

# FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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**SERMON:** *Through the Eyes of Joseph*

**SERIES:** *Christmas - Through the eyes of...*

**SCRIPTURES:** *Matthew 1:18-25*

**SPEAKER:** *Shaun Kipe*

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*\*Credit to Bible Project (Tim Mackie); Ken Bailey;*

Well good morning, it is so great to worship with you. Want to say welcome to all of you gathered on-line, at home, tuning to the live stream.

Believe it or not this morning is the first Sunday of the Advent season. Advent is simply a word that means “coming” and refers to the several weeks leading up to Christmas as we anticipate and think about God coming as a baby and also look forward to when He come again.

And so this morning we are kicking off our Christmas sermon series. This year our series is called “Through the eyes of...” **(Series TITLE SLIDE)**

Sometimes the Christmas Story gets lumped into the holiday magic and the story of Jesus birth loses some of its realness and authenticity.

And so each week, we want to see the Christmas story through the eyes of some of those folks that were present when God entered real time and real history.

We want to enter the world, the emotions, the stories, the lives of Joseph, Mary, Simeon, the Shepherds. And we believe that as we step into their shoes, we may just find our own real life stories.

We may just find some similar questions, hurt, pain...and at the same be reminded that there was incredible joy, celebration and hope as God entered our world and you also can have that, this Christmas season.

We begin today, with **the Christmas story through the eyes of Joseph.**

And didn't Mason Swankler just do such an amazing job of capturing some of what may have been going in that man 2,000 years ago.

## **I. Joseph's Story**

Not much is known about Jesus earthly father, Joseph. There are only a few small episodes where he shows up in Scripture, most of them in Matthew 1.

He is often described as a carpenter though to be honest, that may not be completely accurate. The word Greek word, is better defined as a craftsman...possible he was a wood-worker, but some suggest he may have been mason or stone worker.

But, while much of Joseph's story is unknown, there are some fascinating things that stand out about this man. In fact his story involves a common human experience.

Not the part about his fiancée saying she is going to give birth by the power of the Holy Spirit or the angelic dream visits. That has probably never happened to you. But in another sense...you've experience this in life, haven't you?

### **A. "That's not what I expected."**

That's where Joseph's story begins. Listen...

**18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about<sup>[d]</sup>: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.**

Imagine your engaged to be married, and in ancient Israel these betrothals could be years in the making. Possible Joseph and Mary had been preparing for this for quite a while...your fiancée pulls you aside one day and says, *“By the way I had this dream, and Angel told me, God put a baby in my womb. In fact, this Baby is the Messiah. The one who we’ve been waiting on for several hundred years. The one who’s going to save the world. ”*

What would a young engaged man, be thinking? “This is not what I had in mind. This is not the news I expected my fiancée to share with me.”

I read this humorous little story one time...

A group of tourists was visiting a crocodile farm and they were in a floating on a boat out in the middle of a crocodile lake. The owner of the farm shouted: "Whoever jumps into the water and swims to shore, will receive 10 million dollars. The silence was deafening.

Suddenly, a man jumped into the water. He was chased by crocodiles, but with great luck he was unharmed. The owner announced: "We have a winner!!!".

After receiving their reward, the man and his fiancée returned to the hotel. The man tells his fiancée: "I did not jump in myself ... Someone pushed me !!!"

His fiancée smiled and said coldly: "It was me!"

You know what that man was thinking... “That’s not what I had in mind.”

*“By the way, Joseph, I had this dream, and Angel told me, God put a baby in my womb. In fact, God put Himself there.”*

Joseph’s story begins in much the same way we experience life....this isn’t what I expected.

Think back on 2020. This isn’t what we had planned is it.

You’ve missed graduations, vacations.

You got bad news about your health.

You lost a loved one...suddenly.

Someone walked out on your life. Your parents finally decided it was time split.

The promotion went to someone else.

Your retirement disappeared.

Isn’t that just how real life leaves us sometimes? “This isn’t what I expected. This isn’t the way I had it planned.”

Joseph’s story kind of reminds us that that first Christmas story must have been filled with questions, doubt, and confusion. You and I can relate can’t we, because the same holds true for our lives.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth...

