

THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Hillsboro Presbyterian Church

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Matthew 1:18-25 ***“This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said. ‘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.’ All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’ – which means, ‘God with us.’ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.”***

Welcome! God is pleased you are here. I know if it were my son’s birthday...and everybody was invited...and acted excited about it...and had been busy buying presents and making preparations – I would expect them to show up at his party! God is pleased you are here. That first Christmas, others just like us were there...actually there at the birth of Jesus.

JOSEPH. Joseph was a carpenter...a regular “Joe”. Joseph was a **“righteous”** brother. So when he found out Mary – the young woman he was almost married to - was pregnant he wanted to do the right thing. He may have also wanted to punch somebody out! But Joseph was unwilling to expose Mary to the public humiliation and disgrace that a broken engagement would have been back then...that says a lot about Joseph. Then the angel came. Once Joseph realized this was a God thing, of course he did the right thing. Friends, even when you do the right thing it doesn’t mean your fear goes away. Joseph still needed that message, **“Do not be afraid,”** because sometimes in our world when you do the right thing, it can be very scary. The future Joseph planned was changed. “What do you mean I’m going to be Dad to of the Savior of the World? How in the world am I going to parent God’s Son? Will Jesus accept my discipline? Will Jesus finish my sermon before I preach to him?” When I think of Joseph at the birth of Jesus, I think of that word...“afraid.” Joseph was a good, godly, guy’s guy...but he was “afraid”.

MARY. Beautiful, serene, angelic, Mary. She was chosen by God to be the mother of the Savior. But behind the scenes you see a young woman living an impossible story. A pregnant virgin. No possible PR spin to get Mary away from the accusations of everybody’s minds. Imagine what her Jewish mother had to say...“I warned you what kissing would lead to!” I trust that the grandmother of Jesus finally saw the light. God had chosen the womb of her daughter to begin to fulfill His plan.

Peaceful, privileged, pregnant Mary is the way we picture her. But the Gospel of Luke (2:4-7) tells us **“Joseph (had to go) from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem the town of David (his ancestor)... He went there with Mary who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.”** The Living Bible says Mary was **“obviously pregnant.”** I love that term. Nazareth to Bethlehem was about 70 miles...5-6 days on a donkey. **“Obviously pregnant.”** I wish that all women who were pregnant were *obviously* pregnant. Anybody else in here, as dumb me, who has asked only to discover she wasn’t pregnant? I’ve done more than once! That’s how foolish I am. Now you could be 11 months pregnant with limbs coming out of your belly and I will not ask! So big time pregnant, 70 mile donkey ride, far from home...do you really see a calm, glowing, angelic Mary? No reservations, no hospital, no epidural... just a bunch of buggy, smelly animals - and a good-guy fiancé. I see an uncomfortable Mary. Trusting God, yes...but she had to have been “uncomfortable.”

THE INNKEEPER. We always make this person out as a villain. Who would not open a room up for a pregnant woman? This person is like the first scrooge of Christmas. But here’s the deal...the Innkeeper is barely mentioned...Luke 2:7 **“Because there was no room for them in the inn.”** That’s it! I do not see the Innkeeper as being evil...I just see him - or her - being occupied. It was what it was: no room available. To his/her credit, the innkeeper did what they could (maybe more than we would have) and got them out of the cold...into his barn. The inn was occupied...the innkeeper was “occupied.”

THE VISITORS. In the Gospel of Matthew they were wise men...in the Gospel of Luke they were shepherds - but interestingly enough the first visitors in both narratives have the same response. First the Magi. Matthew 2:11 **“On coming to the house, they saw the child and His mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented (Jesus) with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.”** What was the response of the Magi? Worship. They dropped to their knees and worshipped. Next the Shepherds. Luke 2:16 **“The shepherds hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen (Jesus) they spread the word...and all who heard it were amazed....The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God”** The response of the shepherds takes worship to a whole new level, doesn’t it? They didn’t just worship in the moment; they took their worship to the streets and back to the fields where they worked. They told everybody so they would know the good news too. Luke 2:18 **“and all who heard it were amazed”.** Not amazed like the before and after of The Biggest Loser, but amazed like staring up at galaxy upon galaxy...or amazed like looking upon a new born. The visitors at the birth of Jesus were “take your breath away” amazed...they were “gotta tell everybody” amazed...they were “Praise The Lord” amazed. The visitors at the birth of Jesus were “awestruck.”

Afraid, Uncomfortable, Occupied, Awestruck. Four feelings by those at the birth of Jesus then...and now. Maybe you are afraid of what your life would look like if you were to follow Jesus or you are afraid of people who do. Maybe you don’t want to have Jesus make you uncomfortable about what you think or watch or spend or behave. Maybe you are not a follower of Christ because your life is so occupied...you are just too busy. Maybe Jesus rocks your world and leaves you awestruck...Jesus evokes these feelings within your soul where you can’t keep quiet...Jesus gives you a passion for living and a compassion for others. No matter what you are feeling, you are not alone. God knows your heart. God wants you to receive into your heart His love...God’s very real love given to this very real world in this very real baby named Jesus. Happy Birthday Jesus!