

Advent in Biblical Perspective
The Spirit of Christ at Christmas
“The Holy Spirit and Joseph”
Matthew 1:18–25
Dr. Harry L. Reeder III
December 4, 2016 – Morning sermon

This is the second Sunday of Advent and we’ll start by looking in Matthew 1. This is God’s Word and it’s the truth. Matthew 1:18–25 says [18] *Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. [19] And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. [20] But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “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. [21] She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” [22] All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:*

[23] *“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).*

[24] *When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, [25] but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you. Glory be to God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit for this His Word.

This is an amazing moment from this text and I want you to try to come to this text afresh and anew. This entire year we have been studying the ministry of the Holy Spirit from Romans 8:14 which says [14] *For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.* The Spirit of God leads us from sin to the Savior. The Spirit of God leads us by regeneration where we’re born again so that we can now come to the Savior. The Spirit of God leads us in sanctification where we become more like our Savior. He leads us by filling us with the Spirit, putting within our heart every desire so that we would not grieve or quench the Spirit. We also walk in the Spirit, keep step with the Spirit and bear the fruit of the Spirit. That is what we’ve covered and I’d like for us to maintain our focus on the ministry of the Holy Spirit during this Christmas season with the Spirit of Christ in Christmas. In the last study we saw that the Spirit of Christ has been poured out upon you. If you’re in Christ and Christ is in you He is in you by His Spirit. The same Spirit who was with Jesus from conception all the way back to glory has been poured out from Him into your life.

Now I’d like for us to take a look at the earth shattering work of the Holy Spirit in these monumental moments that we call the Advent season, the birth of the Redeemer, the Messiah who came into the world to save His people from their sins, but whenever the Spirit of God is doing these big works of the narrative of grace and redemption there is always a back story of what He is doing that is not quite as visible, but it is absolutely essential. In other words, when God is doing these great glorious works, here is the miraculous birth of the Savior through the Virgin through the power of the Holy Spirit. That is not all the Holy Spirit is doing. While we see that big movement of its grand proportions there are other things that the Spirit of God is

doing in people's lives. In this study we'll look at Joseph. In the next study we'll look at Mary. After Mary we'll look at Simeon, where the Holy Spirit is at work in the back story that is absolutely essential in the big picture story of the work of the Holy Spirit.

As we look at this text I want you to see Joseph's situation, Joseph's solution and then God's solution to which Joseph responds. As we look at Joseph's situation we know he is a carpenter. He lives in Nazareth and that's where we are in the text. Nazareth isn't much of anything to tell you the truth. From what the archeologists have uncovered it had at most 500 people living there. There was about 200 to 500 people there so there really wasn't a place to hide. Here are two people living in anonymity almost – Joseph and Mary. One disciple said, 'Can anything good come from Nazareth?' Yes, how about a Redeemer, in fulfillment of Scripture and prophecy. He will be called a Nazarene, born in Bethlehem but raised in Nazareth. So Nazareth is a backwoods town that has no great reputation with two people living in anonymity with one being a carpenter and the other a young girl who he has asked to marry him.

Now we find out that these two dwelling in anonymity actually have a royal line. That royal line is significant. Joseph who will be Jesus' legal father has a line directly back to King David. So he stands in succession of a regal line and his genealogy is given to us in Matthew 1. Mary is also of the same line all the way back to David and her genealogy is given to us in Luke 3. They both go back to the royal tribe of Judah that was prophesied as the scepter of Judah which would rule over God's covenant people.

We also know they have started the process of their covenant of marriage. When a person married in the first century there were three steps. Step one was a covenant commitment and covenant vows which was called a betrothal. Step two was the covenant ceremony with the marriage feast. Step three was a consummation of the marriage bed. All three were required for the fullness of marriage. Some have compared the betrothal to our engagement but it's not, for our engagement is stating an intention and giving a ring. In a betrothal they took marriage vows and that's why they would use phrases like husband and wife. Then there was an assigned period of time in which they would then declare and manifest the purity of their intentions, then it would come to the covenant ceremony, the marriage feast and after which was the covenant consummation and the marriage bed.

Mary and Joseph are at step one because we just learned from the text that they haven't come together which likely means they haven't had the ceremony or the feast and they certainly haven't had the marriage bed. But Joseph finds out Mary is with child. We don't know how he finds out. Even though they are in a covenant relationship with covenant vows and they have not come together, she is with child. You can pretty well imagine what is going through Joseph's mind at that moment and that time. What will he do now with this information? It's an interesting moment. I could see where he would be disappointed, embarrassed, angry and a number of those things but that is the situation that Joseph finds himself in.

