

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Third Sunday in Advent, December 12, 2010

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Hymns: 73, 89:1-2, 56, 84:1-5, 66.

Lessons: Psalm 2, Hebrews 1:1-9, Luke 1:26-38.

Sermon Text: Matthew 1:18-25.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

God could have chosen any possible method of sending his Son to the earth to redeem sinful mankind. However, he chose to send his Son into a normal family, in this way sanctifying the kind of family he created in the beginning: blessing a father and mother, husband and wife, with children. Although Joseph was not technically the father of Jesus, God chose the family of Joseph and Mary as the place where his only-begotten Son would come into the world, be nurtured and raised, with both a father and a mother.

However, even though Joseph was not really the father of Jesus born to the Virgin Mary, people thought Joseph was his father. Luke records *"Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph"*. Luke 3:23. Even one of Jesus' disciples repeat the common notion about Jesus' parentage when they first meet him: *"Philip found Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.'" John 1:45.* Surely as they learned about Jesus, they recognized him as the Son of God.

Joseph's most significant role is explained by the angel in our sermon text. *"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."* Today let's look at

JOSEPH, WHO WAS THOUGHT TO BE THE FATHER OF JESUS

- 1. He obeyed God in taking the pregnant Virgin Mary as his wife.**
- 2. He served as a genuine human father for Jesus, the true Son of God.**

In Matthew's gospel we find the first mention of Joseph, the husband of Mary, the man whom many people supposed was the father of Jesus of Nazareth, whom we know was truly the son of God. Matthew's Gospel was written primarily for Jews. The genealogy of Jesus Christ that we find there tells us of: *"Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ."* Matthew 1:16. Then Matthew is very specific about the birth of Jesus Christ. *"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."* His mother Mary is mentioned first. But immediately Matthew tells us that she was pledged, engaged we would say, to Joseph. She was betrothed to be married to Joseph. The King James Version uses the word "espoused". We should mention in passing that Jewish marriage traditions regarded this engagement as fully and completely binding, even though the couple had never come together. For many people

today, engagement has very little of a binding aspect to it. In fact, for many people, engagement is merely an excuse to have sex, or even to have children. But that was surely not the case in Israel at the time our Savior was born.

The Word of God says they were pledged to be married ***“but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.”*** Then we read ***“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.”*** Here was a man who had obeyed God’s word in regard to marriage and had not committed fornication with the woman with whom he was going to spend the rest of his life. And what happens to her? She is found to be with child. She is pregnant. And he is not the father. He could only conclude that she had been unfaithful to him. He was righteous in God’s sight through his humble faith in God’s promise of the Savior to come, and so he was concerned about living a righteous life as a fruit of that faith. Thus he did not seek revenge or a desire ***“to expose her to public disgrace.”*** He decided rather to ***“divorce her quietly.”*** Matthew tells us specifically who was the father of her unborn child. The father was God the Holy Spirit. Our gospel lesson from Luke also made that very clear.

Then we read: ***“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.’”*** Joseph was minded to divorce her. Joseph surely would’ve had scriptural grounds for divorcing the woman who was regarded as his wife, even though they weren’t living together. She was expecting someone else’s child. So Joseph had Mary’s reputation and his reputation at stake. But an angel of the Lord appeared to him. The Lord gives him specific instructions and the reason his wife is with child. The angel even tells Joseph what the child is to be named. The child’s name is Jesus, Matthew says ***“because he will save his people from their sins.”*** The name Jesus means Savior.

So Joseph treats Mary as his married wife. ***“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.”*** He took Mary home as his wife. But one thing was unique about this marriage, at least until after Jesus was born. He had no union, he did not have sex with her. Scripture suggests that Mary did have other children, so theirs was probably a normal marriage. One thing about their family was truly unique however. That was the fact that their first-born son was the Son of God. And their Son Jesus would grow up to be sinless. That must’ve made for an interesting household, perhaps difficult at times.

Then listen to what happened months later: ***“And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.”*** Luke 2:1-5, King James Version. This speaks again of Joseph being a descendant of David. In this great census of Caesar Augustus, Joseph, obedient to the civil government, went to be registered in his home city. Mary also was a descendant of David. Mary was considered Joseph’s husband and she went with him to register. This was a lengthy journey, about 80 miles as the crow flies, probably much longer on foot. We have no reason to believe that Mary and Joseph had a donkey, so they probably traveled on foot. They were after all a poor couple, she a young woman, he, perhaps somewhat older. It was while they were in Bethlehem that the Savior of the world was born to this man’s wife.

Joseph had him circumcised on the eighth day. When Jesus was 40 days old, his mother and Joseph took him to the temple in Jerusalem: ***“When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord”***. Luke 2:22. Again Joseph was obedient to God’s command.

Some time after the birth of Jesus Joseph had to flee with his family to Egypt. We have another appearance of an angel to Joseph. This happened, Matthew reports, after the wise men had returned to their home country without telling wicked King Herod that they had found the King of the Jews. *"When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. 'Get up,' he said, 'take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.' So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son.' When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi."* Matthew 2:13-16. Notice that Joseph immediately obeys the angel. He gets up in the middle of the night and leaves for Egypt. Scripture says they then stayed there until after the death of Herod, which fulfills the prophecy of Scripture. *"After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt"* Matthew 2:19.

Jesus grew up in Nazareth, and probably learned the trade of his father, the skills of carpentry. There is no further mention of Jesus or Joseph until Jesus is 12. Then his parents took him to Jerusalem, and later head home, thinking Jesus to be with the group of pilgrims who had come together to celebrate the Passover. But Jesus wasn't found after a day's travel, so they rushed back to Jerusalem. *"After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, 'Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.' 'Why were you searching for me?' he asked. 'Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?' But they did not understand what he was saying to them. Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart."* Luke 2:46-51.

In the synagogue in his hometown, Jesus was considered no more than a carpenter, a son of Mary, as Matthew and Mark report. He was just another young man. These people had known Jesus for most of his life. They knew Mary, his mother, and they regarded Joseph the carpenter as his father. They knew that Jesus had also worked at the carpenter's trade in Nazareth. How could he claim to be a prophet to the fulfillment of Scripture? Well we, by the grace of God, have come to know that Jesus' father really truly is God in heaven. On one occasion in Capernaum, about 20 miles from his home town of Nazareth John reports similarly that people thought of him as the son of Joseph. Listen: *"Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. 'Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?' they asked. 'Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?' And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, 'Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor.' And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith."* Matthew 13:54-58. The most natural explanation would tell us that Mary and Joseph probably had other children, born after the virgin birth of Jesus. However, the word brother does not always refer to sons of the same earthly father and mother, but sometimes it refers to other close relatives, such as cousins.

After a certain point, there is no mention of Joseph in the Scriptures. Perhaps he had died before Jesus at approximately 30 years of age began his public ministry. But it is certainly appropriate to remember Joseph, who as a father helped raise the one who would save us from our sins. Jesus is that one, who came from a typical Jewish family, guided by Joseph, who assumed the role of a father on earth to him. In such a man we find a good Christian father, guided by the Word of God. May we never forget God's love in this aspect of providing us a Savior from all our sins. Amen.