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**Joseph's Visitation**

**Series: The Angels' Advent**

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**The Village Church**

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- I. Introduction
  - A. There may be no other human enterprise that more people have in common
    - 1. And yet about which there is so little understanding
      - a. Than dreams...
    - 2. Everybody, it seems, has dreamed at some point
      - a. Some people dream with regularity
      - b. For others, it's rare
      - c. Or more likely, they dream but don't remember dreaming
  - B. Dreams, then, are ubiquitous in human experience
    - 1. Ubiquitous enough that dozens of scholarly books have been written about dreams
      - a. Categories of dreams
      - b. Theories on why people dream
      - c. Advice on how to interpret dreams
    - 2. None of which seem to rely on actual scientific empirical analysis
  - C. But we do know what categories of dreams people report having – and I'm sure you can relate to some of them
    - 1. Some people have dreams about being chased
    - 2. Some have dreams about falling
    - 3. Other have dreams about flying
    - 4. Still others have dreams about trying to get somewhere, and things prevent them – just can't get there
      - a. I've had that one
    - 5. And one of my favorite – dreams about showing up late to something important
    - 6. And there are many others
  - D. But it's quite amazing
    - 1. In all the psychological literature about dreams and dreaming, I can't find any category for dreams when an angel shows up
    - 2. But that's exactly what happens with Joseph
  - E. We're in Advent
    - 1. And Advent is about preparation
      - a. Preparation for the coming of the Messiah
      - b. The coming of Jesus, the Christ – the incarnate Son of God
      - c. Who would come, as we have learned from Scripture from the time we first started having dreams, as an infant, born of a Jewish virgin

2. And we've seen that while the appearance of angels happens in Scripture with some regularity
    - a. It's actually quite rare
    - b. And they cluster around significant moments in redemptive history
    - c. Like the resurrection
    - d. And of course, like the birth of the Son of God
  3. In fact, more angelic visitations cluster around the birth of Jesus than any other time in redemptive history
    - a. With the exception of the end of history as portrayed in the book of Revelation
- F. So this year for Advent we're studying what we're calling The Angels' Advent
1. Examining the key angelic appearances surrounding the birth of Jesus
    - a. And since those appearances are designed to prepare the people of God for His coming
    - b. We're gleaning from those appearances lessons for ourselves for our own preparation for the coming of Jesus this Christmas season
- G. Now last week we introduced the issue of angels
1. And noted that angels – whatever their appearances, which can be quite remarkable – are actually messengers for God
  2. Aggelos (Gk) = messenger
    - a. And when angels appear they generally have a message to deliver
    - b. And they deliver messages with the authority of the author of the message who is God Himself
  3. So when an actual angel appears, you had better pay attention!
    - a. Because if the angel is really one of the good guys – the good angels – He is speaking for God
- H. Last week we examined the angelic encounter with Zechariah
1. Zechariah and Elizabeth were the parents of John the Baptist
    - a. The forerunner of Messiah Jesus
    - b. Who came explicitly to prepare the way for His coming
- I. This week we examine the angelic visitation of Joseph
1. And what is unique in Joseph's angelic visitation – which is not the case in the other Advent visitations – is that Joseph's visitation happens in a dream
- J. Now you might wonder about the validity of an angelic appearance when it comes in the form of a dream
1. After all, most of the dreams most of us have don't have much of a basis in reality
  2. When I dream that I'm terribly late for an important event, and I'm devastated that I can't make it in time, when I wake up I realize that the event is not until next week and I've got plenty of time to get there
    - a. Or that it's not really an event that I have to go to anyway!
- K. But that's not the biblical view of dreams
1. Dreams are used by God from time to time to communicate with His people

