

“Take Mary Home”
December 24, 2023, 10:00 am Service
Pastor John Mars

This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it! Good morning, Church, and almost Merry Christmas! I want to read a passage of Scripture this morning that comes from the book of Matthew, part of the birth narrative. And by the way, this evening we'll be looking at the part of the birth narrative from the book of Luke. The book of Matthew is told from the perspective of Joseph, and the book of Luke is from the perspective of Mary. So today, we look at part of the birth narrative from the perspective of Joseph.

Matthew, chapter 1, beginning with verse 18:

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “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 his people from their sins.”

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” --which means, “God with us.”

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 birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

May God bless the reading of the Word.

I have had some weird and some vivid dreams in my life. The first time I went to Stanley, Idaho, after that visit was probably the most vivid dream I've ever had in my life. How many of you have ever been to Stanley? Okay, some of you know what I'm about to talk about. Stanley is one of the most picturesque cities I have ever seen, one of the most beautiful places I've ever been. It is absolutely glorious. And as soon as I saw Stanley with my own eyes, I said, “I want to live here!” Then three things occurred. Number one: I found out what real estate prices are there. Number two: I found out that they had two weeks in July when they did not get frost. And number three: I found out they did not measure their snow in inches or feet, but in yards, and I decided this would be a place for me to visit. But the night I got home from Stanley, I had a vivid dream, the most vivid I've ever had in my life. What I dreamed is that I built a cabin. I'm not a carpenter, but I dreamed I built a cabin. And to this day, I can take you to the spot where I built that cabin. When I woke up, I was dead-dog-tired, and I was covered in sweat. My hair was wet. That is a vivid dream!

I wonder, though, how I would have responded if I dreamed the dream Joseph dreamed. Now take a little journey with me, especially you fellows. You're engaged. You're in love. You are about to get married. You and your fiancée live some ways apart, so you don't get to see each other very much. And then one day, like a lightning bolt out of a clear blue sky, you get the message that your fiancée is pregnant. You know, beyond any shadow of a doubt, there's no possibility that child is yours. After the

anger and devastation begin to resolve itself, you begin to process, and you begin to think, "What do I do now?" Now, you're a godly man. You're a righteous man. And not only that, you're a kind man. And you decide that you do not want to disgrace her, or worse yet, have her put to death, which was your right during that era. And you decide that you're going to handle this quietly. You're going to let her go her way, and you will go yours. You say, "Okay, I'm going to do that in the morning." And you go to bed, and you have this dream. And in your dream a being, maybe it's an angel, says, "Joseph, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." The next morning you wake up. What do you do? I know what I'd do. I'd say, "I am not eating at that food truck again!"

But if you'll read the birth narrative according to Matthew, you will find out that God routinely speaks to Joseph in dreams. And that's a thing. I know of a number of people that God routinely speaks to them in their dreams. And God spoke to Joseph in a dream. And it is very obvious, by his response, that this was not the first time. So, God spoke to him in a dream; Joseph listened; and he did just exactly what the angel of the Lord said. Now, in most sermons about this passage, there is an awful lot made of Mary being a virgin. And yes, that is important. But in the Greek, the part that is emphasized, the part that is in bold, the part that is underlined, the part that is quoted, the part that is emphasized is that this child is of the Holy Spirit. Because what the Holy Spirit did spiritually, Jesus would manifest physically. One of the things the Holy Spirit does is bring God's truth to humankind. In Jesus Christ we see all that God has always been. In Jesus Christ we see God with skin on His face. In Christ we see all that God is and has always been. In Christ we see all that we were created to be. We see human potential. We see, not the mess and the chaos that we've made of our lives, but we see what our potential is. Only in Jesus do we see true manhood, true goodness, true obedience, true sacrifice, and a personification of what love is. Only in Jesus do we see the truth about God and the truth about ourselves. This is God's gift to us. As the Holy Spirit brought order out of the chaos in creation, so Jesus has the ability to bring order to the chaos and the mess of our lives. And when our lives are dead to sin, and when our lives feel like they may not be worth living, Jesus brings back meaning and recreates us. This is what God did for us.

And you know, we talk about this in great, big, glowing terms, especially on days such as this, but today I want you to personalize that. This is what God did for you, personally. And God did this through two teenagers. Yes, teenagers. And the fact of the matter is: if they were following Jewish marriage customs, they were between 13 and 17. They did not understand all that was going on. I can only imagine they were scared to death. They faced unimaginable difficulties and uncertainties. There were times it seemed as if the whole world were out to get them, yet they persevered. And God blessed the world through these two teenagers who were willing to trust God, who were willing to sacrifice, who were willing to give all they could to God, though they did not understand all that was going on in their lives. They filled their roles, and as a result of them filling their roles, God brought salvation to our world. When we read the birth narratives, we learn of the phenomenal character of these two kids. We, as Protestants, don't talk enough about these two teenagers and their role in bringing salvation, the gift of God, to us. They filled their roles, and because of them, we are truly, truly blessed.

I wish you could have seen the kids' faces when I asked them what they got Jesus for His birthday. What did you get Jesus for His birthday? You know what He wants? He wants you to follow His example. As He blessed the world, so He calls on us to be a

blessing to the world. As God used these two teenagers to bless all of humankind, so we, as his followers, have the privilege of continuing that blessing and being a blessing to the world by following Jesus' example. Now, don't have any illusions of grandeur. You're not Joseph. You're not Mary. But it takes so very little to be a huge blessing, and you can do that. Have you ever had the opportunity of being a blessing to someone, see their eyes brighten, see a smile creep across their face, maybe even see a tear of gratitude roll down their cheek? How beautiful, how wonderful, how awesome it is to be a blessing. And you can make a huge impact in someone's life through very little. Now, God is probably not asking you to have the faith of Joseph. He's probably not asking you to make the sacrifice Mary did. But small things make a huge difference. Do your part. Fill your role. Make a difference. What God did for you, in blessing you, you can be a blessing to others. That's what Jesus wants for His birthday, and we can give that. Let's pray.

God, we are a people most blessed. God, You gave us the greatest gift imaginable, and You ask in return that we be a blessing. So, Lord, on this day, as we look forward to celebrating Your birth tomorrow, we pledge ourselves to be a blessing, and blessing others as You have blessed us. In Christ's name, amen.