

Matthew 1:18-25

12/22/2019

At last Wednesday evening's communion service, there were just two of us and as we gathered to worship, it was clear that the franticness of the season was getting to both of us. So, I decided not to use the reflection I had planned to use and instead during the sermon time, I played the meditation from the Pray As You Go app (<https://pray-as-you-go.org>). The meditation was a different from the usual – which is to hear the scripture read and then ponder some reflection questions. This time we were asked to imagine what it was like to be in the story from scripture that we heard which was the gospel we heard this morning about Joseph finding out that Mary his fiancé is pregnant and what happened next. I want to share with you a story that came out of my reflection time with this scripture about Joseph.

Joseph was returning home from work. It had been a good day. As he thought about it just about everything was going well in his life. He had a trade that he loved – carpentry. He had orders coming in. He was so excited about working on a door for the Metz family. Such beautiful wood. And he was engaged to a wonderful young woman. He had known her all his life. He admired her faithfulness in the synagogue and knew she was devoted to God. He was grateful that his parents had been able to arrange a match for them. Joseph was looking forward to being married to her, raising children with her and devoting their lives to God. He was preparing the home they were to live in and had made a special chest for storage that he hoped she would love.

When he got home, his mother told him that Mary had been waiting for him. That's strange he thought. When he came into the main room, she looked scared. Mary told him- something has happened. Several weeks ago, an angel appeared to me and to and said I had found favor with God. You will have a child and will call him Jesus. The angel said that the child will be the son of the Most High who will reign over the house of David forever. When I asked how could this be since I am a virgin, the angel said the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the child that is born will be holy. And it has happened. I am with child.

Joseph asked how could this be? With child? No way? Not Mary. Never in a million years could he have imagined this happening. She was so faithful. Had someone taken advantage of her? And what was all this talk of an angel? Was Mary going mad to make sense of what must have been someone hurting her? He needed to think and sent her home.

Joseph told his good friend, Matthew, and Matthew was horrified. You know what you have to do Matthew said. This is an egregious offense. She needs to be stoned in the marketplace. These women need to know that such behavior is completely unacceptable! But Joseph couldn't do it. Something kept nagging at him. Mary was such a faithful young woman. How could this have happened? Perhaps – just perhaps – this angel story might have something to it, but how could that be. He felt sick about

the whole situation and decided to dismiss Mary quietly. Maybe she could make something of her life even with this pregnancy.

Over the next few days, Joseph found himself so sad. He really wanted this marriage with Mary and couldn't understand what was happening. His carpentry work became mundane. He was just going through the motions. He was barely sleeping. Could this be as Mary said? She would never lie. Joseph thought - What if her story is true? What if I am missing out on God's call?

Finally, one night after tossing and turning, Joseph fell asleep and began to dream. He was in his workshop working on the storage chest he was making for Mary. He became aware of a glowing light around him and looked up. In front of him was a being of light – an angel? The angel 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."

Then the angel faded away. Joseph woke up with a jolt and at the same time a feeling of peace flooded him. The words came back to him – do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. He knew what he had to do. That nagging feeling that something else was happening came back. Joseph was convinced that something very special was happening even though it didn't make much sense. Somehow Mary will bear this child of the Holy Spirit and Joseph wanted to be part of what it is happening as crazy as it sounds.

Have you been there? In a difficult or painful situation where you don't know how to go forward and then there comes a sign – something that gives you direction – an unexpected direction. It might be another person, something you notice, a dream or voice you hear pointing a way forward. Somehow it feels right even though it might seem crazy to follow.

As Bishop Wright, from the diocese of Atlanta, wrote this week in his weekly 'For Faith' email – God invites. Faith accepts. Joseph awoke and made God's message his mission joining Mary. That's how God did it and still does it, down into our lives with an impractical plan changing dream or whisper, God with us.