- a. And they have everything to do with reality
- 2. Jacob, especially, was a dreamer
  - a. Dreamt of the ladder
  - b. Dreamt of the mating of sheep
  - c. Even his wrestling with God may have been a dream
- 3. Joseph had more than his share of dreams
  - a. Some dreams when he was younger – dreams that got him into trouble with his brothers, but that were prophetic and true
  - b. And he interpreted dreams of others which got him out of trouble
  - c. So Joseph’s dreams got him into trouble and got him out of trouble
  - d. But always, they were rooted, ultimately, in reality
- 4. Daniel as well was able to interpret the dreams of others
  - a. Including telling others what their dreams were
  - b. Also, always rooted in reality, coming true
- 5. Samuel had dreams
  - a. His calling took place through a dream
  - b. And prophesied God’s judgment on the house of Eli – which, again, actually took place
- 6. God spoke to Solomon through dreams
  - a. Again – prophesying blessings that came true
- 7. And the prophet Joel prophesied that God would continue to use dreams
  - a. **Joel 2:28** (ESV) — 28 “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.
  - b. A prophesy that took place at Pentecost
- 8. And it’s not that God has stopped using dreams to communicate to His people
  - a. Reports are that quite a few Muslims have come to Christ through dreams
  - b. We had a couple like that in our ministry in our student ministry in Morgantown
- L. And so in our text this morning we examine Joseph’s visitation
  - 1. A visitation in which an angel appears to him
    - a. And not only prophesies what will truly take place
    - b. But also gives him explicit instructions in what he must do

## II. **The Betrothal**

- A. Now the thing about dreams is you never know when they’re going to show up
  - 1. In Joseph’s case, the angel showed up in his dream in the context of his betrothal to a young Jewish woman named Mary
- B. Now betrothals were not all that unusual, of course, in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jewish communities
  - 1. That’s how marital unions were done
  - 2. Yes, very often, the betrothals were arranged with the parents

- a. But they tended not to bypass the willingness of the couple
- C. But what was different about betrothals in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Judaism is that they were not like our own custom of engagement
  - 1. In 1<sup>st</sup> Century Judaism betrothals were legally binding
    - a. That was the case even during the period between when the betrothal took place and when they wedding was actually consummated
  - 2. In fact, they were so legally binding that the couple were regarded as husband and wife – which you will see in our text
    - a. And to get out of the union a legal divorce was necessary
- D. But this particular betrothal had its own idiosyncracies
- E. **Matthew 1:18** (ESV) —
  - 1. 18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way.
  - 2. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph,
  - 3. before they came together
  - 4. she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.
- F. In other words, Mary was pregnant
  - 1. But not pregnant through Joseph!
- G. Now that’s awkward!
  - 1. Here’s a couple – they’re legally bound as husband and wife
    - a. But they haven’t consummated the marriage yet
    - b. They haven’t even gotten to the wedding
  - 2. And she shows up pregnant!
- H. What’s Joseph supposed to think?
  - 1. He knows that he’s not the father
  - 2. Who, then?
  - 3. His mind’s got to be racing
    - a. Going through all the eligible men in the community
    - b. Who’s the culprit?
  - 4. And what’s Mary got to say in the matter?
    - a. And what about her parents?
    - b. And what about his parents?
    - c. What are they all thinking?
  - 5. What a mess!
- I. And Mary concocts this ridiculous story of having gotten pregnant – but not from any human being
  - 1. So Joseph’s got to be thinking, she’s been unfaithful
    - a. But she’s also loony!
    - b. She might as well have been impregnated by a space alien!

### III. **Joseph’s Character**

- A. Well, Joseph may have had suspicions about Mary’s character at that point
  - 1. But he knew who he was
    - a. And he was the kind of guy who wanted to do the right thing
  - 2. He had every right to make a big deal out this predicament