What is Joseph's solution? Now we find out something about Joseph. We know he wasn't controlled by the anger of man. In fact, the writer of Matthew under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit gives us two features of Joseph as a man. We can see he is a man of God. The first feature we see in Matthew 1:19 which says he is a just man. Some translations use the word righteous in place of just. Joseph was unwilling to put her to shame so he resolved to divorce her quietly. If Joseph is a righteous man then he knows the Word of God and he is committed to being obedient to the Word of God. He will do what God has revealed is right. He embraces the truth of God's Word and will engage it with obedience. There is a clear verse in the Scripture that speaks to this and it is Deuteronomy 24:1 which says [1] *When a man takes a wife and*

marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house. Also at that time in the traditions that had grown up they had made something like this a public matter. Joseph decides he is not going to make it a public matter. He is not going to follow the traditions of man and publically expose Mary.

He is going to follow God's Word and divorce her but we see another insight into Joseph. He was a man who knew the grace of God and therefore manifested the grace of God so he was a man unwilling to expose her and embarrass her, no matter how embarrassing it might be for him or the personal cost it might be for him. He not only is committed to the truth but he manifests the grace of God through the compassion that he shows by not divorcing her publically.

The back story here is that you are looking at the work of the Spirit of God in a man of God. We are seeing a man filled with the Spirit of God, walking in the Spirit of God as the Spirit of God drives him to the truth to obey it but frames him with grace and mercy in how to do it so that it is not about him. It's about the Lord and others. We are seeing a man of God with the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control – filled with the Spirit and keeping step with the Spirit therefore he will embrace his obedience but he will also manifest mercy and grace.

If you're a Christian, circumstances do not dictate your character, they reveal your character. When we falter, which we will, then they become the opportunity to refine it. Here we are finding out something about Joseph. We are seeing the big story in the work of the Spirit of God in the Virgin birth but we're also looking at a very crucial backstory. We see a man of God, filled with the Spirit of God, who will not grieve or quench the Spirit of God, who will show the fruit of the Spirit of God and who keeps in step and walks with the Spirit of God. He comes up with a solution and a strategy. He will obey according to Deuteronomy 24:1 but we won't do it publically like everybody else to protect himself from vengeance but he does it privately, behind the scenes.

I love the verse in Proverbs 16:9 which says *[9] The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.* There is nothing wrong with planning. We are made in the image of God. God does things on purpose and we ought to do things on purpose. It is just like Joseph. He has made a plan and I love the way one theologian put it; man proposes then God disposes. Joseph comes up with a plan where he can be faithful as a just and righteous man but he can also show grace and compassion as he manifests the Spirit of God in his life. Then God redirects his plan. God sends an angel to Joseph. We don't know who this angel is but we do know Gabriel talked to Mary so maybe it was Gabriel. We know this angel shows up quite a bit in Scripture.

So here is God's solution to Joseph's situation. The angel of God tells Joseph not to fear and that's one of the four 'fear nots' in the Advent season. The angel tells him not to fear about taking Mary as his wife. Why? God has some information for Joseph. One is that Mary is with child. He knows that. Two she is that she will bear and deliver the child. Three, even though there were not sonograms back then Joseph was told she will have a son. Four, is she is still a virgin and what is in her has been conceived by the Holy Spirit. Notice it doesn't say the Holy Spirit conceived with her but the Spirit conceived what is in her. The Spirit caused Mary's egg to be a seed and the Scripture is fulfilled – the virgin will give birth. Thus the promise to Eve is fulfilled – you shall have a seed that will defeat Satan – and women don't have seed.

This is more than a miraculous birth that will take place. Sarah and Elizabeth had a miraculous birth but Mary's birth was a unique, one of a kind, birth where a virgin gives birth. Joseph had assumed that somehow she had broken covenant with intimacy outside the marriage covenant but the angel is telling him that is not what happened. She is a virgin, still a virgin and he is to keep her a virgin until she delivers because what is within her has been conceived by the Holy Spirit. Why has the Spirit done this? The big story is by a man came sin/death and by a Man must come the resurrection and salvation. There is only one Mediator between God and man and it is the Man, Christ Jesus. He must be man but He can't be from Adam because if He was then He would inherit a sin nature from Adam.

So Jesus is fully Man and has a real body that comes from Mary. He will feel pain. He will get sick. He will stumble, fall, laugh and cry. He is not Superman but He is a real man. He is also the Son of God, having come in the flesh. This is God and Man, two distinct natures in one Person – unmixed and yet not separated but interwoven, interdependent, one upon the other and one with the other. This is the God-Man who has come in fulfillment of the Scripture. God's Son has come to save His people from their sins.

Guess what this Son has done? He has adopted you. He is your Father. I always struggle with this when I'm talking about the brothers of Jesus. Do I call them the brothers of Jesus which is what the Bible calls them but then again it's hard for me to call them brothers because I know they are only half-brothers. Jesus and His brothers only share a mother. Joseph is Jesus' legal father and a functional father but he is not the originating father yet Mary is the originator of this body that bears all the marks of a sin-cursed world that Jesus is born with into this world. So Jesus is 100 percent God, 100 percent man, yet He has no sin because He has no sin-nature yet He resides in a body weakened by the fall. So what do you really say about His brothers who are only half and His 'father' Joseph?

