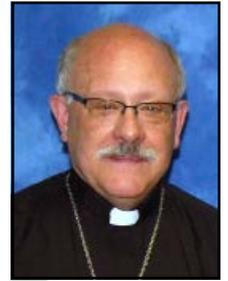




# Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

## Second Sunday of Advent

December 4, 2016

### The Angel Speaks to Joseph's CONFUSION

Matthew 1:18-25

Advent...we are learning to move pretty quickly...this time to remember the promise of God to a nation, Israel, and the fulfillment we know in the life of Jesus.

Our theme: "Angel Speaks" as we live into the fear of Zechariah, the confusion of Joseph, the doubt of Mary, and the curiosity of the Shepherds. Seeing how one lives in the world where God is making a grace note statement in the coming of Jesus, Son of God, Son of Man.

Last week, fear as Zechariah, priest at Temple, serving the Lord. A good man, married to a faithful woman, Elizabeth from the lineage of Aaron, the brother of Moses. No mean couple, these two, "righteous before God, living blamelessly" keeping the commandments and law of the Lord. Oh, but they had no children...Elizabeth was barren...two old crocks, "getting on in years." [Lest you forget, to be barren would have been viewed as a disgrace. Far from a blessing with NO offspring!]

Lighting incense at the Holy of Holies, he is met by an angel. Needless to say, fear enfolded him. And the angel word was "Chill, stop fearing, your prayer is answered, a son is coming, name him 'John.' Joy and gladness are yours and others will rejoice too. Great in the Lord's sight, full of the Spirit. Like Elijah, he will make 'ready a people prepared for the Lord.'"

Fear abated as a speechless priest goes home. All well as this old couple waited for the day and the coming of the son, named, John, who would one day truly prepare the way of the Lord. All well and Elizabeth said, "This is what the Lord has done for me when he look with favor on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among the people."

So we come to Joseph. It is Matthew's narrative, likely compiled between 80-90 AD/Common Era. Some fifty years after the birth of Jesus.

The account is pretty abrupt: Engagement. A binding in which Joseph and Mary would have been legally married. Any notion of unfaithfulness would be considered as adultery and could be dissolved only by divorce or death.

The plot thickens: Mary is expecting baby. What to do? A time of confusion in which a decision needs to be, must be made and the family/social ramifications could be, well, difficult!

I have got to believe that Joseph was confused and being "a righteous man," made the "just" decision, not to go the letter of the law, but to not bring shame on Mary and to divorce her quietly. Still, difficult! Time for sleep therapy and he did just that, went to bed.

Angel again, Matthew gives the spoiler to the reader, by the Holy Spirit. This is all God's doing and the message is pretty clear: "Joseph, son of the promise to David, don't be confused, get rid of

your fear, take Mary as your wife because what has been brought to life in her happened, by the Holy Spirit."

Here is the point: out of confusion comes clarity to those who rely on the Holy Spirit as the pathway to the grace and love of God we share through the faithfulness of Zechariah and Elizabeth, now, Joseph and Mary.

Baby boy. By the Holy Spirit. Name his Jesus, YAHWEH saves. Now get this: "YAHWEH, saves, "his people from their sins." And the angel gives the proof text from Isaiah with the assurance that this baby boy will be the Christ, whose foster father, Joseph, and adoptive mother, Mary, were the means by which God enfolded all of creation through the genesis of new birth that God has planned for us forever.

I find the story stunning. In fact, I find the whole of Matthew's and Luke's birth narratives to be so remarkably simple that my heart begins to accommodate the truth FOR YOU, for me, that God has a plan, works the plan, and the plan for our salvation is fail safe!

Both Zechariah and Joseph did as they were told, pushed out of their fear, out of their confusion that they were called to respond faithfully to their life's calling---to be a priest, and the carpenter father and mentor of Jesus. To protect their sons, hold their family close, until the day of the meeting of the meeting of Jesus to John at the Jordan when He was baptized.

Notice that in our passage, only the angel speaks. Not one word from either of the engaged. They simply responded that with the word EMMANUEL, all will be well. A commentator I hold in high regard, M. Eugene Boring (Not the best name for a Biblical scholar writes well, "Joseph's obedience allows Jesus to be adopted as a true Son of David; it is Mary's role that allows Jesus to be born Son of God."

Christmas is a time to tell familiar stories; of times past, of joys shared; the always family tales our children hear about when they were young.

Advent is a time to hear the PROMISE GRACIOUSLY GIVEN. The words of a promissory note of salvation which calls us to live as disciples willing to be about faithful witness and mission that others might know Jesus and His love.

Chaste Joseph, waiting with Mary. A baby boy "and Joseph gave the boy the name 'Jesus.'" And we are the rest of the story.

Matthew viewed the Jesus' story as a new creation, better than the first Genesis because each day in Christ everything is brand new.

Each Sunday we share these words in our Confession of Faith: "And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary." Sometimes I just want to stop; leave in my mind the pictures of the Manger Scene...so nice "Silent night, holy night! All is calm, all is bright, round yon virgin mother and child. Holy Infant, so tender and mild, sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace."

But you know that it was never meant to stop there...the rest of the story makes us the blest of the story...suffered, crucified, died, buried, on the third day raised, ascended seated, will come again... Son of God, love's pure light, radiant beams from your holy face, with the dawn of redeeming grace. Jesus, Lord at your birth, your death, your life, our life; our joy, our peace, our hope.

The world is often dark, often fear filled, often confusing...for those us who are named and claimed in Jesus, the call is clear...to keep the festival of Emmanuel, God with us, for us, forever. The One who sends us out with the assurance from the lips of the Savior, "Lo, I am with you always to the end of the earth."

Advent is our time to prepare, to repair, and to be open to the newness Christ brings. Even so, come Lord Jesus, Amen.