

The Advent of Faith - Matthew 1:18-25; 2:13-14, 19-23

Introduction: A young boy was applying for a job at a local newspaper. The manager asked him, "Can you type?" the boy said, "No sir." "Can you run a printing press?" asked the manager. Again, the boy said, "No sir." "Well, can you take shorthand?" And again, the boy said, "No Sir." "Well, young man, what can you do?" The boy said, "I can do what I am told, sir." The manager said, "You're hired!"

There was a Seinfeld episode where Kramer bursts into Jerry's apartment. George is also there, and Kramer says "Do you guys want to have some fun!" George and Jerry say "Sure." And then Kramer says "Do you really want to have some fun? Or are you just saying you want to have some fun?" And George says "I really want to have some fun." And Jerry says "I was just saying I want to have some fun."

These are the questions we need to answer today. "Are you willing to do what you are told?" and, "Do you trust God? Or are you just saying you trust God?"

This morning as we continue to uncover the meaning of Advent, we're going to look at a man in the Christmas story who did what he was told when he was confronted with the question: "Do you really trust God?" This morning, we're going to look at Joseph. His story begins in **Matt 1:18-24 READ.**

Let's put on our imagination caps this morning and try to put ourselves in Joseph's shoes for a moment. Ladies, you'll really have to step outside yourself to imagine this. We're going to put ourselves back in the time of Joseph. We're going to put ourselves in Joseph's shoes for a moment.

Your wife-to-be, from a reputable family, is "*found to be with child.*" Now, you know that there is only one known way for this to happen, and you know it wasn't you. In your mind, you only have two options. You can make a big scene about it, and humiliate Mary before the whole town, divorce her publically, and try to regain your honor and respect in the community. Or, you can divorce her quietly, move on with your life, and leave Mary to deal with the consequences of her immorality.

No doubt Joseph wrestled with this decision for some time – probably going back and forth with his emotions, weighing his options, and fighting with his own convictions. But after a great deal of soul-searching Joseph finally made the decision to divorce Mary quietly. And with his mind made up, Joseph went to bed that evening feeling good about his decision. But that is when things changed. Now Joseph's faith would be put to the test.

1. The Invitation to Faith

In his sleep that night, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and gave him another option. He filled in the gap of truth that Joseph was missing. He 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. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins*" (20).

Suddenly, things are not so cut and dry anymore. I mean, before, Joseph was in a position of strength. He was completely justified in his decision to divorce Mary. He knew he was innocent and he didn't have to continue their relationship. Every ounce of righteousness that Joseph could muster up dictated that divorcing

Mary quietly was the most moral and Godly thing he could do. It was the prudent thing to do. He could still maintain his personal dignity and honor. It just made good sense.

And then the angel came in a dream with this invitation to put his faith and trust in God, and it would leave Joseph in an even more difficult situation. If he took Mary as his wife, everyone would naturally assume that he is the father. If he took Mary as his wife, he would forever live with the stigma that he fathered this child outside of marriage, when he knew better. If he took Mary as his wife, he would no longer be known as a righteous man in the eyes of his family and the community.

Now what was Joseph going to do? What would you do? What do you do when you're faced with either doing what you think is the right thing or doing the God thing?

Well, Matthew records: "*When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.*" (vs. 24). Joseph chose to trust and obey God. In spite of everything it meant for him personally, and all he would give up, he said, "*I will do what I am told sir. I am trusting God. I'm not just saying I'm trusting God, I'm really trusting God. I'm taking Mary home as my wife.*"

That is advent faith. You see, we have to keep in mind that Joseph was a Jew. He had been raised in the tradition of Judaism and the Hebrew Scriptures – the Torah, the Law and the Prophets, and the writings which taught that Messiah would come.

But Joseph was also living in a time and a culture that had heard no word from the Lord in over 400 years. Can you imagine what kind of faith it must have taken for Joseph to wake up from a dream in which an angel he had never heard from before, told him to trade his position of strength and embrace a position of weakness, shame, ridicule, loss of reputation and respect in the community, by marrying a fiance who is carrying a child that was not even his. In the midst of an incredibly difficult situation Joseph chose to obey. That is having faith in the coming Savior. That is living and acting upon the very definition of faith: "*...being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*" **Hebrews 11:1 (NIV).**

But that was just the start of a lifelong experience of faith. For Joseph and Mary, the invitation of faith became:

2. A Pattern of Faith

In the next chapter, we see Joseph's faith being put to the test again. By this time, the Magi have come with their treasures and worshipped Jesus.

