

**Joseph's Story**  
**Matt 1:18-25**

So friends, the Christmas Season is fully upon us, the lights are up, the decorations are out, Christmas music is on the air, and TV stations seem to be showing Christmas movies every day – so I'm wondering are you feeling the love yet?

Because that's the why in all of this – the reason it all got started...

Two thousand years ago God so loved the world that he sent his one and only son, so that whoever believes in him might not perish but have eternal life!

So... we're celebrating the arrival of Jesus Christ, the ultimate expression of God's love for his creation, for us – for his creatures.

And friends, if you've ever been in love you know what a wonderful thing it is and what a powerful thing it is.

And when you fall love with someone you are smitten by them - they make you feel warm and fuzzy all over, you can't think of anything else, you want to be around them all the time...doing nothing in particular, just gazing into each other's eyes...

And this can go on for weeks, months and if it continues to grow stronger then your thoughts start drifting towards making a future and a life with the person you've fallen in love with

And in our culture that means the guy makes a trip down to Spence Diamonds to purchase an engagement ring and tries to figure out the appropriate way to pop "the question" to his girlfriend.

And if this happens close to the Christmas season, there's a good chance a guy might decide to do it on Christmas Eve – because it's more romantic and all, and hopefully it will increase the chance that his girlfriend will say yes and become his fiancé – and then they will be engaged to be married.

But once you're engaged you need to make the transition from romantic love to a realistic love – because the reality is that spending a lifetime with someone will not always be romantic.

So while you are engaged you need to do the hard work of getting to know each other better and learning what the other person needs and how you can serve them as their partner.

So an engagement is pretty serious – but if there are doubts or problems people can still break things off, it's not legal yet.

However the engagement that we read about in our scripture passage today between Mary and Joseph was a legally binding relationship. If they discovered something about the other person that they couldn't live with - the only way out of it was a divorce – even though they weren't fully married yet.

So when Joseph discovers Mary is pregnant, he has a scandal and a dilemma on his hands.

The scandal would be in the fact that people would think He was responsible for getting Mary pregnant before they were married and his reputation would be ruined.

The dilemma arises because Joseph knows he has not done anything to father a child with Mary, so the only logical explanation is that Mary has cheated on him and committed adultery.

If he tries to save his own reputation by denying his part, it will clear him - but doubly ruin Mary's reputation, and put her life in jeopardy because adultery was grounds to be stoned to death.

Joseph can't lie and say the child is his, but he doesn't want to disgrace Mary either, because he truly loves her – so the scripture says he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But the scripture says that after he had decided to do this God sends an angel to explain to Joseph what is going on - Mary is pregnant because of the work of the Holy Spirit, because she is going to play a significant role in God's plan to save people.

But, aside from having his conscience put to rest that Mary is innocent of having an affair have you ever wondered why God is so concerned that Joseph not divorce Mary and that he stay with her as her husband?

Maybe God didn't want Jesus to grow up without a "Dad"  
Maybe God felt it was best that Jesus was in a "normal" family

Maybe God wanted Joseph to provide for Mary and Jesus,  
Maybe it would have been too scandalous for Mary to be a single mom in Jewish society.

But friends, think about it for a moment. God has a track record of bringing good out of scandalous situations – just look at the women listed in Jesus family tree in Matt chapter one.

There's Tamar, who masqueraded as a prostitute, and slept with her father-in-law  
There's Rahab, a Canaanite and a bonafide prostitute,

There's Ruth – a Moabite, an immigrant from an enemy nation, there's Bathsheba whose exhibitionist rooftop bathing habits got her into an affair with King David.

I think God could have easily dealt with one more scandalous situation if Joseph didn't stick around, and God could have easily provided for Jesus too.

Think of how God provided manna for all the Israelites in the desert or how God fed the prophet Elijah during a famine by having birds bring him food. Providing for Mary and Jesus wouldn't have been a problem for God – who after all was his real father.

No friends, God needed to have Joseph stick around and wed Mary because He was a descendant of King David.

In fact the angel goes of out his way to address him as such  
"Joseph son of David!"

And friends, long ago God had promised King David that He would make sure that one of David's descendants would always be King.

*You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant, <sup>4</sup> 'I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations. (Psalm 89:3-4)*

But, it had some conditions to it. Here's how God explained it to David's son Solomon when he became king.