**1 Corinthians 13:12 - <sup>12</sup> For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully...**

I’ll just tell you sometimes as churches we get this wrong more anyone else. We think to ourselves or give the impression to others that life with God is mostly about answers to life’s surprises. No more surprises. No more doubts.

That wasn't Joseph's experience. In fact, isn't it fascinating that when God was physically closer and more present in Joseph's life than any other time, was the time he probably was more confused than at any other time?

We all come to church, we all come to Jesus, not because we have answers to all of life's questions but rather because our life experience often leaves us saying, "This isn't what I expected."

We come in pain, loss, confusion, suffering...that's life. That's how Christmas started for Joseph. I bet you can relate.

Second, I just think it's really important to notice Joseph's immediate response.

**<sup>19</sup> Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet<sup>[e]</sup> did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.**

**<sup>20</sup> But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream...**

Now, have you ever thought about this before?

How long was the time between Mary's angelic visit and Joseph's angelic visit? There is no indication in the story. Was it days/weeks/months of considering what to do?

It's interesting. Wouldn't you have switched the order of the story if you were God? Tell Joseph, first. Then go and tell Mary. Eliminate any of the confusion before it begins. Or maybe tell them at the same time, so they can commiserate together.

How long did Joseph consider?

One of the reasons, I love Scripture and studying the characters in Scripture so closely is that the Bible is so raw and transparent about their humanness. Sometimes we turn biblical characters into mega-spiritual super heroes and they lose some of their humanness.

The Greek word here that is translated as “considered” has two meanings. Most versions of your Bible say “considered or pondered”. But the word also shares the same root word in Greek that means “filled with wrath or rage”.

Middle Eastern scholar Ken Bailey suggests that a better translation in this instance would be that “Joseph was fuming mad”...when he found out Mary was pregnant. Matthew just get’s real blunt about Josephs experience, his emotions, what he’s feeling...

I was kind of thinking that so many of us are not good at acknowledging what we are feeling, especially this time of year. But that raw honesty can be good for us. I was kind of thinking, kids don’t have the same concerns, kids are usually much better at raw emotional honesty, they just tell you exactly what they feel. I came across these letters that some kids wrote to their teachers...

“Mrs. Munn, you were a good teacher this year...but not my favorite ever...NOT even close. (Bryan)”

“Miss Mandy, You can move my seat anywhere and I will still talk a lot, I just will. You think about that this summer.” (Stacy)

“Mrs. Stephen’s I’m sorry your cat died but at least you won’t smell as dirty anymore.” (Michael)

I have been learning to play the guitar, and the other day I was feeling pretty good about myself and I was singing and playing in the living room. I was beginning to think pretty highly of myself. I was thinking, man this is really starting to sound like a song. My family is probably really enjoying this, it’s like I’m serenading them

through their day. And then my little angel daughter, Ady walked into the room and said, “Dad, when do you think you’ll be done making all that noise.”

I don’t know all of the emotions you may be experiencing this time of year. Christmas is always one of those seasons of confused emotion. Some happy and joy and excitement. But for many also a time of confusion and sadness and loneliness, maybe even anger and fuming. But I just want you to know, that whatever it is that you’re experiencing, feeling it’s ok. I’m not saying it’s easy, but it’s ok...it’s part of being human.

Joseph felt that. You’ve felt that. It’s real, it’s raw and I bet you can relate.

So...

## **II. Where do we go from here?**

Joseph chose two responses that we also might be able to resonate with and perhaps learn from. First, Joseph responds with...

### **A. Simple Obedience.**

**<sup>20</sup> But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,<sup>fn</sup> because he will save his people from their sins.”**

**<sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.**

And if you’re familiar with the story, “the dream like instructions” don’t stop there.

**Matthew 2 - <sup>13</sup> ...an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”**

**<sup>14</sup> So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, <sup>15</sup> where he stayed until the death of Herod.**

Joseph leads his family on a dangerous trek from Bethlehem to Northern Africa, refugees, fleeing for their lives and then back.

You'd have to think that at some point Joseph would have wondered about the validity of Jesus truly being God's son. Wouldn't you expect things work out much better? We can only speculate on the doubts and confusion Joseph must have experienced.

Why Mary my fiancé? Why a census the year the Messiah being born? Why all the killing? Why fleeing to a foreign country?

