

An Ordinary Man: Joseph
Matthew 1:18-25
Everton Hills
18 December 2016

Quick quiz. Who here suffers a little bit of OCD – the need to have everything in order? Who of you are approaching next week end, either concerned that things are not going to go the way you have planned, or are pretty confident that they will! Maybe you have even created a list... what time you need to leave home, what time the food needs to go in, when the drinks need to be cooled, and so on. Those sorts of people are often called Type A personalities... they need to have everything planned, so that there are no real surprises.

Now I think that it is a fair call to say that most of us like to have some degree of awareness of what is going to happen in our lives. I doubt that there are too many of you who wake up in the morning and just go with the flow; “I might go to work and see what happens... or maybe I won’t”. Most people do think about the future... who we might marry, what our kids might be like, what they might end up doing, whether we will have enough to retire on, and so on and so on.

But have you ever noticed that things often don’t go as we plan? I think that the call committee has discovered that.

And so when things don’t go as planned, what do we do? You can get really upset or angry about it. You can feel frustrated and look for someone to blame. Or you can do something else... Have you ever wondered that maybe, when things don’t go according to our plan, that **God himself might be trying to reveal something else to us?**

“My plans are not your plans, says the Lord” Isaiah 55:8. In fact, what we have been learning over the last few weeks, is that God frequently uses unexpected things, ordinary people, to bring about his extraordinary outcomes!

So as we continue on this journey towards an ‘ordinary Christmas’, today we are going to look at another **ordinary man called Joseph**. In fact, he was so ordinary, that the bible doesn’t really say much about him at all. But it would be fair to say, that like us, he too, would have had dreams and hopes about a future. And those plans were meant to involve his betrothed, Mary.

And yet, because of the fact God had his own plan, and that plan involved both Mary and Joseph, I imagine that Joseph’s world would have been rocked when he discovered that Mary was pregnant... and that it could not have been his child!

We don’t know how Mary broke the news... “Joseph, I need you to sit down....”

What we do know is Joseph’s response...

“Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.” (Matthew 1:19, NLT)

What that tells us about Joseph is that he was righteous. That doesn't mean perfect. But what it does mean is that he made every effort to follow the Mosaic Law.

And here was his conundrum.

When Mary breaks the news, according to the law, he has two options.

Option 1, which wasn't practiced much in the first century, was that he had every right to shame Mary and her family, publicly... and to have her stoned to death!

Option 2, was to go before a couple of witnesses and divorce her quietly.

They were the only two options. And since he was a righteous person he had to choose one. There was no way that he could have taken her home as his wife... because she was now pregnant with a child who wasn't his. According to the law, by doing so, he would have been admitting his own guilt.

Now there is something else you need to know. There is something else going on in Joseph's heart. And I think that this is especially important to us guys. He didn't want to expose her to public shame. Despite what had happened, or what he thought had happened, he didn't get violent, or lash out, or get revenge, there is no indication that he raised his voice... rather the bible suggests that he had an incredible amount of respect, and love, for Mary.

So being true to who he was, being self-aware and non-reactive, he makes the decision to divorce her quietly. Which would have meant that he remained faithful to the law, but that he could also show compassion towards Mary.

And it was in the midst of this wrestling about how exactly to go about it, about how to remap his life, that God shows up... and sends an angel in a dream.

We see that regularly in the bible – where God reveals his will through dreams.

“As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid...” (Matthew 1:20, NLT)

Notice. The angel first draws attention to Joseph's lineage... you are of the line from which the Messiah will come. I think that's intentional.

Then the angel says, “Do not be afraid”... Do not be afraid. When have no need to fear any outcome, when God is at the centre of the plan... Think about Joshua 1:9.

“This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:9, NLT)

Aren't those words that we need to hear as the Holy Spirit prompts us to share our faith with our neighbour? I mean, doesn't everything inside us scream... you are going to get tongue tied, you are going to mess it up, people will think that you are some sort of religious nut – and man, there are a lot of those out there!

So we need to hear those words. Time and time again we need to be reminded of God saying to us, **‘Do not fear, for I am with you.’**

We need to hear those words when we are at work – when people are trying to get you to step away from your integrity, from what you hold to be true and important.

We need to hear those words when we are sitting at school, and we notice someone paying another person out, and on the one hand we want to join in, but the Lord says, stick up for them. Do what is right. Do not be afraid!

So the angel says to Joseph,

“Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:20–21, NLT)

I can picture, stunned mullet Joseph, at this point thinking, “Whoa, she was right!”

That is a good lesson for a husband to learn – your wife is always right.

And then the angel gives him two more reasons why he should not be afraid...

The first is found in the name Jesus... **You are to name him Jesus for he will save his people from their sins.**

And yes, that is the memory verse for this week... but this week, I want you to personalise that memory verse... you are to name him Jesus for he will save ‘David’ from all his sins.

And the second reason gets back to the fulfilment of a prophecy...

“All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet: “Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’ ” (Matthew 1:22–23, NLT)

His name will be Immanuel. Which means “God is with us”.

Now I want you to think about what that actually means. **God is with us.** Those four words are the most profound, comforting and encouraging words you can ever hear. There is no other faith in the world where God says I am with you. Every other faith or belief system says you have to come to me... you have to follow this rule, or do this religious exercise, or climb through these religious hoops. But in Jesus, we have God himself, coming to us, to live among us, to empower us, to comfort us, to cry with us, to rejoice with us, to give us courage when we feel scared, and to give us hope when we feel hopeless.

Don’t miss the importance of that, this Christmas.

Don’t get so hung up with right thinking and right doing and clever planning, that you miss the remarkable reality that in Jesus, God himself is with you!

God is with us, to save us. And sometimes it is to save us from ourselves and from our own plans!

So Joseph, with all his expectations, with all his dreams about how his life would be, got a brand new message, and effectively says, ‘no worries God, I get it. This is really strange, but I trust you, and I believe you.’

“When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.” (Matthew 1:24–25, NLT)

So what is it that we learn from Joseph?

First, we can put the needs of others first, even when they don’t deserve it... because that is what Jesus does to us. **“We love because he first loved us” 1 John 4:19, NLT**

Second, we can acknowledge the importance of planning... but also learn to listen to the voice of God and follow his ways. Because the important thing is, to **be attentive to God’s leading, not ours**. It was Joseph’s being open to change his plans, that enabled Jesus, the saviour of the world, God with us, to enter our time and space to make a difference.