- a. And he may even have been angry
  - b. And wanted to hang Mary out to dry – make it so noone would ever want her!
- B. **Matthew 1:19** (ESV) —
  - 1. 19 And her husband Joseph,
  - 2. being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame,
  - 3. resolved to divorce her quietly.
- C. First, notice how Joseph is regarded
  - 1. “And her husband Joseph”
  - 2. He’s called Mary’s husband even during the betrothal!
    - a. Another indication of how binding the arrangement was
- D. So Joseph wasn’t the kind of man who would want to make a spectacle out of this unfortunate circumstance
  - 1. So as best he could, he would handle the matter quietly
    - a. And let Mary and her parents take care of things as best they could in this 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jewish community
  - 2. Yes, word would get around
    - a. But Joseph would keep his integrity intact
    - b. And give Mary and her parents at least a little breathing space to sort things out

#### IV. **Joseph’s Visitation**

- A. But then... this!
- B. **The Angel**
  - 1. **Matthew 1:20** (ESV) —
    - a. 20 But as he considered these things,
    - b. behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream...
  - 2. Now we don’t know what this angel looked like
    - a. Maybe the angel was Gabriel – the same angel who appeared to Zechariah
    - b. And who would also appear to Mary
  - 3. But this was not a dream like you and I would experience
    - a. There was no mistaking this appearance for Joseph
    - b. He knew this was an angel, however he appeared
- C. **The Dream**
  - 1. And this took place in a dream
    - a. The presumption was that he was asleep
  - 2. That, in itself, is quite remarkable!
    - a. Imagine the sleeplessness of Joseph once he got the news Mary was pregnant!
  - 3. But even in the event of a sleepless night, exhaustion will have eventually had its way
    - a. And in the midst of tossing and turning, God granted him sleep
    - b. And sent His angel

V. **Joseph's Message**

A. So, what did the angel tell Joseph?

B. **The Conception**

1. First, he told Joseph about the conception
2. **Matthew 1:20** (ESV) —
  - a. 20 ... “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.”
3. So, “Joseph, it’s not what you imagined! Your tossing and turning is a waste time.”
  - a. “Mary’s not been fooling around with one of your buddies”
  - b. “And no, she’s not been impregnated by space aliens!”
4. “Mary is pregnant by the Holy Spirit!”
  - a. “God Himself is involved”
  - b. “He’s the only One who can create life in the womb out of nothing – ex nihilo as the philosophers would put it”
5. **Matthew 1:21** (ESV) — 21 “She will bear a son, ...”
6. The angels even tells Joseph the sex of the child
  - a. Doesn’t even have to have amniocentesis or an ultrasound!
  - b. She’s going to have a baby boy

C. **The Name**

1. And not only that, the angel tells Joseph what the boy’s name will be
  - a. In fact, he commands Joseph to do the naming
2. **Matthew 1:21** (ESV) —
  - a. 21 “She will bear a son,
  - b. and you shall call his name Jesus...”
3. “You shall call his name Jesus”
  - a. Jesus – Latinized form of **Iesous (Gk)**
  - b. Iesous is the Greek transliteration of **Jeshua (Heb)**
  - c. Which itself is a contraction of **Jehoshua = Jehovah is salvation**
4. In its contracted form the emphasis, then, is on the verb
  - a. So literally – **God certainly saves!**

D. **The Purpose**

1. Which brings us to the purpose of the name which God applies to His incarnate Son
2. **Matthew 1:21** (ESV) —
  - a. 21 “She will bear a son,
  - b. and you shall call his name Jesus,
  - c. for he will save his people from their sins.”
3. Now the Jewish people wanted to be saved
  - a. They were under the oppression of the Romans
  - b. The movement of Jews who really wanted to be saved were the Zealots
  - c. They were anticipating a military-political Messiah who would throw off the oppression from Rome
4. But that was not God’s plan

