

2nd Sunday of Advent: Hope

Sermon series can be found at asburybham.org/sermons

Scripture Reading

Matthew 1:18-25 (NRSV)

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 fulfil 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."

Summary

Most of the ethical teachings from Scripture can be summed up by the Greatest Commandment: love God with all of your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. We are taught, as Christians, to always do the right thing and to care for those in need.

Joseph was a righteous man, according to Matthew. He loves God and loves others and his intentions appear to back this up. Joseph had found out that Mary was pregnant before they were married and he knew he was not the father. The law was clear, he had to divorce Mary.

Joseph did, however, decide to dismiss Mary quietly so that she would not carry shame and would not suffer public disgrace. He seemed to be determined to do the right thing.

But that is when an angel visits him in a dream and asks him to do more than the right thing. Joseph is asked to do the even better thing — he is asked to sacrifice his own hopes and dreams...and his own plans for a family. He is asked to stay with Mary and raise Jesus.

Obviously, God wants us to do the right thing as well. But from time to time, we - like Joseph - might be asked to do the even better thing. How would you respond to an angel asking you to do something amazing even if it is costly and difficult?

Discussion Questions

1. Joseph was engaged to Mary, but it was a binding commitment and the only way to end that relationship was a divorce. Some divorces where there was an unfaithful party could be ugly, public, and painful. What does it tell you about Joseph that he sought to avoid all of this for Mary?
2. Another Joseph in Scripture had a knack for interpreting dreams. You may remember that in the Book of Genesis, Joseph used dreams to help make sense of what was to come. We may not take our dreams seriously these days, but there is a case to be made in Scripture for listening to our dreams. How could God reach us or speak to us through our dreams?
3. Joseph was a righteous man, we are told. He also was a person of deep faith because he immediately follows through with the message from the angel in a dream. He stays with Mary and raises Jesus. All of this would take a person of deep faith to trust in God. How is faith like trust?
4. The name Emmanuel means God with us. Jesus is God with us. When he speaks, he is God speaking to us. When he loves, he is God loving us. Talk about why it matters so much that God sent His own Son to us. What does that say about God?

Prayer by St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153 AD)

Let your goodness Lord, appear to us, that we, made in your image, may conform ourselves to it. In our own strength we cannot imagine your majesty, power, and wonder, nor is it fitting for us to even try. But your mercy reaches from the heavens, through the clouds, to the earth below. You have come to us as a small child, but you have brought us the greatest gift, the gift of your eternal love. Caress us with your tiny hands, embrace us with your tiny arms, and pierce our hearts with your soft, sweet cries. Amen.

Practice

- Consider the word Emmanuel and say this phrase to yourself:

God is with you, __(insert your name)___.

Talk to God about any stirring in your heart that arises from this phrase.

- Be intentional about pausing during Lent. Listen to the 5-minute Asbury Daily Devotionals/Meditations each day during Advent. They can be found here: asburybham.org/podcast/