




Theme: The Wisdom of Christmas


"The Courage of Joseph"

Weekly Memory Verses:

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. – Matthew 1:24

Meditation Moments for Monday, December 15 – Read **Matthew 13:53-57** and **Mark 6:1-6**. Joseph is central in all nativity scenes, but he was an obscure person in the gospels. The gospel writers never specified what he did for a living, never directly called him a carpenter. Matthew and Mark recorded that when Jesus went to Nazareth, many people rejected him. In Matthew's version, they called him "the carpenter's son." According to Mark, they identified Jesus himself as a carpenter, and it seems logical that he would have learned his father's trade.

 It would be nice if we could read an eloquent speech Joseph made about being Jesus' earthly father. But the hard and inconvenient truth is that Joseph has no "lines." We don't read a single word he speaks in any of the gospels. In many ways, he is the patron saint of those who serve anonymously and do the right thing without seeking any credit. How easy or hard do you find it to be content when the spotlight falls on someone else more than on you?

 The word "carpenter" may refer to one who builds with wood or stone. Wood is somewhat rare in Palestine, and houses are mostly constructed with stone. Joseph and Jesus may have been stone masons, or perhaps "subcontractors," making wooden items like doors for stone houses. People apparently did not see such workers as wise or impressive. Are you open to learning from people of all ages and experiences, or do you discount anyone without the "right" outward credentials?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, the gospels suggest that many people in your day added "just a" before "carpenter." Help me value all people, not only the ones who have a job that impresses me. Amen.

Tuesday, December 16 – Read **Matthew 1:18-19, Psalm 18:28-30 and Isaiah 43:1-4.**

Matthew's and Luke's gospels did not duplicate each other; they complemented each other. Luke told about Jesus' birth through Mary's eyes, while Matthew told the story from Joseph's outlook. He was engaged to Mary when the story began. Mary lived in the tiny village of Nazareth, but Luke 2:1-4 seems to tell us that Bethlehem was Joseph's hometown. If so, that suggests that their families had arranged the marriage, as was common in their time and place.



When Joseph learned Mary was pregnant, he knew he couldn't be the child's biological father. Broken and let down, he likely turned to scripture like the Psalm and Isaiah text we read today. How can passages like these give you a spiritual foundation when you face a letdown?



Isaiah 43 came in a section of the book many mainline scholars call, "Second Isaiah." It spoke first to Israelites returning from exile in Babylon having been taken there by force generations earlier. It emphasized God's personal bond with God's people with the words, "I will be with you.... I love you." It did not promise an easy, pain-free life, but pledged that whatever happened, God's people can depend on God's presence. How could such a passage speak to Joseph's hurting heart? How does it speak to you today?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, your miraculous conception started your life upending business as usual in our broken world. Fill me with the courage to let you reshape all the parts of my life that need it. Amen.*

Wednesday, December 17 – Read **Matthew 1:18-19 and Deuteronomy 22:20-24.**

In Israelite culture, a betrothal was as binding as marriage. When Mary, betrothed to Joseph, became pregnant, Joseph at first drew the "obvious" conclusion that she had been intimate with some other man. Painful as that was, Joseph began to realize that the law in Deuteronomy might cost Mary's life. If he denounced her publicly, she might be stoned to death like the woman in John 8:3-5 who was brought to Jesus after being caught in the act of adultery. He sought a different solution, even though it might let some people blame him for her pregnancy.




Matthew, with just a few words, reported something important about Joseph. "Joseph her husband was a righteous man.... he didn't want to humiliate her." What do you learn about Joseph's inner qualities from his measured response when, "he decided to call off their engagement quietly"? The book *Safe People* by Drs. Henry Cloud and John Townsend listed Biblically based qualities of "safe people." One of those qualities was exhibited by Joseph as he refused to abandon Mary or throw her under the bus. Safe people show up when things are hard. How safe are you for others? Like Joseph, do you choose not to humiliate others?




Joseph was a devout Jewish man willing to obey God's will, even when it was difficult. He gave up what was often perceived to be a Jewish father's greatest privilege of siring his first-born son. Have you had to give up some cherished dream to obey God, or might you have to? If so, how are you and God working to bend that loss to produce good results?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, your earthly father showed his righteous character, not in demanding that Mary follow the law to the letter, but in showing her mercy. Help my righteousness, too, to always lean in the direction of mercy. Amen.


