

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place 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” (Matthew 1:18).

For many Christians, even myself, I don’t like just rushing into Christmas. After all, it’s still the Advent season. But in today’s Gospel reading, those who crafted the lectionary with the Holy Spirit’s help gets us as close as we can to Christmas Day without actually being there.

But of course, today’s Gospel text does have an Advent feeling about it, as the bulk of today’s reading is about Joseph and Mary and the key pieces of God’s salvation plan dropping in place ahead of the Messiah’s arrival.

But today’s text is more about Joseph than anything else. And although Joseph does not even say a recorded word, he is certainly at the center as he confronts a problem, a big problem: his betrothed is pregnant with child.

After St. Matthew devotes 17 verses to Jesus’ human genealogy from Abraham to Joseph, he now records Jesus’ divine genealogy in a single verse: Mary ***“was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit”*** (Matthew 1:18).

This states a fact even without attempting to explain how it took place. This verse reports a birth that was unique in all of human history. This tells us that the eternal Son of God, who ***“was in the beginning with God”*** (John 1:2) and ***“all things were made through Him”*** (John 1:3), assumed human flesh and blood in the womb of the Virgin Mary. He is true God from eternity, and He is also true man since He was conceived and born of a human mother some two thousand years ago.

But there was a problem. A big problem. Mary, who was with child, was only ***“betrothed to Joseph”*** (Matthew 1:18) at the time. That betrothal was more than what we commonly call an engagement. It wasn’t something that was easy to get yourself out of. To be betrothed meant that the couple had already spoken vows of marriage in the presence of witnesses, and they were regarded as husband and wife.

However, according to the custom of the time, the marriage celebration would not be until some months later, and only then would the bride and groom consummate their marriage together as one flesh.

Being pregnant before the marriage celebration was scandalous!

Just imagine the shock and hurt Joseph felt when he was made aware of Mary's pregnancy! A woman can only hide her pregnant belly for so long. Eventually people will notice! And in time, Joseph noticed!

And Joseph concluded that Mary had been unfaithful to him. And if that is true, which he was certain, then he could not take her home to be his wife. So, he begins planning.

If this pregnancy becomes public, Joseph knew the Law. If she was found guilty of adultery, she would be stoned to death – along with the other guilty party (Deuteronomy 22:23-24).

Sometimes we are surprised by a crisis. It could be an unplanned pregnancy. It could be a sudden loss of a job. It could be a financial crisis.

More often, we are forced to simply grind through life and face the routine challenges and difficulties as we live in this broken world. So often, we do the same techniques as Joseph. We begin planning our next move in order to remove the crisis.

But Joseph did not seek revenge as he was a just man unwilling to put Mary to shame, so he resolved to find another way to dissolve this relationship. He decided to dissolve their marriage contract as quietly as possible.

But then comes another twist! God intervenes. He sent an angel, likely Gabriel, to Joseph in a dream. Now Joseph did not just dream about an angel bringing him a message; a real angel came to him and spoke to him. He told Joseph, ***“That which is conceived in [Mary] is from the Holy Spirit”*** (Matthew 1:20).

Now, how could Joseph be sure it was God's Word that he heard? He had faith. This angel connected the dots. He struck the lottery! He was betrothed to the one-in-a-millions kind of woman. For inside Mary's womb was the fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14: ***“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel.”***

Now, God's plan would be challenging. It meant dealing with the complications of a pregnant fiancé. God's plan is often challenging, and His plan frequently goes against what we would like to do, or what makes sense, or even what may seem right to us. But it is God's plan, so we do it. God's plan is always right.

In the dream, Joseph was told to name the child "Jesus." Now, Jesus was a common name among the Jews. You may have heard of the names "Joshua" or "Yeshua," which are other names for "Jesus." The name means "Yahweh saves." When that name was given to an ordinary child, it served as a reminder of God's promise of a Savior. But in this Child's case, it identified the One and only Savior of the world. Jesus' name tells who He is – *God* – and what He does and will do – *save His people from their sins*.

Now, we don't have to be told in a dream to know what God wants us to do. He has revealed that to us through His written Word, the Bible. God has the plan. Instead of relying on ourselves, let us rely on God and His plan as He sent us the Savior who came to be the atonement between God and man as He would save His people from their sins through Him being nailed to His throne, the cross, and giving all who trust in Him: forgiveness, life and salvation. Amen.

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +