

121825

- I. My Notes ... WWC message 12/20 (Christmas message)
- II. Series: Advent 25
  - Title: Let's Hear From Joseph
  - Text: Matthew 1; Luke 2
  - Quote: "Peace on earth will come to stay when we live Christmas every day." – Helen Steiner Rice (Poet)
- III. Introduction
  - Everyone has their favorite Christmas song or songs. It's the time of the year when tradition feels a little more comfortable. I am unique (some might say weird) when it comes to Christmas music ... I tend to lean to those songs that aren't typical, that may not even be that familiar. Songs like "Jesus Christ" by the Decemberists and "Baby in the Hay" by the Fruit Bats are typical listens for me. One song that I tend to gravitate to at this time of the year is "Christmas Must Be Tonight" by The Band. "How a little baby boy, Bring the people so much joy. Son of a carpenter, Mary carried the light. This must be Christmas, must be tonight" (1977). These bring a refreshing viewpoint during this season.
  - Google will tell you that 90% of the people in the US celebrate Christmas. That's an amazing statistic. Yet, when asked, only 22% of people can tell the Christmas story from memory. About 50% are familiar with some of the details. This makes me question what many are celebrating. But even a more concerning statistic (in my opinion) is that only 76% of people who go to church regularly believe in some parts (not the entire) of the story. The history of man shows that he routinely gets in the way of God and what He is doing.
  - Perhaps this disconnect between celebration and understanding is why the message of Christmas—the true light coming into the world—can sometimes feel overshadowed by tradition and routine. As we listen to these unique songs and reflect on the story behind them, we're reminded that the heart of Christmas isn't found in familiar carols or decorations, but in the transformative message of hope, peace, and joy that entered the world that night. Embracing the essence of Christmas everyday challenges us to move beyond surface-level festivities and allow the light of Christ to shape our lives, relationships, and communities in lasting ways.
  - I've been in story-telling mode as of late. In the spirit of sharing stories, I am drawn to the remarkable moments that set this time of year apart, I

find myself reflecting on the perspective of someone often overshadowed in the Christmas narrative—Joseph. While Mary's faith stands as a beacon, Joseph's journey is one of quiet resolve, wrestling with doubts, expectations, and the weight of responsibility. His world, shaped by tradition and an enduring commitment to what is right, is suddenly upended by news that defies reason. As I imagine stepping into Joseph's shoes, I am struck by the tension between what he knows and what he hopes, between the life he's building and the mysterious work of God unfolding before him. It's a story not just about obedience, but about choosing compassion when confusion reigns, and trusting in a greater purpose even as uncertainty looms. This Christmas, perhaps Joseph's experience offers us a fresh lens: to recognize that behind every tradition and celebration lies a deeper call—to faith, to courage, and to love that endures in the face of the unknown.

#### IV. A Story That Should Be Told

- To help us feel the weight of Joseph's obedience, I want you to hear the story through his eyes. Joseph's story helps us see Christmas not as a peaceful postcard, but as a moment of costly obedience.
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- Trust is something that is earned, it can be hard to win. And belief, well that is something learned. Actions speak and as my father always told me, trust what you see.

Mary is very trusting; she lives each day with deep and passionate faith as her guide. She often talks about God and how good He is. I'm not so sure. I know that there are rules that we must follow, that obedience to God's word is necessary. But look at the difficulties each day brings. Life isn't easy. Making a living is a great challenge. And trying to build a home that Mary and I can live in and raise a family seems impossible. I am not so sure about how God will help but I will continue to do what I know that I should. And I believe and trust Mary.

We are committed to each other, some call it "engaged," and the wedding day is coming. I can't wait to get through this and on to what is next.

Family is important. I am looking forward to having one. I have gotten to know Mary's family and am excited about having my own. We found out a short time ago that Mary's cousin Elizabeth is pregnant. Everyone is excited because it is so unexpected. Elizabeth and Zechariah are older, and they never thought they would have kids. I know that soon it will be time for Mary and me to have a family.

- Mary told me about what Zechariah saw. He said it was an Angel that told him that Elizabeth would become pregnant. I don't know about that. It doesn't seem that this would be possible. But Mary believes what she heard. And I am inclined to trust Mary.
- I saw Mary the other day. Gosh, I love her so much. This wedding can't come soon enough. It looked like something was bothering her. I need to get her to tell me what is going on. My parents raised me to be honorable and hardworking, they taught me to care about others, and to live the right way. I'm doing my best.

As I reflect on these moments and the challenges we face, I have learned that life rarely unfolds the way we expect. The uncertainty of our future together weighs on me, yet seeing Mary's unwavering faith encourages me to persevere. I know there are questions I need to ask her, and I sense that something significant is happening beneath the surface—something that might change everything. Even so, I am determined to stand by her side, trusting that, somehow, the path ahead will make sense in time. In the midst of doubts and difficulties, I hold onto the hope that our love and commitment will carry us forward, and that, together, we'll find the strength to face whatever comes next.

- Mary finally talked with me. She is pregnant ... pregnant! And she says it is by the Holy Spirit. Mary told me an Angel came and told her that this would happen. This is getting to be a common explanation. Pregnant and it isn't my child. I have treated her with respect and kindness. I intended to wait until we were married. Many don't, after the promise they just jump right in. That isn't me. This hurts deeply. It can be a huge embarrassment to us and our families. I need to break this off. But I will do it quietly so that Mary won't be ashamed.
- Breathe Joseph, it is going to be ok. Continue to be the man you were raised to be. Ok, I got this ... I had to "walk away" to gather my thoughts, to understand what I needed to do. Now, I'm ready. Let me get some rest and I will handle this tomorrow. I don't want to hurt Mary, but this isn't the way this should be. I am going to try to sleep. I hope I can rest and wake up with a fresh perspective.
- Last night I dreamt it was amazing. Now, I understand what Mary saw and why she was so shaken but resolved. I believe what she said about Elizabeth too. Dreams happen, Angels appear, and YHWH speaks to us. I can still hear the words of the Angel ... *"Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."* (Matthew

**1:20-21 CSB).** The Messiah is coming and we are going to part of His arrival. How can I be worthy of that? The confusion hasn't vanished, but beneath the uncertainty, there is a peace which I can't explain and a quiet assurance that this path, even though it seems overwhelming, is one I am called to walk. I think of Mary, her courage and trust in God unwavering, and I realize that loving her means standing together, especially when the road is unclear. So, even though I am tired, I am ready. I believe what the Angel told me and will step forward in faith. I won't put Mary aside; I will make her my wife. We may not understand all that lies ahead, but together, we will face the unknown, trusting that God's plan is unfolding through our story in ways greater than we can imagine.

- It's become clear now, what the Prophet Isaiah said all those years ago. *"Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel."* (**Isaiah 7:14 CSB**). Our God is involved - He cares about what is going on. The time is right for the Messiah to come. Hope needs to be restored; people need to hear the truth. Mary and I have the privilege of playing a part in this fulfillment of prophecy. God is with us and I believe that those He will guide us and we live through these present struggles.

#### V. Just a Thought

- Is there a place in your life, in your journey, that God is asking you to be obedient even though the future is uncertain?
- Perhaps, just like Joseph and Mary, you find yourself standing at the edge of the unknown, wrestling with questions that have no easy answers and facing choices that require courage and trust. God may be inviting you to take a step of faith, to remain steadfast and obedient even when the path ahead is unclear and your heart feels the weight of uncertainty. In these moments, surrender becomes more than an act—it is a quiet resolve to believe that, even amid confusion or fear, grace is at work. The journey may not make sense, and the future may hold unexpected turns, but as you lean into faith, you may discover that hope and purpose unfold in ways you never imagined. Just as Joseph and Mary found strength to walk forward, perhaps you too will find that, through obedience, God's promises take shape in your story, bringing light and redemption where you need it most.

#### VI. The Story Continues

- Scripture records the next steps in the journey of Mary and Joseph.
- **Luke 2:1-7 Philipps NT**

- *At that time a proclamation was made by Caesar Augustus that all the inhabited world should be registered. This was the first census, undertaken while Cyrenius was governor of Syria and everybody went to the town of his birth to be registered. Joseph went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to David's town, Bethlehem, in Judea, because he was a direct descendant of David, to be registered with his future wife, Mary, now in the later stages of her pregnancy. So it happened that it was while they were there in Bethlehem that she came to the end of her time. She gave birth to her first child, a son. And as there was no place for them inside the inn, she wrapped him up and laid him in a manger.*
- Joseph was obedient, both to God and to the leaders of the day. Even though the government couldn't be trusted, Joseph did what he should have. I am sure there was tension because Mary was in the late stages of her pregnancy. This trip wouldn't be easy or comfortable. He needed to be the protector, the provider, and be able to make the birth of the baby as easy as possible. I would think that he battled thoughts of failure and inadequacy.
- We read this passage and the rest of the story of the birth of Jesus with excitement about the arrival of this baby that would change the world. Mary and Joseph were excited and they must have been exhausted from the trip and the difficulties they faced. There was misunderstanding that led to shame and scrutiny. Mary was pregnant and they were not yet married. How could Joseph stay with her? It was his choice and it reflected exactly who Joseph was.
- Yet, as the night unfolded in Bethlehem, their hearts were full of wonder and awe, even amid the hardship and uncertainty. The birth of Jesus was humble and quiet, far from the comforts they might have hoped for, but the weight of the moment was undeniable. Surrounded by the stillness of night, Joseph and Mary clung to their faith, drawing strength from the promises spoken over them, and trusting that, despite their fears and the judgment of others, God was working through their obedience. Each breath, each quiet moment beside the manger, reminded them that hope was breaking into the world in the most unexpected way ... a hope that would not only sustain them, but would also bring light and redemption to all who would believe.

## VII. The Message of Christmas

- Joseph shows us that the arrival of Jesus is not just a miracle to celebrate—it is a call to surrender, to faithfulness, and to love that acts even when life doesn't make sense.

- Plans were shattered, paths had to be altered, with the news that Mary brought to Joseph. In this time of confusion and hurt, God spoke. That's the way it is. In our uncertainty and brokenness, we can find grace and truth. Christmas shows us that God will step into the mess to bring His mercy and grace into view.
- Joseph was invited to obedience – to listen and act. Not to fame or status. You never hear of Joseph preaching a sermon or singing praises. Joseph was faithful to what he was told to do. He kept Mary as his wife; he moved to Egypt when he was told to. He supported his family and lived in a manner that honored God.
- The Christmas story points us to Jesus. But part of this story emphasizes belief and trust. It shows us that the way to live is one of faithful obedience to the One who came for us.
- From the perspective of Joseph we can learn that Christmas is more than a story to remember, it is a life to imitate.
- Let's Pray
- Grace First, Grace Always