And I was kind of thinking that sometimes, when life is throwing things at us...we so often just want to sit in the corner and curl up and cry. We want to give up on life.

Joseph's response in some ways is inspiring and challenging to us. It's like he said, *“Lord, I don't where this is going. I may be misunderstood, laughed at...But I'm gonna take the first step, doing the first thing I know is right.”*

One author says it like this...

**“He didn't know everything, but he did what he knew was right.”**

You don't need to know everything, start by doing what you know is right. Start by being faithful in one small area of your life.

It's easy to get caught up in arguments sometimes about controversial topics about life, theology...but sometimes the best thing to do is to stay away from all of the arguments and just do the little things you know are right.

If you're spending too much time on a screen. Turn it off. (Do the right thing.)  
When you're about to complain because something didn't go the way you wanted. (quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry). Just keep your mouth shut. Maybe you've become aware this year that materialism and stuff is gripping your heart, just tell the people around you one less present this year will be fine. Learn contentment.

If you're having trouble with your diet, you're addicted to caffeine or sugar...just eliminate one item. Soda. Start there.

If you're about to open your mouth or post on social media and attempt to set someone straight. Just don't. Just quietly walk away. Pause and ask God to change your heart toward that person. Be obedient to Jesus on social media.

Forgive your angry neighbor. Love your political opponent. Read the Christmas Story with your family. Find out about a missionary who could use a care package or a word of encouragement. Volunteer in a ministry that needs an extra set of hands.

Joseph didn't know exactly where his story was headed. There were moments where the confusion and wondering must have had his head spinning. But in the midst of that all that, this man got up, he packed his bags, he loaded the donkey and started to walk. **"He didn't know everything, but he did what he knew was right."**

Second,

## **B. Stand WITH the broken and the hurting in your world.**

**19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet<sup>le</sup> did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.**

Now just a little bit of clarity here. In the ancient Jewish world, when a couple was betrothed or engaged to be married...breaking the engagement was just like divorce.

So even though they weren't officially "married", Joseph is planning to "divorce her."

And, according to Jewish law, if a betrothed wife is found to be unfaithful...the letter of the Jewish law could be pretty harsh. She should be dragged before the court and her sin exposed publicly. And if found guilty...possibly even stoned. (Deut 22:23)

One second century writer, Aulus Gellius says it like this: ***"If you should catch your wife in adultery, you may put her to death without a trial; but if you should commit adultery she must not presume to lay a finger on you..."***

Joseph is faithful to the law and yet...he didn't want to expose her publicly and he didn't want her to be stoned. Call it grace. Call it compassion. Whatever you want to call it the man knows...grace in the face of brokenness and sin and pain and humiliation.

And then Joseph has his own dream...

**24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.**

This is fascinating...not only does Joseph then, not abandon her, expose her, humiliate her...he joins her. He will take on the suspicion, the ridicule, and the humiliation with her. He will enter into the pain and brokenness of Mary.

Look she's the one walking around obviously pregnant. But, Joseph chose to stand with her, in this. He is gonna marry someone that the community will see as unfaithful and the best explanation he's got is "God's Holy Spirit" did this to her.

Kind of makes me wonder if Jesus ever found out about the story of his own birth and how Joseph chose to respond to Mary.

And it makes me wonder years later...when Jesus is a grown man, and a woman who has been unfaithful, caught in sexual sin, she is dragged before him and thrown humiliated to the ground. Was there a moment where Jesus remembered back to the humiliation and scorn of his own mother and how his earthly father Joseph stepped up and took on the humiliation with her and stood by her side? Did Jesus remember and smile and admire the courage of his father to show such grace and compassion in face of brokenness. And Jesus responded the same to this woman.

One of my favorite hero's of the faith is a Catholic priest, Father Damien. In the late 1800's moved by the miserable conditions of lepers whom the Hawaiiin government had deported and then isolated from the rest of the community...but living in deplorable conditions. No school, no hospitals, simply left to die. Father Damien, He saw these folks as real people whom God loved. And so rather than stand on the side-lines or encourage them from afar, he knew the best way to help was to be present with them. So, knowing the risks, he moved into their community to help teach, heal, care for and live with the lepers. Not surprising, he did eventually contract the disease himself and die.

