

12.24.22**Jesus' Family: Mom & Dad****Matthew 1:18-25****Douglas Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church**

Christmas is different when you're a child and when you're an adult. It's a lot more fun when you're a child and a lot more work when you're an adult. Sometimes, I miss experiencing Christmas as a kid. Do you have any special Christmas memories either as a child or an adult? A special Christmas memory might be something to talk about as you share a Christmas meal. What are the primary emotions you feel and experience at Christmas? Joy, love, peace, hope, nostalgia, excitement, exhaustion, relief that it's finally here?

Almost without exception I share Luke 2:1-20 on Christmas Eve, but this year, since Christmas is on Sunday, I'm going to read that passage tomorrow morning at our service at 10:00 am. If you're visiting today, for the last few Sundays, I've been talking about Jesus' family tree including the women Matthew highlights, as well as his godly relatives Aunt Betty & Uncle Zach better known as Zechariah and Elizabeth, and his cousin John. Tonight, I'm going to share about Jesus' mom and dad.

Some of you may be familiar with a series about Jesus and his followers called **The Chosen**. It's well done and helps to humanize, Jesus, his mother, and his followers. I highly recommend it. Last night at 8:00 pm there was a bonus episode of The Chosen on TV called The Messengers. It was about the birth of Jesus from Joseph and Mary's perspective. That's what I planned to talk about tonight also.

As you're getting ready for Christmas, do you ever think about Mary and Joseph, Jesus's mom, and dad? When you're feeling a bit overwhelmed, thinking about what they went through, what the experience was like for them, and what they may have been feeling may help give you a sense of perspective when you're stressed. If you think about what Joseph and Mary went through, one of the things you realize is that the Christmas story we celebrate **begins with unexpected disappointment**.

Listen to **Matthew 1:18-25**

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 fulfill 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.**”

What a rollercoaster of emotions for Joseph. What do you do when unexpected disappointment invades your life as it did for Joseph? **One response is to plan.** Many of us try to come up with a plan to deal with situations in life. You know Christmas is coming so you begin sending Christmas cards, making, or buying presents, baking cookies, and confessing your sins, like John the Baptist tells us to. If you’re a student and you know you have a final exam on Friday, you begin studying on Monday, (right?). Jill worked in November creating Christmas cards, and they didn’t arrive until today! It’s disappointing. It’s much easier to plan for events we expect, such as, Christmas or a test in school, **than it is to deal with disappointments that come suddenly and unexpectedly.** A car accident, a layoff, an illness, a death, an unwanted pregnancy. **Our hopes for the future can change quickly when unexpected disappointment invades our lives.** We’ve all experienced **unexpected disappointment** and we will again, especially if we’re Patriots or Red Sox fans, or Ralphie in the movie *A Christmas Story* who gets a pink bunny costume instead of an *“official Red Ryder, carbine action, 200-shot, range model air rifle.”*

The first thing Mary and Joseph did at the beginning of the Bible’s Christmas story was to trust God in the unexpected moments of life. Can you do that? **Put yourself in Mary’s place.** You’re a young woman seeking to be obedient to God. How do you explain to your family and fiancé that you had a visit from a divine messenger and your pregnancy is not the result of unfaithfulness? Are you frightened because the punishment for being in your situation in that culture at that time is death? Who can you confide in? What do you tell Joseph? In the first century, a Jewish

marriage was a contractual agreement between two families. Once two people were engaged they waited a year to consummate the marriage so the woman could prove her purity. If in that time she were to become pregnant, then the marriage could be annulled. With all this and more swirling inside of her we can understand why, according to Luke's account, Mary went to be with her older relative Elizabeth who at this time was six months pregnant with John the Baptist, the one who would prepare the way for Mary's child. The response of both Elizabeth and John while still in utero serves as confirmation for Mary of the message she'd been given. After three months Mary returns home and perhaps this is when Joseph finds out about Mary's condition. **Mary was willing to trust God even in the unexpected** even though that put her reputation, her marriage, and even her life at risk.