<sup>17</sup> *"As for you, if you walk before me faithfully as David your father did, and do all I command, and observe my decrees and laws, <sup>18</sup> I will establish your royal throne, as I covenanted with David your father when I said, 'You shall never fail to have a successor to rule over Israel.'*

<sup>19</sup> *"But if y'all turn away and forsake the decrees and commands I have given y'all and go off to serve other gods and worship them, <sup>20</sup> then I will uproot Israel from my land, which I have given them, and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. (2 Chronicles 7:17-19)*

And unfortunately Solomon's descendants did not keep God's decrees and commands, they were unfaithful to God and Israel was eventually sent into exile.

So the fact was that the line of King David was unable to produce an heir to the throne of Israel who was capable of walking faithfully with God and leading the nation to do the same, because the line of David was spiritually dead.

Now, in the ancient world if a man died without producing a son, an heir to his estate that was a big problem.

It's like when someone dies in our day without having a will. No one knows what to do and so their property and children become property of the government.

Same thing back then, without an heir a man's property and land would simply be sold off to anyone and the widow and her daughters would be out of their inheritance.

So there was a custom, which later became a law when God gave Moses the 10 commandments, if that a deceased man had

a brother, or another close relative – they were supposed to take the widow and give her a child, preferably a son, so that their would be an heir to inherit the estate, and the family could continue. (Deut 25)

This custom plays a pivotal role in the story of Ruth if you remember last years Breakfast Theatre story.

This man was called a Kinsmen Redeemer – Now I know it sounds a bit strange to our ears – but this is how things worked back then.

So, in the story of Joseph, God is playing the role of a kinsmen redeemer.

Joseph is not physically dead – but he represents the line of David which was spiritually dead, unable to produce an heir to the throne that would be able to lead Israel so they would love, obey, and worship God.

So God steps in and takes Mary, who is legally bound to Joseph, and gives her a son. And Christ had to be conceived

while Joseph was engaged, in a legal relationship where no children had yet been produced.

If God had taken Mary outside of this circumstance His action would have been divine adultery.

Instead God is redeeming the line of David, producing an heir who is spiritually alive and this means, as the angel says, He will save people from their sins – from being spiritually dead.

And the scripture tells us that all this happened to fulfill what had been foretold through one of the prophets – the virgin will be with child and they will name him Emmanuel “God with us”

And that’s pretty amazing friends; that God – the almighty, all powerful, all knowing creator - would want to be with us!

And that God had this desire for a long time and that he was putting precise specific plans into place in order to fulfill that desire.

But that's exactly what this is all about isn't it – For God so loved the world, he sent his one and only Son...

And friends somehow Joseph gets it.

Joseph gets what God is trying to do and because he understands that he is willing to take Mary as his wife, wait to consummate their relationship until Jesus is born

He is willing to endure the shame and scandal and the gossip that will go around because she is pregnant during the engagement. He is willing to take Jesus as his own son, raise him, and care for him even though all the older people in the village will think he's the child of another man.

And friends this is all possible because Joseph understands that God is showing His love, and keeping His promise to King David by being the Kinsmen Redeemer

Because God so loved the world, Joseph is able to love Mary as his wife and love the boy Jesus as his own son.

And friends as we celebrate Christmas this can be a time where we are confronted with God's amazing love.

A love that moved God to leave behind whatever it meant to be fully God – being all knowing, all powerful, all present and be conceived as a human baby – weak, ignorant, dependent, vulnerable, defined by space and time.

This is the essence of God's selfless love friends, and as we reflect on it through celebrating Christmas it will cause us to respond to others in a like manner.

As Philippians 2:5-7 says <sup>5</sup> *In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:* <sup>6</sup> *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;* <sup>7</sup> *rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness."*

So friends, not only because Christ's action inspires us, but because he is truly spiritually alive and saves us from our sin our relationships with one another can grow beyond sentimental love into selfless love.

So that in spite of what we learn about each other's brokenness and weaknesses, in spite of how sin causes us to hurt and offend each other, and regardless of how things might continually remind of that... we can show selfless love to each other anyways.

Like Joseph did to Mary and Jesus... because friends that is what God has done for us in sending his one and only Son.

Amen.