



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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December 19, 2012

Midweek Advent Worship

Sermon Text: [Matthew 1:18-25](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 130](#)

Scripture of Prophecy: [Ezekiel 34:11-16](#)

Scripture of Fulfillment: [John 10:11-18](#)

### **Hark the Glad Sound! The Savior Comes**

He Comes to Those Who Believe

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow redeemed:

As we get closer and closer to Christmas, I'm kind of reminded of the words of the famous minister from a couple generations ago. He once said, "I do love Christmas. To me it's like a gothic room come to life for 24 hours." I have no doubts that this guy loved Christmas, but I think of these words because I think he, like a lot of us and like a lot of us are tempted to do, kind of gives Christmas, the event itself, a short trip. It's not just one day where a gothic room comes to life. It's not just 24 hours. It's not even just the couple of months they have devoted to Christmas songs on the radio. It's so much more, but because at times we all have Spiritual Attention Deficit Disorder, we get distracted by all the bells and whistles around us, by all the preparations, by all the traditions, by all the family things we do. We get so focused on those things that we forget they were originally started to help us celebrate who Jesus is and what he has done for us.

Do you ever find yourself so wrapped up in those things that you don't take the time to contemplate things like what I just read to you, the humble faith of Mary and Joseph? Think of how hard it was, humanly speaking, for them to believe what they were told. We are reminded that, humanly speaking, none of us can believe it until we see the miracle of God and the gift of God. It's not just the Christ child. It's the gift he gives us to believe the unbelievable. We are better off if we spend a little more time focusing on believing the unbelievable.

Put yourself in Joseph's shoes. You are pretty fired up, right? You're going to get married. You have the woman you are going to spend the rest of your life with. Then one day she comes up and tells you, "Hi honey. I'm pregnant. And it's conceived from God." Can you hear the air going out of Joseph's balloon as he listens to that? Humanly speaking, put yourself in his shoes. Is your sinful nature going, "Yeah, right, it's conceived from the Holy Spirit. Likely story. How dumb do you think I am?" Think about that.

We are told he was a righteous man, so after he thought about it, the plan he came up with was "I'm going to divorce her quietly instead of making a show of it." That's what

divorce her quietly means. That's the just and righteous man thing. He didn't want to draw attention to shame Mary. He also didn't feel the need to be vindicated by making this public show that he was the one wronged.

Think about that temptation that comes from our sinful nature. When we are wronged, don't we at times want to make a public show of how we've been wronged to let everyone know. There were procedures in place for divorcing someone publicly according to the teachings of the Law and the rabbis and things like that so that everyone could see that he was still a righteous man and that Mary was the one who had sinned and committed adultery. But Joseph evidently didn't feel the need to be vindicated by this. We see that in his faith, his desire to do what was right and put the love of Christ into action as he saw it best fit for everyone.

Then he goes to bed one night after some meal he had, maybe some lamb, and during the night all of a sudden an angel comes and appears to him. He has a vision. The angel comes with the same message that Mary had told him. "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins." You kind of have to wonder if he sat bolt upright in his bed after that. There were other options for Joseph at this time besides believing the message from the angel. He could have sat up the next morning and said, "Man, there must have been something wrong with that lamb I had last night. That was really a weird dream." He could have dismissed it as just that, a weird dream, and continued on down the path that he had intended to go of divorcing Mary quietly.

But God worked in him to believe the message that God sent to him. That message then changed him. We are not told a lot of things, but there might have been the whispers when they walked through town about how Mary was already expecting. There might have been some of those things that they endured, but they were willing to endure it because now their eyes were focused on God. God had said to these two people, Mary and Joseph from Podunk Nazareth, never spoken of in the prophets as the birth place of the Messiah or as the source of the Messiah, but God had said "I'm going to do it." And they believed it, that humble faith that focused on God and trusted God and took God at his word.

In order to do that, in order to have a humble faith, God has to work in you. That comes from focusing on his Word, as the two of them did. But think of how hard that is for us to do sometimes. We are so caught up with getting the right cookies made, getting the right wrapping on the paper, the right tree and the right everything else that sometimes I think we forget Christmas is all about humble faith, believing that God sent his Son to live and die in our place. Believing that the gift that comes in the manger is fulfilled, is finally unwrapped completely on the cross and the empty tomb. A humble faith to believe these things and to focus on these things despite any distractions that might come. That takes something.

When you read the Christmas account, you contemplate it and meditate on it, you have to be humbled at the faith we are told they displayed. Especially when you think about who they were. They were just from Nazareth. This had to come as a complete and utter shock to them. Not only because who expects to become the mother of God and who expects to raise the Son of God as his earthly father, but because the prophecies had always talked about him coming from Judah. They weren't living in Judah. They talked about other places, and they were in Nazareth. They had to just be amazed as they see the hand of God progress as the census comes. They have to go to Bethlehem. They see this all unfolding. They see how it fulfills Scripture. They had to just stand back in awe of how God works.

God works through people you wouldn't expect. You would have expected something different, some different people to serve as the human parents of Jesus. That's not how God works. He works through people that he gives this humble faith to. He works through them and he blesses all people through them.

Think about that. It's the same thing that Paul told us. Paul said in his letter to the Corinthians, "Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were influential, not many were of noble birth, but God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are so that no one may boast before him." Paul understood that. He applied it. He applied it to the people he was speaking to. The question now becomes, as you look at Mary and Joseph and consider their faith and how they acted on the Word of God, do you take that to heart and apply it to yourself?

God worked through people like them by giving them this gift of faith. Does God also plan to work through me by giving me this gift of faith that he has given me? Before you throw your hands up and say, "No, that's for someone else. That's for the heroes of faith. That's for other people." There were no posters of Mary and Joseph going around Nazareth before this happened. These weren't the great and mighty people of the world. These were your ordinary everyday folk. That's who God works through. He works through people like you and through people like me. Not just the powerful and the mighty.

Look at the Song of Mary. We'll hear it this Sunday as the Gospel. It talks about how the Lord lifts up the lowly. Mary understood it. Mary lived it. The question becomes, do you live it? Do you understand it? Or do you say, "God can't work through me. That's for Called Workers. That's for other people. That's for different people." If so, your eyes are in the wrong place. You're looking at yourself. You're not looking at your God. Your faith in yourself is always going to disappoint you. Then you're right in not trusting in yourself because you can't do anything. But God can through you. God can use you to bring the message of Jesus to those that are hurting, and at this time of year, there are always people hurting. We set up such high expectations for the holiday season and reality so often disappoints that people are left low and down and moody.

You and I know the message. We know it's all about Jesus. Beyond just saying "Jesus is the reason for the season" and other cliches, we can tell them why and point out why Jesus is so necessary and how amazing it is that God became flesh to die for people like us, to die for people who are so often disappointed, but here is one area in our lives where we'll never be disappointed. When we look to Jesus, we find no disappointment. Instead we find forgiveness and peace and security for all eternity. Tell me which person that is having trouble with Seasonal Affective Disorder doesn't want to hear that message, and you tell me why you can't be the one to tell them. Amen.