Now put yourself in Joseph's sandals. Your response to the news of Mary's condition is one of tremendous disappointment. How could this have happened? You're a humble, compassionate man. You're a man of integrity. How can you go ahead with this marriage and be made to look like a fool? Most people will think you did this to Mary. This is a small town and people will gossip, "*Did you hear about Mary and Joseph?*" But you care about Mary and don't want to ruin her life or to create a scandal that will permanently damage her. The only answer is to tell Mary the marriage is off, that's the decision that makes the most sense and the one your family and friends will understand. How else could Joseph deal with this disappointing news?

We all manage disappointing news in different ways. Some of us have trouble getting out of bed and just want to pull the covers over our head. In worst case scenarios, we may engage in risky unhealthy behaviors or make dangerous choices. Some of us let anger get the best of us and we go on the attack and lash out. Some of us withdraw in an often icy or impenetrable silence. Others dissolve in tears; some are unable to take any action at all. Since Joseph is a godly man, I trust he prayed about his disappointment and how he should respond. **When unexpected disappointment disrupts your life, don't make the mistake of planning before praying.** Matthew says Joseph went to sleep **having made up his mind** to dismiss Mary quietly, without exposing her to public disgrace. He had his plan. However, as Psalm 16:7 says, when you're lying on your bed at night often God will instruct you. **"An angel appeared to**

Joseph 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. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins*’ (Matthew 1:20b-21).

God isn’t always silent in our unexpected disappointments. Luke and Matthew tell us that a divine messenger visited Mary and Joseph. Both were able to **trust God in the unexpected moments of life.**

Joseph awakes from sleep a new man. “*When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him* (verse 24).” When Joseph wakes from sleep he does what the angel of the Lord commanded him to do. **God’s whole story of salvation hinges on Joseph’s obedience in the midst of his unexpected disappointment.**

Your own journey of faith may also depend on your ability to trust God and to do the second thing Mary and Joseph do which is to be obedient and faithful in the midst of unexpected disappointment. Mary gets far more publicity and attention than Joseph. We never hear about Joseph after Jesus’ childhood, and he probably died before Jesus began his ministry. Mary on the other hand is present all the way to Jesus’ death and is praying with the first believers when the Holy Spirit comes upon the early church. She’s the one who’s portrayed in more great works of art for centuries to come. Mary gets the publicity and the magazine covers. In Luke’s Gospel we hear Mary’s magnificent and challenging song of praise to God which has been preserved for all time. But **in Matthew’s gospel Joseph is the one who has a critical decision to make.** There may be some people in this service who are facing a weighty decision or choice, that’s challenging you to trust God and to be obedient and faithful but it’s not easy. You can relate to Joseph and Mary.

Joseph can doubt what Mary said and ruin her life. Or he can believe what she and the angel have said and defend and stand by her. **Three times in Matthew’s account** of Jesus’ birth and infancy Joseph is visited by an angel who tells him to do something. **Three times Joseph gets up and does exactly what he’s been told to do. We never hear Joseph speak a single word. His actions speak louder than words.** When God’s messenger tells him what to do he’s not portrayed as (Zechariah is

in Luke 1) as doubting, questioning, fearful, bargaining, or controlling – **he acts**. **God's story of salvation hinges on Joseph's obedience and faithfulness in the midst of his unexpected disappointment and Joseph does what needs to be done.**

When you're faced with unexpected disappointments in life, you face a similar challenge as Joseph and Mary. How will you respond? **Like Jesus' Dad and Mom** will you trust God and be obedient and faithful and to do what God asks you to do even if it may seem unexpected or surprising.

Recently, I talked about Jesus' family tree. Sharing about Jesus' roots helps Matthew deal with Jesus' questionable parentage because among Jesus' ancestors were four women: **Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba** all of whom were foreigners, outsiders, and all were to a degree suspect. Yet through all of them God worked unexpectedly and surprisingly for the salvation and deliverance of God's people. They prepare us for the surprising birth of Jesus to Joseph and Mary.