Now by the time the Magi arrived, Joseph and Mary had moved from the stable because vs. 11 says, "*On coming to the house, they saw the child with His mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped Him.*" (**Matthew 2:11 NIV**). We don't know how much time had elapsed from the time Jesus was born until the arrival of the Magi, but according to **Luke 2:21-27**, it was probably enough time for Jesus to have been circumcised, and for Mary to have completed her period of purification so they could travel to the temple in Jerusalem to present Jesus to the Lord and make their sacrifices. This period of time could have been anywhere

from 8 weeks to up to two years. So it is within the realm of possibility that Mary and Joseph and Jesus have settled down in Bethlehem. Joseph probably found a little bit of work, they had settled into some type of a life, and then he had this second dream where the angel of the Lord appears again and says. *'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.'*” **Matthew 2:13 (NIV).**

And again, Joseph responds with obedient faith. *“So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt”* **Matthew 2:14 (NIV).** Joseph said, *“OK. I’ll do whatever you say. God didn’t lead me wrong before, I have no reason to doubt Him now. We’ll pack our bags and go down to Egypt right now.”* (Vs. 14 paraphrase).

Joseph obeyed, immediately. The little family left their own country, went to a different culture, had to stay with strange people, and they started all over again for the second time in less than two years.

But Joseph’s faith Journey didn’t end there either. After Joseph escaped with his family to Egypt, we see in vs. 19-20: *“After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.”*” **Matthew 2:19-20 (NIV)**

Now we don’t know the exact time frame, but Mary and Joseph had time to settle in Egypt, make some kind of a life for themselves there, and once again Joseph laid down one night and had a dream. This is the third dream. If I was Joseph, by this time, I’d be afraid to go to sleep, because every time one of these God-dreams happens, we have to move and my life gets upended.

This one, though, is good news. They get to go home – back to Israel, back to their people, back to the land they knew and the places they were familiar with and the families and friends they had left behind.

And once again, Joseph immediately obeyed: *“So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.”* **Matthew 2:21 (NIV).**

But it doesn’t end there either. When Joseph and his family arrived back in Israel, they discovered that Herod’s son Archelaus had become king, and so there was still a threat on Jesus’ life. Naturally, Joseph was afraid to go to Judea, and so once again God speaks to him in a familiar way. *“...Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth.”* **Matthew 2:22b-23 (NIV)**

Do you see a pattern here? God spoke, Joseph obeyed. We don’t read of any arguments with God. We don’t hear of any questioning, or whining, or any attempts to wiggle out from God’s command. Even though all that moving and adjusting and unsettling worry and fear had to be a tremendous burden upon this little family, Joseph was obedient.

That is the way following God's will is sometimes. It is more often than not, a burden. More than likely, it will require a sacrifice of some kind. It can be very uncomfortable and cause more than a little fear and anxiety. And it can be a humbling experience to submit to the voice of God.

But following the will of God will also always lead you to a safe place. Someone told me years ago that the safest place on earth is in the will of God, and I believe it.

God spoke and Joseph obeyed. It's as simple as that.

Finally, let's look at:

3. The Result of Faith

In return for Joseph's obedience, what did he get? He got to teach the Messiah. He got to hold Him and watch Him learn and discover all the wonders of this world. He got to provide for His needs. He got to take Him out into his workshop and pass along the skills of the carpenter to His son, all the while knowing that God's plan was to save humanity through this child. Joseph got the joy of doing all this because he was willing to obey God.

Did you know that when you choose to obey God, you also get to be a part of God's plan of redemption. You get to see God work in your life and in the lives of those you touch. You get to see first-hand God's forgiveness, and His healing and restoring power. Whatever the cost to us of obedience, that reward is worth it all.

Conclusion: This Christmas season, I want to invite you into that kind of selfless obedience. I want to invite you to become a participant in God's plan of salvation. Haven't you sat on the sidelines long enough? As James says, it's time to not only be hearers of the Word, but doers of the Word of God.

How is God you to obey? Is it in the area of repenting of your sin and turning your life over to Him?

Is it in an area of forgiveness? Has God called you to obey Him by forgiving a brother or sister and patch up a relationship?

Or perhaps God has just called you to trust Him in that situation that's weighing you down with worry and fear. Perhaps He's calling you to have an advent of faith this Christmas season. If so, I invite you to simply trust and obey, like Joseph did. Don't just say "*I want to trust the Lord;*" Step out on faith and actually trust the Lord by obeying His voice. When you do, you'll know the same joy that Joseph felt. You'll know the joy of participating with God in His incredible plan of salvation.