

18 Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. 20 But just when he had resolved to do 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 as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' 22 All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:*

*23 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel',*

which means, 'God is with us.' 24 When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, 25 but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.*

Once a boy named Joseph had a dream. He dreamed the sun and the moon and eleven stars bowed down to him. Since he had eleven brothers the meaning of this dream was obvious – his mother and father and brothers would all bow down to him. This Joseph was in the center – the star of the show – Everything was about him. Over his lifetime the dream came true but not before there were many bumps in the road. His brothers sold him into slavery but with God's help he became the second most powerful man in Egypt. In a time of famine his family came to Egypt seeking food and the dream was fulfilled as they bowed down to him – a happy ending for Joseph.

Books and movies tell the story of like Joseph's in a million ways – injustice overtaking the good one, the righteous one but in the end a happy ending – justice done, good winning out. Cinderella, Star Wars, the Bourne Identity, David and Goliath, the Sound of Music, at the end the star of the show is smiling.

Some seventeen hundred years after the first Joseph another Joseph had a dream. We know little of this Joseph except that he was promised in marriage to a girl named Mary. She was found to be with child before they had lived together – Joseph, knowing that the child was not his child had decided to divorce her quietly. But then, in a dream an angel came to him, spoke to him. “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

No sun and moon and stars bowing down to this Joseph – he would be enduring the wagging tongues and the judging glances of those who noticed that Mary was pregnant before she was with her husband. In naming this child Joseph would be publicly declaring the child to be his even though it was not. And what would Joseph be receiving for all of this sacrifice? No promise of wealth or honor or glory was given.

A natural question we humans ask is – what is in it for me? How will I benefit? What will others think of me because of this? Joseph did not ask those questions – he believed the message of the angel in the dream and obeyed. He did not divorce Mary, he gave legitimacy and a name to Jesus. Through Joseph Jesus came to be a Son of David – the two genealogies given for Jesus in the Bible both show his descending from David not through Mary but through Joseph.

Should the sun and the moon and the stars be bowing down to you and me? Is that the dream for your life and mine? When I feed someone who is hungry is it all about how good it makes me feel or is it about the hungry one? What if I tell someone about my faith in Jesus and he makes fun of me? What if I give and the receiver expresses no gratitude? We are never told that Joseph was happy because he did what the angel told him to do. I doubt that he was happy in the way many movies portray happiness. He obeyed God because God is to be obeyed. He wanted God’s will to be done.

The story of Jesus is the same – there is no indication that Jesus was seeking his own happiness – at times he sought to get away from the demanding crowds – he even wanted the Father to find some other way than the cross. But above all he wanted his Father’s will to be done. Not my will but your will be done.

It was the Heavenly Father’s will that Joseph not divorce Mary, that Joseph name the child Jesus and watch over and protect this child that fulfilled the promise Of God with us – Emmanuel.

It is the Heavenly Father’s will that you trust in this child of Mary – trust that he will be God with you no matter what. No sin, no suffering, no shame, no prosperity is able to cause him to abandon you. Never give up on him. Never be ashamed to acknowledge that he is your Lord and Savior.

Not every person is called to do what Joseph did but each of us does have a calling. God may want you to give yourself in costly ways, in ways that may cost you happiness. Love does what needs doing – you know that from your family life. Caring for young children, being there for elderly parents , bearing with a difficult sister or brother, love does what needs doing.

The child born of Mary made us all family – every one a sister or brother of Jesus, a child of God. God with us the prophet promised but through Jesus “us” has become more than the people of Israel but now includes people from Japan and Sudan and the folks next door – the people of Haiti. Love one another as I have loved you – that is what this child of Mary would teach.

And live, and die and be raised for – God’s love for you and every sister and brother. Amen.

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