



December 22, 2025

The lectionary gospel reading for Sunday, December 21st, was Matthew 1:18-25, the story of the birth of Jesus. This passage is frequently read during advent, a story most of us know well. It is a story about both obedience and the free choice each of us exercise in our daily lives.

When Joseph learns that Mary, his fiancée, has become pregnant before they started living together, his initial reaction was to protect her from exposure to public disgrace and had planned to “dismiss her quietly.” At first glance, the author seems to suggest that this would be the honorable action to take.

In verse 20, we read, “But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord and appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.”

Verse 24 tells us, “When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, he took her as his wife...”

It seems to me that Joseph may be the unsung hero of this miraculous story. First, he resolves to protect Mary from public disgrace. Then he completely changed his course of action in favor of what the angel had told him in a dream.

Imagine how differently this familiar story may have played out, if Joseph had not had a complete change of heart. As I glance at our nativity scene, neatly displayed in our living room, I

wonder how Mary would have been treated had Joseph “dismissed her quietly.” Would she have been able to escape to Egypt when Herod’s decree became known to slay all children under the age of 2? Would she have been able to find a place to stay in Bethlehem? How would Mary have supported herself and her newborn baby Jesus?

Although Joseph may have experienced some anxiety about the choice he made, it seems to me he was willing to embrace uncertainty in an uncertain world. Perhaps as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ, we too should remain open to following the path of the Holy Spirit, be willing to walk in uncharted territory, knowing that Emmanuel, God is with us.

Merry Christmas!

~Written by Tom Webster

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