

## Matthew 1:18-24

MW Advent 2, Dec. 13, 2023

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*Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. <sup>20</sup> But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." <sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: <sup>23</sup> "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). <sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife. . .*

During the Advent Season this year, we've been considering a few "Advent Passwords"—words which will help us "get into" the true meaning of Christmas once again. Last week the password was "watch." This morning, we'll unlock a new dimension of Christmas with a different key. Today, **The Password is: "Trust."**

I went paragliding in Nepal this summer. That's where you take off from a hillside with a large parachute overhead, and you can just ride the air currents really for as long as you'd like. And while it was a fun experience, I had a lot of doubt heading up to the launch site. Jumping off that hill required a lot of trust in the paraglider that was taking me, in his preparation, in the parachute, and in the harnesses. I was kind of regretting my decision after I'd gotten in the harness, but at that point, it was too late to turn back around. So, I said a prayer, we ran down the hill towards the drop-off, and I took a leap of faith. Thanks be to God that we all made it safely back down to the ground.

You know, the process of coming to trust in God is sometimes referred to as a "leap of faith" as well. That's because there's a tremendous jump involved when a person disregards everything his mind and his senses tell him, and instead trusts in the promises of God. Today, we're going to send ourselves back in history a little over 2,000 years. Put yourselves in Joseph's shoes. Think of what *he* was called upon, by God, to believe. *He* took a leap of faith.

The events of our text probably occurred after Mary had returned from her visit to her cousin Elizabeth. She had stayed with Elizabeth, who was pregnant with John the Baptist, for three months. And when she returned home, you have to imagine that her fiancé, Joseph, had quite the shock. It was obvious, by that point, that his dearly betrothed was also pregnant, as our text says, ***"She was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit."*** Now, the angel of God had already appeared to Mary, and so *she* knew the explanation of the miracle that was taking place in her body. But think of Joseph!

Poor Joseph! What type of thoughts must have been running through his mind when Mary came back to town. I'm sure it was just total confusion and terribly upsetting! How could this have happened? How could he have misjudged so badly this nice young woman who had promised to become his wife? All the evidence seemed to scream at him that he'd been a fool to become engaged to Mary. Did everyone else think he was a fool too, blinded by his love? All his future plans of becoming a husband and hopefully a father—suddenly out the door! What a mess! What a scandal!

And it was a scandal. In that day and age, it was a very *serious* scandal. Jewish law dictated that a betrothed virgin, if she was found pregnant by another man, could be stoned to death for her sin. And Joseph didn't want that. But he *had* to do something. He certainly wasn't going to go through with the marriage and raise someone else's kid! ***"And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly."***

That'd be the best thing, right? Just call it off! She'd go her way, and he'd go his. And really, that was a very merciful thought from Joseph! It was just about the kindest thing that he could have done for Mary in the face of such a scandal. ***"But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.'"***

God was calling on Joseph to trust Him, in spite of *everything* telling him to just get out of the situation entirely. And it would be a lonely sort of trust, because Joseph couldn't expect any of his neighbors to believe that Mary was the first virgin in the history of the world to conceive a child. So, how could he do it? How could he trust God? It's not like the angel gave him some sort of miraculous sign to prove that it was true. He didn't get any budding staff, no rock gushing water. All Joseph had been given to put his trust in was the promise of God. The promise that this child would be the Son of God—the Savior of the world. And that Gospel promise, itself, did the trick. ***"When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife..."*** That good news that had been proclaimed to him, that good news of a Savior from sin—that is what enabled Joseph to trust. It was that promise that gave him the faith to take the leap.

Well, today it's our turn to take the leap. It's our turn to trust the incredible message that 2000 years ago, a Baby was born to a virgin. And that Baby was no ordinary child, but is indeed our Redeemer. Will *you* trust this incredible message? You know, today, the Gospel is just as much a scandal as it ever was. What Paul wrote to the Corinthians is still true: ***"We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness."*** (1 Corinthians 1:23)

Little Greek lesson for you today. The Greek word for "stumbling block" is "skandalon," which is where we get the word "scandal" from. Almost everyone in this world of ours, Jews and gentiles alike, consider the good news of Jesus Christ to be scandalous and foolish, just like Paul said. That the Son of God came to earth and was born of a virgin, lived a perfect life free from sin, then died on a cross according to the will of God, and then rose from the dead after three days? "That's a myth," the world says. And sadly, even many so-called Christians today will reject some of those elements, like Jesus being born of a virgin or Jesus rising from the dead. "It's too foolish to believe," so many people say. They will trust the Bible, but they won't trust the Bible that far. It's too big a leap to take.

And it is, indeed, a very big leap to make. But God asks us to jump anyways. He asks us to trust His Word. To believe the Christmas message of a Savior born of a virgin. To let go of everything else and trust only Him for our salvation. That's a big leap, and one that we cannot make on our own. Maybe you remember from your Confirmation days that we confess in the explanation to the Third Article of the Apostle's Creed: *"I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my*

*Lord, nor come to Him...*" We can't make that leap alone. But do you remember how it goes on? *"...but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel!"* That's the beautiful thing about this incredible Christmas message! It carries, within itself, the power to make us believe it. Paul wrote to the Romans, ***"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."*** (Romans 10:17)

Every time you read God's Word, anytime you come here and hear it preached, the Holy Spirit is working faith in your heart. The Gospel itself makes you believe the Gospel!

So, the Password is "Trust." During this Advent Season, God is calling upon you to trust, just like He asked Joseph to trust. No signs, no miracles, just . . . trust. Thanks be to God that He also *enables* you to trust through His Word, just like He enabled Joseph. You *can* trust God's Word. You can trust that every word of the Christmas story is true. Above all, you can trust in that Savior who was born in a stable and died on a cross. Trust Him! He forgives every sin you commit. He will welcome you into heaven at the end. So, settle back and enjoy the coming of your Savior. You are truly blessed, for Jesus said, ***"Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."*** Amen.

***"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*** (Philippians 4:7) Amen.