

Preaching notes for Joy - Matthew 1:18-25

In a moving narrative in today's gospel reading, Matthew describes Joseph's love and care for Mary, which becomes something of a metaphor for the love of the God who is about to step physically into human affairs and experience.

Joseph is engaged to Mary, but before the marriage he discovers that his "young maiden of marriageable age" is pregnant. Joseph is deeply troubled and realizes because they have never had sex that he's not the father. Being a very gracious man, he desires to minimize Mary's shame so he decides to divorce her privately. Divorce was required to end an engagement/betrothal in those days.

God sends an angel to explain things to Joseph. The child she carries was conceived by supernatural means of the Holy Spirit. He should go ahead with the marriage. The angel tells Joseph to call his son the name Immanuel which is translated "God with us".

What Matthew, the Apostle, does here is an amazing bit of Divine Biblical Theology. He connects the Sign of Immanuel from Isaiah 7:14 to the virgin birth of Jesus. What Isaiah promised in the eighth century B.C., expecting it to be fulfilled in his time, Matthew saw as having its ultimate fulfilment in his day. Or to put it another way, what Isaiah foresaw as a new era to come, Matthew saw as present. The birth of Jesus is the sign of God's presence, "God with us."

Writer Nick Fawcett helps us to understand the passage in the following meditation.

"It was the strangest of dreams, ludicrous really, yet I can't get it out of my mind. You see I dreamt God was speaking to me. No not face to face, I don't mean that, but through his angel, claiming to be his special messenger. And do you know what he told me?"

Take Mary to be your wife - that's what. Just when I had decided to put her quietly aside, hush up the scandal as best as I could this character was telling me to think again. And why? Because apparently it had nothing to do with her because the baby, she is carrying is not a result of some fleeting passion but conceived of the Holy Spirit ordained by God himself.

Well I have heard a few excuses in my time but that takes the biscuit! I mean who did this fellow think I was- some fool born yesterday. It's laughable, but funny a dream it may have been, but it's lived with me.

And you know what - I can't say why exactly- it was a mixture of things I suppose. There was Mary for a start. The way she looked at me as she broke the news almost as though she too had met with God and was confident that I would understand. But what really swung it for me was that I had this feeling deep inside me that God - somehow God had touched me".

The essence of Matthews story is that in the birth of Jesus the Spirit of God was operative as never before in the world.

The name Immanuel – God with us – is a profound and powerful statement of God's desire to be in intimate communion with human beings. The challenge for us is to recognise God's presence in all situations and circumstances. We can doubt God's love in times of grief, pain

and trauma, but we find Joy, comfort, healing and strength when we are able to experience God's "with-us-ness" even in such times. And, when we are able to help others to recognise and experience God's presence and love in their lives – whatever they may be going through – then we have truly become Advent people.

The Spirit brings Gods truth to the world, He takes up residence in us and enables us to have a joyful living relationship with Jesus. To empower us to witness to others the good news of that loving and restored relationship with Him. **Amen.**

Deacon Paul Wayne.

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