The third thing we learn about facing unexpected disappointment is to respond with mercy. Be merciful even when you're disappointed. Joseph lives in obedience to a principle that's central to Matthew's presentation of Jesus and the Gospel (Matthew 9:13), *"Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."* Joseph acted mercifully to Mary. The expectations and hopes Joseph had for his life would not be fulfilled. God had other plans. Imagine what's going through Joseph and Mary's minds after the baby is born, confirming what the divine messenger had told both of them. Jesus' dad and mom had the satisfaction of knowing that in the unexpected events of life, even in our disappointments, God may do something incredibly significant with you, through you, and in you, perhaps even beyond what you can ask or imagine, **if you will trust, obey, and be merciful. The baby they had would say when he was grown up (Matthew 5:7), ***"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy."*****

I know there are people struggling today for a host of reasons. Each of us can pause for a moment and we can start to identify the pain points, the heartaches, the fears, the anxieties, the worries, which weigh us down or burden us. If you're hurting or struggling, **remember the message of Christmas is how God brings new life and**

hope to birth in the midst of disappointment, heartache, and grief. Don't give up. Keep the faith. Hold onto hope. Trust, obey, and be merciful.

Finally, Matthew reveals what Jesus' name means. Joseph is to name the baby **Jesus because he will save us from our sins**. God sent Jesus because God knows there will be times when we ignore God's instructions for our life and our relationships. There will be moments when we fail to respond obediently. There will be seasons in our life when we're overwhelmed by unexpected disappointment, and we question God, fail to trust, or walk away from a relationship with God entirely. Yet if you ask God for forgiveness, if you're willing to embrace the new beginning we're reminded of each Christmas season, Jesus will save you from your sins. He will be Immanuel, God with us, in all the seasons of your life – in the joys and celebrations as well as in the grief and disappointments.

On Christmas Eve, Joseph and Mary are alone at the manger, with no help from a midwife or a family member, with a new baby to love, nurture, and protect. The responsibility must have felt overwhelming. At Christmas, we celebrate that **Mary and Joseph believed God was faithful, and they responded to initial disappointment with trust, obedience, and mercy. Those are choices you and I have to make, and they set the direction of your life. Do you believe in God, and do you believe God can be trusted?**

Henri Nouwen said, "This is the great conversion in our life: **to recognize and believe that the many unexpected events are not just disturbing interruptions of our projects, but the way in which God molds our hearts and prepares us for his return.**"

It's Christmas Eve. Mary must be exhausted and more than a little uncomfortable. She and Joseph could both use some sleep, food, and a bath. Yet they share a bond of faith, love, hope, and serving the Lord. The three of them huddle together for warmth.

Tomorrow, on Christmas Day, we'll meet the new arrival.

Prayer

Loving God, renew our sense of expectation. Let the music of Christmas & the stories of your birth rekindle in us a feeling for your role in our lives & for the difference you can make in our world.

Creator God, you're known in the bleakness of the wilderness and winter as well as in the magic of the Christmas season, you abide with your children in times of suffering & hardship as well as times of joy & gladness, hear the prayers we make from our various places in life. Give peace & strength to those who are angry, distressed, or lonely. Grant rest & renewal to those who are tired. Touch with healing, bodies that are sick, minds that are disturbed, hearts that ache. Make whole the relationships that have broken & give new relationships where life is barren. Create your beautiful kingdom inside us & help us share it with others.

Grant us always to keep things in their proper place, that we may not seek them nor grasp them, but use them for the needs of the poor & the hungry. Teach us to be imaginative with all our gifts, that we may bless the world, & blessing the world, bless ourselves.

Anoint our children with a sense of wonder & reverence that will never leave them, & enable those of us who are older to rediscover a feeling for mystery during this special season of the year.

Make us aware of your presence in little things - a gentle smile, a flickering candle, a cup of tea or coffee - that we may seek life & not death, love & not self-destruction. Through the one who was born at Bethlehem & crucified on Calvary that we might live forever. Amen.

Blessing: May the light that began at creation, continued through the witness of the prophets, and has come to fullness at the Birth of Jesus Christ, be in your hearts and minds this evening.

As you go from this place may your spirits be filled with joy and hope; for God's precious Light has been given for you.

Go in Peace and know that God's peace always goes with you. Amen.