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**Advent 4 A – Dec. 18, 2022**

**“Joseph – The Promise Believed”**

**Read: Matthew 1: 18 - 25/ Memorize: Matthew 1: 22**

We don't often think of the word promise and Joseph in the same sentence. Certainly Mary had a promise, but did Joseph? So what is the promise? Before I tell you what it is, let me just say that you cannot understand the Old or New Testament, Christmas, or your life apart from the promise. So where does this promise begin? Well, you'll have to go back to the Garden of Eden.

The Garden of Eden made Disney World look like a dump. In the Garden God told them the one thing that they needed to know. It was a pretty simple: “You can have anything else you want in this Garden, but don't eat the fruit of that tree.” We know that they blew it royally. Their one act of disobedience put us in the mess we are in today. For a moment, Satan was deliriously happy. He thought he had messed up everything. He had ruined the perfect world.

He damaged a perfect marriage; broke the fellowship Adam and Eve had with God. Satan would have won except God made the promise which we read in Genesis 3: 15: “And I will hostility between you and the woman, between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.”

From the moment that God made that promise, He had one item on His to do list; a promise to keep. He would send someone to take care of Satan, sin, sorrow and suffering. It was going to take a long time to happen, but when God makes a promise, He always keeps it.

This is where Joseph, who is mostly forgotten, comes in. If you choose to play him as an actor, you won't be a star or receive much recognition. The only thing Joseph seems to do is stand by Mary. He has no lines, in fact, there are no recorded words of Joseph in all of the Bible.

God was about to bring to pass all the prophecies concerning the Messiah. Joseph's the unsung hero of the story. Even though Joseph doesn't say anything, there's a lot of things said about Joseph. From this great man, we can learn some valuable lessons.

From him we learn to trust God's promises, no matter what. Only Matthew 1:18 shares this message, "This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit."

Here's the drama: It says they're engaged, then he is thinking about divorcing her in the next verse. In our western way of thinking that is very confusing. But by Jewish custom it was very, very natural. You see, we tend to think of marriage as an event. Roxann and I married on June 30, 1991. But a Jewish marriage is not an event, it's a process. There are actually three steps to the process.

First there was the arrangement stage. This is the contractual stage. Joseph and Mary's parents would have arranged this marriage. When they agreed, they entered the engagement stage. It usually lasted about one year and was a binding contract that could only be dissolved by divorce. At the end of that year, there was a marriage. The marriage feast lasted about a week before the marriage could be consummated.

In that engagement phase, even though the couple was bound together morally and legally, they would not have sexual relations until they were actually married, after the week long party ended.

We're meeting Joseph at the beginning of a really big problem. He is engaged to a young woman who he finds out is pregnant. He knows it's not his child. According to the law, Mary could be stoned to death, her husband could make a public disgrace of her or he could put her away privately. In that case, he would take her before some legal officials, who had the authority to break this contract and privately go his own way.

He is full of doubt. He doubts Mary. Who wouldn't have? He doubted her character, her purity and her virginity. I suspect he doubted God because I assume Mary must have told him. He doubted himself because he did not know what to do.

Joseph was wondering, should he break off the engagement? He decided to do it, but out of care, he decided to make this a private affair. But He didn't just make that decision. Matthew says he "considered" what he should do. Maybe you've wondered, just as I have, why God didn't bring him in on the secret beforehand. Whatever the reason, before he took that next step he thought and prayed about it, which is something we should also do. Perhaps, now he was open to hear God's message.

God sends an angel to Joseph to confirm exactly what Mary must have told him and the words are pretty fantastic, "Take her as your wife, the child who has been conceived is of the Holy Spirit." She'll have a baby, you'll give Him the name Jesus, "for He will save His people from their sins."

**But now comes the really key verse: “Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophets.” Did you hear that word, fulfill? This is the key word in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew uses that word over fifteen times to show that Jesus is all about fulfilling prophesy, which is about nothing more than keeping a promise.**

**Now the ball was in Joseph’s court. He has to make a bigger decision. Was he going to trust God’s promise or not? There will definitely be gossip about this couple for their whole life. They will have to endure it. But so will the rest of the family when they have their other children.**

**He didn’t do this just because he loved Mary. He trusted God’s promise. If you are in the middle of a situation where you are doubting whether or not you can make it, doubting whether or not you can see it through or doubting whether or not you can survive it, I want you to remember Joseph and the lesson he’s teaching. We’re going to hear about it several times. For every problem there is a provision.**

**The question you have to decide is the same one Joseph did. Will you trust God’s promise or not? God wasn’t finished teaching Joseph to trust or with His promises for Joseph, yet. There would be the great escape when Jesus was about two, to save Him from death; then the return years later. Whatever the angels told him to do, Joseph did. Why did it happen: to fulfill a prophecy.**

**Joseph would have to go seventy-five miles with his wife and child. I may not sound far to us, but it might have taken many days to do so. To ensure the safety of the child he would travel another hundred miles into Egypt. The trip would have been slow and dangerous.**

**Couldn’t God have stymied Herod and his soldiers? He didn’t. God chose to protect Joseph and his family by the very ordinary, and then miraculous, method of fleeing to a foreign country. If God wanted to make it really easier on Joseph why didn’t He just teleport him to Egypt instead of putting him on that long and dangerous journey? You’re going to see the reason for all of this in just a moment, but there’s a lesson to learn here.**

**God’s way is not always the softest, easiest or safest way, but God’s way is always the surest way to His blessing and protection. The lesson we learn from Joseph is that God’s will may sometimes lead us to a dangerous place. On the other hand, the most dangerous place is anywhere outside the will of God, because inside the will of God we’re always under God’s grace and protection.**

**We hear in Matthew 2: 15 why this all had to happen: “This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophets: out of Egypt I called my son.” Once again, we hear that God keeps His promises.**

**So when He called Joseph out of Egypt, He took him to Nazareth to protect Him. It was there that he could raise his child safely. But there’s one other reason why he goes to Nazareth: a promise. Here’s what it says in Matthew 2: 23, “This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: He shall be called a Nazarene.”**

**Here’s another thing we learn from Joseph. It’s a really important lesson. It’s ok to talk about our plans, but we want to remember that God makes the ultimate plans. We learn from Joseph that even the smallest promises of God are so important that God will move heaven and earth, and even kings, like pieces on a chessboard to keep His promises.**

**As you go through life, you’re going to find that things don’t always go according to your plans. You might think that God is messing up your plans. Will you learn from Joseph? God had bigger plans for Joseph than Joseph ever could have had for himself. He was to be the human father of the very Son of God. Joseph had that privilege, because he believed God’s promise and was obedient to Him.**

**There are times in life when God’s will is not the easiest or most convenient thing for us. We learn from Joseph that if we trust God’s promise, we will see that God’s will is always the right and the best thing for us. It’s about surrendering our will to God’s will. The question we have to answer for ourselves is, “Would we be willing, for all of our lives, to be as obedient as Joseph was?” God’s desire for us has always been that we live in obedience, sharing in the joy of His promises for eternity through faith in Jesus.**

**Count me in: Will you be alert to those around you who need to hear God’s promise and share it with them?**