One might say that Jesus is his adopted son but Joseph didn't adopt Jesus. Jesus adopted Joseph and the Holy Spirit has delivered the adoption papers. We know this because the angel tells Joseph that he will call His Name Jesus, which is the function of a father, to name his child. We see this in every child baptism here at this church when we say to the father, 'Father, name your child and the covenant blessing.' So Joseph is legally and functionally going to be the father of Jesus for 30 years to raise Him up, in his home, working alongside of him as a carpenter. Jesus was even known as the 'son of a carpenter' (Matthew 13:55).

So God's solution is for Joseph to stay married because there are no grounds for divorce. She is a virgin, so keep her, provide and protect her, stand with her but do not fulfill the last two steps of the marriage until Jesus is born. Joseph did as God had told him and then he named Him Jesus. He raised Him alongside four other brothers – James, Simon, Joseph and Jude. So Jesus is raised as the eldest brother by Joseph, his legal and functioning father. The angel tells Joseph he will call Him Jesus meaning Yahweh saves because He is going to save His people from their sins. All whom the Father gives to Me, I lose not one but will raise them up on the last day (John 6:39). Now what will His people do? They will call Him Emmanuel, meaning God with us.

Joseph has a solution being faithful to God's Word, filled with the Spirit and compassion. Now God has come to him with a word from on high so what does Joseph do? Joseph is a righteous man and does what God says. He obeys God and the work of the Spirit continues to be manifested in his life as he takes Mary as his wife, keeps her a virgin until after the birth of Jesus, names Jesus and raises Him as His father.

So here is the takeaway. When the Holy Spirit is doing something around you that is for you by His grace, He will also do something in you that will be seen from you for His glory. This virgin gives birth and the miracle really isn't so much the birth as it is the conception. It is unique and one of a kind. Because of this all the people of God will be saved from all of their sins and this is unbelievable and extraordinary what is happening. This big deal that is happening around us and for us is also something the Holy Spirit is doing in Joseph, Mary and Simeon and He'll do something in you. When He does something in you it will be seen from you for the Spirit leaves tracks in our lives.

So what are the tracks in Joseph's life? The distinctive evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in Joseph are grace and truth and it is also seen from Joseph. How is it seen from Joseph? One, Joseph is unalterably committed to the Word of God as truth manifested by obedience. Joseph had a solution to be obedient to Deuteronomy 24:1, God's Word, even in the midst of his own embarrassment but when God shows up to Joseph through the angel He tells Joseph His way and what Joseph will do because Mary is still a virgin. That Child adopts Joseph and Joseph obeys persistently when he is informed by God and wants to perform for God. Joseph doesn't do this for his salvation for only Jesus can do that but he wants to do what God has called him to do. That is the work of the Spirit of God in a man's life.

A second distinctive in him is Joseph is relentlessly committed to the grace of God manifested by compassion. He is not going to take an easy way out. No, whatever God calls him to do he does and he is not only concerned about being obedient to God but he is concerned about Mary and Jesus so he follows through with everything that God has called him to do and you see the evidence of grace in his life through compassion, mercy, grace and truth.

Do you know how much we need that today? Today we get people in the church who rise up in the name of truth and with obnoxiousness, arrogance, and self-righteousness and destroy people. Then we get people who rise up in the name of grace and mercy, who abandon truth and embrace blasphemy and that which is profane. That is why this is the Holy Spirit. If Joseph was operating on his own he would have either, abandoned grace and truth or he would abandon grace for truth or he would abandon truth for grace, if this had been a religious enterprise in his life. This is the work of the Spirit of God who is filling him, producing fruit in him, keeping step with Him, being done in him and it is being seen from him. The circumstance have not dictated Joseph's character but have revealed a Spirit-framed, forged, developing and matured character that bears the marks of grace and truth. That is what we desperately need in this day and age.

It would be very easy to abandon truth in the name of grace because the world would applaud. It would be very easy to hold to truth without grace and the Pharisees would applaud, but God calls us to that work of the Spirit of God that weaves these two threads together in the life of a man. I believe this is applicable to all of us, men and women but I would like to close this study by speaking to the men.

Do you know how much we need men of God, like Joseph, as husbands, fathers, elders, deacons and pastors, young and old? We desperately need men who have those marks of the Spirit of God, of truth and grace, an unalterable commitment to obedience, a relentless commitment to grace, mercy and compassion. It is needed in our churches today. We need Josephs today. When God is doing something big, you pray big, you think big and you long for big, big happens when small is being manifested. One man said 'think global but live local.'