- a. God's plan was to do even more
  - b. God's plan was to save His people from their sins!
5. Now sin is what Rome was really good at!
  - a. The Romans could exact cruelty with the cruelest of nations
  - b. They could stamp out those who were ethnically disparate like they were bugs!
6. But not only the Romans – but the quasi-Jewish puppets like Herod were really good at it too!
  - a. They made sure they got their way and could easily eliminate anybody who was foolish enough to get in their way
7. But not only the Herods and their ilk –
  - a. The Jewish leaders could manufacture ways of bypassing justice and righteousness for supposedly religious reasons in order to maintain control of their little dominion that they carved out under the watchful eye of the Romans
8. But that wasn't why God sent His Son
  - a. That wasn't why this Jesus – God certainly saves! – came
9. He came so that **“he will save his people from their sins”**
10. “His people”
  - a. The people who belong to God
  - b. It's God's people's sins that they need to be saved from
11. Not the sins of the Romans
  - a. Not the sins of Herod and his ilk
  - b. Not even the sins of the self-righteous Jewish leaders
12. Jesus came to save His own people – from their sins
13. In order to be saved by Jesus, you have to, first of all, be one of God's people
  - a. Whom, as we learned in our study of Romans – but which the Bible repeatedly teaches – were chosen from before the foundation of the earth
14. And, second of all, in order to be saved by Jesus you have to realize that you are a sinner
  - a. And that you need to be saved from your sins
  - b. For that's why Jesus came – to save His people from their sins
15. Remember last week – we examined Zechariah's visitation
  - a. Why Zechariah?
  - b. Well, he was John the Baptist's father
  - c. And who was John the Baptist?
  - d. He was not the first Baptist
  - e. He was the one God sent to prepare the way for Messiah Jesus
  - f. He was John the Baptizer
  - g. And fast-forward: What was John's message?
  - h. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!
  - i. Repent of what?
  - j. Repent of your sins

16. Why?
    - a. Because the one coming after John would not baptize with water, but with the Holy Spirit
    - b. Because He would save His people from their sins
- E. **The Prophecy**
1. Not that this angelic message is not anything new
  2. **Matthew 1:22–23** (ESV) —
    - a. 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:
    - b. 23 “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
    - c. and they shall call his name Immanuel”
    - d. (which means, God with us).
  3. The angel quotes scripture!
    - a. Evidently, the angels must have had a seminary
    - b. Or at least a church like this one which teaches the Bible
  4. The scripture is from **Isaiah 7.14**
    - a. It’s the famous passage that we hear read every Advent and Christmas season
    - b. Because it prophesies the virgin birth of the Messiah
  5. Now there’s been a lot of scholarly argument about Isaiah 7.14 – especially about the virgin part of it
    - a. Some would say that the Hebrew word for virgin in Isaiah could just as easily apply to a young woman of marriageable age
    - b. Now without getting into the weeds of the arguments, let me boil it down for you
  6. While this idea that the word means just a young woman may have some kernel of truth in it, in its context in both Isaiah and in Matthew there is a sign function to the virgin conceiving
    - a. And so whether in Isaiah – where the sign is for Ahaz, or here, where it’s about Mary’s being with child through the Holy Spirit – a miraculous event is prophesied
    - b. And so a young woman of marriageable age who gets pregnant by a human being when she gets married is no sign at all!
  7. So in spite of all the ink spilled over the course of church history on this question, both Isaiah and Matthew involve the giving of the miraculous sign of God’s intervention in the affairs of redemptive history
    - a. And a true virgin becomes pregnant
    - b. Not by any human father
    - c. But by God the Holy Spirit
  8. And that’s why the church has always – from the moment of the church’s own self-awareness in the first century – been convinced of the virgin birth of our Savior
    - a. And why we say in the Apostles’ Creed about Jesus: “born of the virgin Mary”
  9. And it is why we have a Savior at all!



