; believe in their dreams. Believe in the dreams of the person you love. Believe in the dream of your husband. Believe in the dream of your wife. Believe in the dreams of your children. Believe in the dream of your hero, your leader, your friend. Believe in their dreams!

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Pastor Edward F. Markquart has been the pastor of Grace Lutheran Church since 1973.

http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series_a_the_birth_of_christ_and_christmas.htm

Do you know that you have only eleven shopping days before Christmas? Do you know that you only have eleven more days to spend eleven billion dollars? Do you know that during the twenty-five days of Christmas that we Americans will spend twenty-five billion dollars? Do you know that this is the biggest spending binge of the year for the American economy? Do you know that many corporations make fifty percent of their profits during the lucrative Christmas shopping season? Have you heard the advertisements bark out the commercials: “Christmas toys on sale. Christmas toys on sale. How can you have a

bright shinny Christmas unless you have a bright shiny new car? Hurry, hurry, hurry, down to the mall of your choice where there is plenty of parking. To the South Center Mall. To the Federal Way Mall. To the Super Mall. There is plenty of parking and plenty of places to spend plenty of cash. Hurry, hurry, hurry. You have only eleven more days to spend eleven billion dollars.”

Yes, we are in the middle of Christmas mania, aren't we? It is that time of year when we are so very busy and there is so much to do.



stream of thought occurs in North Africa, in the city of Carthage. In Carthage, there was a man by the name of Hippolytus, living in about the year 220 CE. He was the father of confirmation; that is, he originated a three-year study program after which people could be baptized. Well, Hippolytus, a great theologian, believed that Christ died on March 25th, in the year 29 CE. He believed he had knowledge of that fact. He also believed that Jesus was conceived on the same day he died, that is, on March 25th. So, if Jesus was conceived on March 25th, he was born on ...December 25th. In other words, the Savior of the world was born on

the same day that the world itself was born.
That made good sense to Hippolytus.

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SermonWriter, Dick Donovan

<https://www.sermonwriter.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/1218-Adv4A.doc>

The name, Jesus, "is the Greek form of the Hebrew Yehosua, which means 'YHWH is salvation' " (Bergant, 27). It is related to the name Joshua—Moses' successor.

"for it is he who will save his people from their sins" (v. 21b). The first Joshua saved

the people from their enemies; the second Joshua (Jesus) will save the people from their sins.

"It is ever God alone, who in and through his Son, saves his people. While some trust in chariots and some in horses (Ps. 20:7)... none of these, whether operating singly or in conjunction with all the others, is able to deliver man from his chief enemy, the foe that is little by little destroying his very heart, namely, sin" (Hendriksen, 132).



The people do not expect a messiah who will save them from their sins, but one who

will deliver them from their oppressors. However, “the angel's words...signal at the start that any political euphoria which may have been evoked by the Davidic and royal theme of the ‘book of origin’ is wide of the mark of what Jesus’ actual mission will be” (France, 54).

Jesus would be far more popular if he would focus on relieving the people of Roman oppression instead of delivering them from their sins. The Romans drain the economy by their taxation, impose indignity after indignity upon the people, and displace God's law with Roman law. Jesus not only

fails to address these grievances, but also commends the faith of a centurion (8:5-13) and teaches people to render to Caesar that which is Caesar's (17:24-27). In Luke's Gospel, he will even forgive those responsible for his death (Luke 23:34).



"Now all this has happened, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet" (v. 22). The fulfillment of prophecy is important to Matthew. He mentions it eleven times (1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:56; 27:9).

"Behold, the virgin (he parthenos) shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son" (v. 23a). The verse cited is Isaiah 7:14. Isaiah spoke these words to King Ahaz in the eighth century. Jerusalem was under siege, and it appeared that both the city and the nation might be destroyed. Isaiah's prophesied that a boy-child would be born and that, by the time he reached maturity, the threat from the enemy would have passed. We do not know that boy's identity, but the city and nation were both spared.

"The virgin" is the correct translation of he parthenos rather than "a virgin"—the

original has the definite article—suggesting that God has a particular virgin in mind.

Isaiah referred to a young woman (*almah*)—although the the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, uses *parthenos*, which means virgin, in Isaiah 7:14.

Matthew's *ho parthenos* clearly means virgin. Neither Mark nor John addresses the issue of the virgin birth, nor do the epistles. However, both Matthew and Luke makes it clear that the child is from the Holy Spirit and that Joseph is not the father (Matthew

1:18, 21; Luke 1:35)—and that Mary is a virgin (Matthew 1:23, 25; Luke 1:34).

"Mary had to be a virgin, because Jesus is the Son of God. There is no way to prove Mary's virginity other than to observe that without Mary's virginity the story cannot be told. Mary's virginity is simply required by the way the story runs. The one to whom she gave birth is none other than Emmanuel, 'God with us,' and such a one can have no other father than the Father who is the first person of the Trinity" (Hauerwas, 36).

"They shall call his name Immanuel" (v. 23b). In the Gospel of Luke, the angel tells Mary to name the baby Jesus (Luke 1:31), but this angel does not tell Joseph to name the baby Emmanuel. Instead the angel says that "they" will name him Emmanuel—"they" presumably being the people whom the baby will save from their sins (v. 21).

In Hebrew, El is a short form of Elohim, a name for God. Immanu-El means "God with us," a meaning which Matthew spells out for non-Hebrew readers. Emmanuel is not a second name by which friends and neighbors will know Jesus. Jesus is his

name, and Emmanuel describes his role. Matthew thus begins his Gospel with the promise that Jesus is God-with-us and will end the Gospel with the promise that Jesus will be with us “always, to the end of the age” (28:20).



J. Nicholas Adams, LectionAid

Christmas reminds us that god hears the cries of his people. Jesus is “Emmanuel,” which means God with Us. Jesus promises to never leave us or forsake us. God has heard our cry & the cries of the whole world.



Don't give up. Christmas magic is not a place, experience or ritual. Christmas magic is Immanuel, Christ with us, the hope of glory. Christmas is Jesus Christ with us, inside and outside the boundaries of our magic kingdom expectations. Jesus Christ with us no matter how we feel, no matter how we fail, no matter how great the need. Immanuel, Christ is with us.

Jesus Christ is the Messiah. He is the light that overpowers darkness and the hope that overcomes despair. Jesus Christ is the life that rescues us from death and darkness. He abides with us, and He will be with us this

Christmas season whether anything goes as planned.

Merry Christmas and peace on Earth to all humankind. ... Especially to you.

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