Thursday, December 18 – Read **Matthew 1:20-21 and Acts 5:27-32**. Joseph planned to break the engagement quietly. In a dream, an angel told him to trust Mary and proceed with the marriage plans. Joseph was in a story much bigger than just one wedding. The angel said to name the child “Jesus,” the Greek form of the Hebrew “Joshua,” or Yeshua which meant “Yahweh is salvation”. Many Hebrews wanted salvation from the occupying Roman army. But the angel never mentioned the Romans. This child, he said, would save people from humanity's greatest enemy: sin— separation between us and God, us and others, and within ourselves.

 The name Jesus means that through him God would forgive God's people. There were about 125 direct Bible references to forgiveness. Forgiveness is a focal point because there is a driving need our human heart feels to be made whole when our heart is broken. Forgiveness from Jesus is the decisive act by which God discards sin and lavishes mercy and grace upon us. How did even Jesus' name point to God's decisive, lavish act to meet our greatest need?

 Scholar N. T. Wright wrote in his commentary *Matthew for Everyone, Part 1*, “Matthew sees Jesus as the one who will now complete what the law of Moses pointed to but could not of itself produce. He will rescue his people, not from slavery in Egypt, but from the slavery of sin, the ‘exile’ they have suffered not just in Babylon but in their own hearts and lives.” What are the benefits of letting Jesus save you from that spiritual exile? How confident are you that Jesus is in fact the savior from sin that we all need?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, though I sometimes forget it, I need a savior. Thank you for being the savior I most need. Redeem my inner and outer way of life from sin, that I may walk daily in your light. Amen.

Friday, December 19 – Read **Matthew 1:24-2:1**. Matthew wrote almost no details about Jesus' actual birth. Maybe that was because he told the story from a man's point of view; maybe his sources simply gave little information. His succinct account didn't even identify where the birth took place until after the fact in Matthew 2:1. But he reported two key facts: despite his earlier reluctance, Joseph **did** marry the pregnant Mary. Even more important, he named the child she bore “Jesus,” as we learned yesterday is the Greek form of Joshua, which means “God saves.”

 Luke 1:38 showed Mary saying, “I am the Lord's servant. Let it be with me just as you have said.” Matthew 1:24 said Joseph, “did just as an angel from God commanded.” Neither of them could even imagine it at the time, but today billions of people worship during Advent because two humble Hebrew peasants listened, believed, and obeyed. What is God calling you to listen to, to believe, and then to do or be this Advent season?

 Christmas Eve is next Wednesday, and Summit's Christmas Eve services start on Tuesday evening at 6, with our online Christmas Eve service available that Tuesday as well. Go to www.summitdurango.org/christmas for detailed schedule

information. Plan to invite someone and join us for a light-filled service honoring Jesus' birth.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, on that first Christmas you came into our midst, human, but also more. Be born in my heart this Christmas, I pray. Amen.*

Saturday, December 20 – Read **Isaiah 7:10-16, 8:3-4 and Matthew 1:20-23**. 700 years before Jesus, three kings were plotting to attack Israel, and King Ahaz was frightened. The prophet Isaiah said to ask for a sign that God was with him. The stubborn king refused, but Isaiah gave him a sign anyway—a young woman (maybe Isaiah's wife) would give birth to a son. Before the boy reached age 13, the plotting kingdoms would lose their power. Matthew was not confused when he wrote this Gospel. He was also not misinterpreting Isaiah. It seems that he was saying something profound and life changing. Jesus, like that first Immanuel, was a sign sent by God that you might know God is with you. Jesus is God's promise that we might know he will never leave us. Jesus embodies the presence and love of the God who rules over the entire universe.



By quoting Isaiah, Matthew linked Jesus with the name that meant “God with us.” Then Matthew 18:20 quoted Jesus as saying, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I’m there with them.” In the gospel's final verse, Matthew 28:20, Jesus pledged that “I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age.” What settings or practices help to make God's presence real to you? What makes God's presence as important for you as it was for King Ahaz?



Scholar William Barclay in his commentary *The Gospel of Matthew-Volume 1*, summed up Matthew's message: “Jesus is the one person who can tell us what God is like, and what God means us to be. In him alone we see what God is and what [humans] ought to be.” In what ways have you made Jesus central to your understanding of what God is like? Has that helped you to avoid some of the negative, frightening images of God some people hold? If so, how?

Prayer: *Be near me, Lord Jesus. I ask thee to stay close by me forever, and love me, I pray. Amen.*