



## St John Lutheran Church

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Text: Matthew 1: 18-25

Theme: Would you believe it??

**The story of Christmas** is a familiar one, even for people who only occasionally make it to church. **Even non-Christians** have a sense of this history, and for many of them, even though they are devoid of faith and have no lasting interest in this event, Christmas decorations are not complete unless there is a plastic manger scene under a bush in the front yard.

**It is St. Luke** who provides the details that are so familiar to everyone. **He is the** one who tells of the census taken by Caesar Augustus that demanded a trip to Bethlehem for Mary and Joseph... **he** tells of the crowded inns, of the manger-cradle, of the shepherds and the angels. **By comparison, St. Matthew's** report of the same event is somewhat disappointing because of the lack of detail. **This is how** the birth of Jesus Christ came about. (Matthew 1:18). **A nobody named** Joseph was engaged to be married to a nobody named Mary. **Before the wedding** could take place, the girl got herself into a little trouble, so it seemed, and Joseph thought the best thing to do would be to get rid of her quietly. **After he had** made up his mind, an angel appeared in a dream and told him to change the plan...**to go** ahead and marry this girl because her baby happens to be God sent into the world to save. **So Joseph does** what the angel tells him to do: **he keeps Mary**, the baby is born, and he gave him the name Jesus (Matthew 1:25). **End of story. At least that story!**

**St. Matthew gives** you no opportunity for flights of fancy...**no** quaint stable... **no** choirs of angels... **no** worshipping shepherds. **Instead, he gives** you the opportunity to see things that you may otherwise pass by in your haste to experience Christmas. **In St. Matthew** you have only three things: **1) a man** who listens to God and God alone; **2) a woman** who entrusts herself to the mercy and Will of God; **3) a child** whose name explains the full compass of God's unimaginably great love for His fallen creation.

**This Gospel describes** Joseph as a righteous man. **He had every** right to get rid of Mary, and legally speaking, he could have made a public issue about her pregnancy. **It appeared that** Mary had committed adultery, and the Law of Moses was clear about dealing with adultery. **As it is** written in the old law, **"If a man commits adultery with another man's wife" ...and that it exactly what Mary was by virtue of her engagement..."both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death"** (Leviticus 20:10).

**"But Joseph was a righteous man, and he did not want to expose Mary to public disgrace, [so] he had in mind to divorce her quietly"** (Matthew 1:19). **The evidence for** adultery was

overwhelming, despite any protest Mary could offer, and a quiet divorce seemed like the right thing, **the best thing** in an impossible situation.

**Now God intervenes** by sending a messenger to speak His Word. "**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 the people from their sins**" (Matthew 1:20-21). **Joseph is a righteous man**, which means he lives by faith. **He seeks no proof**, he asks no questions, and he offers no hesitation. "**He did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife**" (Matthew 1:24).

**Look at Joseph**, dear Christian, and mark well what it means to be Christian: **Joseph hears the Word of God and he holds that Word of God sacred. But that Word of God is not simply information for him! Rather, he listens to the Word and then he measures his life accordingly. He does not walk away; he does not immediately forget what was said, and then go do what he wants. He allows God's Word and God's Word alone to shape and direct his life. Joseph is a righteous man and he does what is right, even though other people probably thought he was foolish to keep Mary.**

**And what about Mary? St. Luke reports** that she, too, heard the Word of God from an angel... **but** who is going to believe her story? **Imagine how you** would feel, gentlemen, if your fiancée came to you, told you she was pregnant, and then tried to convince you an angel was responsible! **Ladies, put yourselves** into Mary's shoes, if she actually owned any. **Here is a woman** who has no control over her own life. **Mary was pledged** to be married to Joseph (Matthew 1:18) but most likely, she barely knew her new husband, much less loved him at this stage of the game. **And then she** was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:19). **There was no** decision for her as to whether or not she wanted this pregnancy. **But do not** look at her as an example of one who is oppressed. **Rather, look at** Mary as an example of one who is a Christian. **She, like Joseph,** is righteous... **she** listened to the Word of God and she obeyed it.

**Now Mary faces** this predicament of being found pregnant while she was yet engaged, as good as being married but not yet fully married. **No one will** believe her explanation, so it is pointless even to offer one. **There is no** recourse for her, except to depend entirely upon the mercy of God. **What does Mary** do? **She demands no** earthly justice. **She begs for** no fairness. **She offers no** excuses and she seeks no way out. **She trusts in** God, against all odds. **She clings to** the hope that this miraculous life that grows in her womb truly is indeed the child of promise. **She trusts that** her life will be spared, if for no other reason than for her baby.

**And Jesus, Mary's unborn child,** saves His mother's life. **It was because** of Jesus, that Joseph took Mary to be his wife. "**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 the people from their sins**" (Matthew 1:20-21). **Because what is** conceived in Mary is from the Holy Spirit, Joseph faces the humiliation of taking pregnant Mary as his wife. **Because what is** conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit, Mary is not put away secretly, but she is spared whatever consequence may have awaited her. **The**

**child** is named Jesus, which means "the LORD saves," and Jesus' work of salvation starts with His own mother.

**So far, that** is what this entire Gospel is all about... **Joseph** the man who listens to God and obeys His Word... **and** Mary, the woman who is entirely dependent upon the mercy of God because she has no other hope. **Both of these** saints demonstrate how you are to live your own lives... **on** the one hand hearing and obeying the Word of the Lord... **and** on the other hand, trusting and depending solely upon the mercy of God.

**Central to all** of this is that newborn babe, with his spindly legs and flailing arms and withering umbilical cord. **"When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave forth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus"** (Matthew 1:24-25). **Jesus comes** "to save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). **Salvation is the** full purpose for His coming. **It is His** mission, **His** desire, **His** goal. **He shall not** rest until He has carried it out.

**The people whom** Jesus comes to save are not just the Jews... **but** as we shall learn on Epiphany, **the gentiles** are included as well. **You are God's** people, whom Jesus came to save. **As St. Paul** said in Galatians, **"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ"** (Galatians 3:26). **By the miracle** of God you have been made the kinsmen of Jesus ...**You are** His own people...**and** Jesus comes **"to save His people from their sins"** (Matthew 1:21).

**You are God's** people, **"born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God"** (John 1:13). **Just as the** angel said of Jesus, **"... what is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit"** (Matthew 1:20), **so may** the same thing be said of you. **Every Christian** is born of a miraculous and supernatural birth. **I am not** talking about the miracle of your natural birth... **but** your new birth by water and the Spirit. **Every Christian** is born of a supernatural, miraculous birth... **"born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God"** (John 1:13), that is a birth which is first conceived by the Holy Spirit. **Jesus comes** to **"save His people from their sins,"** and He does so by first making you His people through the miracle of God.

**Christmas is about** the coming of our long Promised Messiah. **The Promise that** is kept through the Word of God in the flesh. **That same Word** and Promise which is joined in the waters of your baptism. **Each one of** you is a miracle, **conceived by the very Spirit of God** who dwells in you to give you your life saving faith. **The Promised Messiah** came and He did His life saving work...**and** He still comes to save sinners...**through** His Holy Word and His Holy Sacraments...**the Savior comes! In the Name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit...Amen.**

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