

**Matthew 1:18-25**

It doesn't appear as though we're going to have one, but there are still many out there who are dreaming of a white Christmas. Poor Joseph, however, had no such dreams. He was having nightmares. His dream had been shattered. The love of his life had been unfaithful to him. Joseph had been engaged to Mary, but it turned out that she became pregnant and he was not the father. So instead of planning for a white wedding, Joseph made plans to divorce Mary quietly. If he were to make the news public, Mary, by Jewish Law, would have been stoned to death. He still loved her and wanted to preserve her from such a fate, so he considered ending their engagement in a quiet manner.

But that night Joseph stopped having nightmares. An angel appeared to him and said, "Do not fear, Joseph, for the child conceived within Mary is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a Son and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." Joseph was going to have a white Christmas after all! Mary had not been unfaithful. Rather, God had been faithful to His promises. He was sending His Son to be born of a virgin; and Mary, the love of Joseph's life, was that virgin.

You and I are a lot like Joseph in a couple of ways. Like him we also believe the word of the angel. We believe that the child within Mary was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and believing that we have great joy. If we did not believe the angel's word then we would not be here today. Why would we come week after week to Jesus' House if that "Jesus" was just a baby conceived in Mary by another man? If that baby is not God in the flesh come to be our Savior, then our baptism is worthless, the Lord's Supper is meaningless, the word of forgiveness is of no value, and we would have no hope of eternal life. We might still be decorating our homes, and baking goodies, and going to parties, but only as a celebration of the coming of Santa Claus, because Christmas would merely be one big "X" mas.

But look at you...you are here today, again, in the House of the Lord because you believe, as Joseph did, that Mary's child is the Promised Savior. You are preparing not for a Winter Holiday, but for the birth of the Son of God. Your baptism into Christ means everything to you. The Lord's Supper is of great benefit, and you have faith in these words, "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins." The word of the angel meant everything to Joseph, and it means eternal joy to us. Jesus is not just another guy born of a man and a woman—He is, as God's angel declared, Jesus: He who saves His people from their sins. And He came to save you.

And so here is a question worth considering..."Do you think you need saving?" On a scale of one to ten, how sinful do you think you are? Very few believe that they are perfect tens. Where do you come in on the scale? When I wrongly compare myself to others, I'm up there pretty high; but when I look at my heart, and mind, and life in the light of God's condemning Law, I'm not even on the scale. I'm a zero, a worthless, wretched sinner.

Is this also what you believe? If yes, then that is why you are in God's House today...not because you have to serve as an usher, greeter, or counter; not because you have to be here for program practice—you're here because you need Jesus to save you. You need Him today. You need His Word which gives life. "He will save," said the angel, and that didn't just happen 2,000 years ago on a cross—it's happening right here and now as Jesus comes

to you in His Word and Sacraments to give you what His cross purchased for you... forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Joseph could go on with his life because of the word of the angel, and so can we; because even though we are sinners deserving of eternal death, Jesus comes to save us from that fate. He was born to die the death we deserved, and because He lives again, He is able to give you His life—and He does—through His words coming to you right here today. The angel's words gave Joseph new life, and so for you—the life you live is all because of Him who lived and died for you.

Now there is another way in which we are like Joseph. If we really stop to think about it, Joseph was pretty much...unnecessary. Mary conceived in her womb without Joseph. Mary gave birth to Jesus, and Joseph was there but he wasn't a crucial part of the story. It's nice to have Joseph in the manger scene. I don't think we should take our Joseph figurines and toss them in the trash. Who would want a nativity set with just Mary and Jesus and the shepherds? We like to have Joseph in there too, even if he wasn't an absolute necessary part of the story.

And that's us...we're just like Joseph, because even if you and I had never been born, Jesus would have come without us anyway. Even before we were born, Christ came. And so our being here in this world doesn't make or break the story of Christmas. Just like with Joseph, Christmas would have happened anyway, even without us. You and I are not crucial to the story of Christ's birth.

And yet, like with Joseph, God has drawn you into the story. You and I may not be absolutely necessary, but God includes you anyway. The story is not just Mary and the Baby Jesus; it's Mary and Joseph and the Baby Jesus. And the story is not just about Jesus who was born to save all of those people out there; it's about Jesus who was born to save you from your sins because you, friend, are part of the story.

He came to save "His people," and you are one of His people. He made room on His cross for your sins. No matter who you are or how many, or great your sins are, He died for you. In your baptism He put His name upon you. In the bread and wine He gives Himself for you. Through His living words He comes to live within you. You are one of His people. You are His forgiven people...each and every one of you.

Like Joseph, you belong in the story of Christ. As long as time continues Joseph will always be a part of that story. As long as children put on pageants on Christmas Eve, there will always be a little one playing the part of Joseph. He doesn't say anything. But he's there because God put him there. And that is where God has put you. He has placed you with Christ forever. And you don't have to say a thing. Simply believe it, because Christ Jesus wasn't just born—He was born for you. Amen.