- a. Because the virgin birth means that Jesus is the God-man
  - b. Two natures – divine and human – in one person
  - c. Because only God can save
  - d. And only a human can pay for the sins of the humans God saves
10. You reject the virgin birth – for any pretentious, pseudo-intellectual argument
- a. You no longer have a savior
11. It's that important
12. It's interesting
- a. If you study the Isaiah 7 prophecy, Ahaz was a wicked king of Judah
  - b. He was an unbeliever
  - c. And he concocted an arrogant, prideful reason to reject the salvation of God in favor of an alliance with the surrounding pagan nations
  - d. And that's why a sign was given to him
  - e. To show Ahaz what an empty, wicked, unfaithful leader and man he was
13. And so the sign of the virgin was given to us
- a. Do you believe the sign?
14. One more word about the prophecy
- a. "... and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).
15. It's not that the Bible is confused about the name of this child
- a. He shall be called Jesus because He will save His people from their sins
  - b. And – "they shall call his name Immanuel" which means God with us
  - c. Because the only way Jesus can save His people from their sins is if He is, in fact, God incarnate – God come in the flesh
  - d. God with us

## VI. Joseph's Obedience

- A. Now what?
- B. Matthew 1:24–25 (ESV) —
  - 1. 24 When Joseph woke from sleep,
  - 2. he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him:
  - 3. he took his wife,
  - 4. 25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son.
  - 5. And he called his name Jesus.
- C. There's the confirmation again of how binding the betrothal was
  - 1. "He took his wife" (not his fiancée)
- D. And he responded by obeying the instruction of the angel
  - 1. He had no intimate relations with her until after the birth of Jesus
  - 2. And he named the child what the angel told him

- E. Joseph's obedience is contrasted a bit with Zechariah's unbelief
  - 1. Remember, Zechariah had a hard time swallowing the idea that he and Elizabeth in their senior years could have a child
    - a. So Zechariah was chastised for that – he couldn't speak until the child was born and he named him John
  - 2. But Joseph showed no such unbelief
    - a. So during the course of Mary's pregnancy, Joseph could speak!
    - b. What a blessing!
- F. But let me make an observation
  - 1. Joseph is not recorded as saying much of anything in all of the gospels
    - a. Even in this passage, he's doesn't appear to say anything
  - 2. My father's name was Joseph
    - a. I don't know that he was named for the biblical Joseph; I think he was named for his grandfather
    - b. But I do see one parallel
  - 3. My father was a very accomplished man
    - a. He was a career police officer – retired as a major in a major metropolitan police department outside Washington, D.C.
    - b. And he was a leader in the local volunteer fire department, was even chief for a while
    - c. But he was a quiet man; he was not a talker
  - 4. But when my father was about 60 – just after he retired – he had a major stroke
    - a. And it left him with aphasia
    - b. He really had a hard time putting words together
    - c. But lived more than another 20 years and did well, all things considered
  - 5. When he passed there was funeral, which was attended by a whole bunch of policemen and firemen
    - a. And they had an opportunity to share stories of my father
    - b. Some of them quite hilarious
  - 6. One of the men stood up and said this about my father
    - a. He said, "It was too bad Joe had his stroke, because he really couldn't speak much after that."
    - b. "On the other hand," he said, "Joe never said much anyway."
  - 7. So I think the same might be said about the biblical Joseph
    - a. Unlike Zechariah, Joseph could speak
    - b. But he never said much anyway!
- G. But if you had to pick one to emulate, who would it be?
  - 1. Doubting Zechariah?
  - 2. Or obedient Joseph

## VII. Conclusion

- A. As you think about Joseph's visitation, consider these lessons
- B. First, God shows up when you least expect it

1. Especially in the midst of a crisis
    - a. That was certainly true of Joseph's case
  2. You never know when and how God will meet you
    - a. But keep your eyes and ears open for your own God-encounters
- C. Second, being a Christian of good character, who pursues the will of God, puts you in a position to have an encounter with God
1. Sometimes we miss God when we're out doing our own thing instead of doing God's thing
  2. Growth in sanctification, in holiness, puts us in a position
    - a. First, to navigate our way through troubled waters, in times of crisis
    - b. And second, to be used by God for His glory and for the good of others
  3. Emulate the character of Joseph
- D. Third – and most importantly – believe in this Jesus
1. If you believe in this Jesus, if you trust in Him alone, He will save you from your worst enemy
    - a. And your worst enemy is your own sin
  2. Why?
    - a. Because He's the God-man
    - b. Because "the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means God with us).