Folks one of the most powerful aspects of our faith is this right here. I believe that in grace and compassion, we too must learn to stand with those that are hurting and broken.

And isn't that really the heart of the Christmas story...standing with, entering into the humiliation of the broken and the lost. That God looked down from his heavenly

thrown and said “I will enter the mess with them. I will take on the humiliation with them. I will become human myself.”

“And he shall be called Emmanuel, which means...God is with us.”

I believe that’s why one of the themes at Christmas is HOPE. Because at Christmas God entered our mess and came to stand WITH us. I kind of think deep down, that’s who Joseph, Jesus father was.

### **Benediction:**

Ultimately we don’t know exactly what happened to Joseph, Jesus earthly father. Many experts suggest, he may have died when Jesus was still young. But we don’t know. But what I find so fascinating about this man, who is often lost in the hype of Christmas story...is that in the face of confusion and doubt we find powerful example grace and faithfulness. And because of this God used him. Through Joseph, Jesus, the Messiah was born into the world.

In the face of your own confusion, doubt and struggle, pain...may you choose the grace and faithfulness we see in Joseph.

### **Joseph Monologue:**

Wow. What just happened? This isn’t what I expected at all.

An angel, really an angel...is that what that was? Terrifying, confusing. I don’t know what to think.

I love Mary, I really do. I was uncertain when we first met. But, that twinkle she would get her in her eyes when she looked at me. Her sheepish grin and beautiful smile. Her calm and quiet...yet, oh so confident demeanor. She was everything I could have...HOPED for. That's what these arranged marriages are about isn't it? Hope. But I had it...hope in her...hope in you, God.

I had started to dream dreams, what life would be like. Settling down in Nazareth. Keeping up the family business. And starting a family together. Sharing meals in our quiet little home, laughter as our children begin to grow. My kids, working by my side, teaching them my craft, as a carpenter...and life lessons. We wouldn't have had much, I'm not wealthy...but, we'd have each other and I had it all planned out.

And Mary was all on board. She seemed so excited.

But that day...I'll never forget that day. The day hope faded and my dream was lost. She stopped by, I knew something wasn't right. There was a sadness in her eyes and her voice. She leaned over and gently took my hand...*"Joseph, I need to tell you something, I don't know how to tell you this, so I'm just gonna be open...I'm gonna have a baby!"* I half-expected her to start laughing, it's joke. This couldn't be.

But she didn't.

I was furious, irate. I wrenched my hand out of hers. I didn't want her to touch me. I didn't want her to look at me. Look, I'm no genius. But even I know how pregnancy happens. She must have cheated. There's just no other explanation.

I remember her face, the tears, she tried so desperately to explain. Something about a dream, an angel...a baby by God's Holy Spirit...the Messiah! How was I to believe something so phenomenal?

I remember I stormed out of there. So full of confusion. I loved her and despised her all at the same time. Anger and doubt. That's how life leaves me sometimes. Wondering what just happened? And where on earth is God in all of this? Why would you allow this? How could you let this happen?

I formed my planned. I knew I couldn't marry her. I thought about what the "letter of the law" says, and I'd seen it done before to other young lady's... "drag her before the courts, humiliate her for her unfaithfulness, punish her, ruin her for life... maybe even take her life." I'll tell you that's what the anger in me wanted to do.

But I know you God and I also know all the Scriptures about "caring for orphans and widows." I know the stories of your faithfulness and your grace to our ancestors who suffered in Egypt and exile. I just knew, that true justice in your eyes would involve grace. So I made up my mind. I would do this quietly. I wouldn't humiliate her. Just walk away.

And now, now...you've sent ME an angel. *"Don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife. This is the work of your Holy Spirit. This is God's own son. And he needs you (ME) to be his father!"*

There's still a side of me that's somewhat uncertain. I know many will doubt, they'll think I've lost my mind. But I know, I know what I saw, I'm certain of it. The voice was as clear as could be.

Surely, Mary was telling me the truth. This child is your own son. I don't feel like I'm worthy to be the earthly father of the Messiah. I've messed up so much. But I do trust you. My HOPE in you has been restored.

That's it. I've gotta go tell Mary! I believe. I'm in this with her. I won't be perfect, but I'll stand by her side.