Do you believe this nation is in need of a Gospel awakening for men and women to come to Christ? Do you really believe that? Then go witness to somebody. We are all waiting

for the church to come up with a program. You are the program at work, school, sorority, fraternity, neighborhood, you're it! Gospel Awakenings come through personal evangelism. When God the Spirit does something big He starts with something small like me and you. Nothing is small when God is in it. Little is much when God is in it, as the spiritual says.

Do you believe our country is in need of reclaiming the high ground, the sacred foundations of marriage, family and Biblical sexuality? It starts with you and me. It starts with me showing up as a husband and a father. It starts with us saying 'no' to sexual impurity and 'yes' to Biblical sexuality. It belongs in marriage and when we falter we flee to the grace of God for forgiveness and transformation, so that such were some of you. We need sinners reconciled to one another so men don't look over here to Mary but to you, Joseph. Look to yourself. The world will be impacted with Biblical understanding of marriage, family and sexuality and all of those things in the same way that the world is impacted with the Gospel when you and I who want these global movements of the Spirit of God surrender to the local movement of the Spirit of God in our lives. This is so that my wife can go to bed and know that I'll be there beside her when she gets up the next morning. My children will not go to bed and wonder if their dad will come home and be there when they wake up.

One might say 'I have faltered.' Then flee to Jesus for not only will He forgive you but He'll change you from the inside out with the work of the Holy Spirit to mark you with grace and truth. That is what the Spirit of God did in Joseph. Joseph raised Jesus and it says that Jesus grew under Joseph's leadership empowered by the Spirit of God, in wisdom, stature, in favor with God and with man. Joseph not only did that for Jesus but for four others – James, Jude, Simon, and Joseph. One of them will become the first pastor in the church of Jerusalem. He will be thrown down from the Temple and die for his Elder brother, Lord and Savior Jesus and that was James. He writes the book in the Bible called James. He was nurtured under Joseph by the Spirit of God in him. Another brother writes the book of Jude. All of them became believers and stalwarts in the early church. They are all raised in that same covenant home with a Spirit-filled husband and father, not perfect but filled with the Spirit.

Since 1919, *Once in David's Royal City*, is sung as the opening carol at the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols at King's College Chapel Cambridge broadcast all over the world. The first verse at King's College is always sung as a solo. None of the boys in the boys' choir know who is going to sing the solo of the first verse until they walk out. Do you think everyone is ready? You never know when the Lord is going to put you and or your family on the platform for Him.

We not only need men of God as husbands and fathers but we need them in the church today. Rise up O men of God, have done with lesser things, clothed with the armor of God, taking up the weapons of the Spirit of God, lifting high the cross of Christ, the church for you doth wait. We need men of God with grace and truth both married together in the power of the Spirit of God to lead His church into this world as this world stands in an assault upon it. You can't be that man in the church if the church is 'well you might show up if it works within the schedule.' This is Christ's church so rise up O men of God, have done with lesser things, give heart, soul and mind to Christ your King and lift high that cross of Christ with His people for you never know when He is going to call you out.

How many times did Joseph put a piece of wood in Jesus' hands? How many times did he tell Jesus to pick up a fist full of nails for him? Jesus would bring the nails in His hands to Joseph. How many times would he fashion out a stone trough in the hills of Nazareth? All the while a daddy is being used by the Spirit with His Son and He'll take a roughhewn wood, called

a cross and that wood He'll embrace to save us. His arms will stretch out and in those hands He'll take nails just like the ones His daddy taught Him to use, through His hands and His feet. He'll be laid in a stone trough that cannot hold Him back and He will rise. Praise God that the Spirit of God had given Joseph as a father and Mary as his wife and God's people, the church, as a witness of an imperfect but Spirit-filled man of God, marked by grace and truth. O God do that again, let's pray.

Prayer:

There is a Savior who went to that cross for you and if you would like to see your need to come to Him then I call you to come to Him. You can contact us here at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 and we'll be happy to talk and pray with you. If you have an issue in your life call us. Men, particularly you are on my heart today so before God we can't do this on our own but we're called to be men of God where circumstances do not dictate our character but they reveal God's grace and truth within us. He is ready when we falter to lift us back up. If you men want to pray with someone then also call us at Briarwood. Jesus do Your work in us so that it will be seen from us. God we ask and long for You to do these great movements in the Spirit of God in churches in our nation and around the world, but Father, do that backstory in us and use us. Then the tributaries of men and women of God marked by grace and truth would overflow so the whole world would know Jesus is Lord for I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND JOSEPH

Joseph's Situation

Joseph's Solution

God's Solution

LIFE TAKEAWAY

When the Holy Spirit is doing something around you that is for you by His grace, He will also do something in you that will be seen from you for His glory.

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