

“The Genesis of Jesus”

St. Matthew records for us the beginning, origin, existence of Jesus – literally the “genesis of Jesus” – as he reveals the conception and birth of Jesus the Christ. And there is Joseph – in the middle of it all.

Mary is betrothed to Joseph – she is his wife. Back then, things worked a little differently than they do today. With the betrothal came many things – a legal arrangement, financial arrangements, even new living arrangements – but the marriage was yet to come.

Typically, the betrothal of a virgin lasted for one year – and during that time the young couple lived with the husband’s family, as a rule. At the end of the betrothal an (oftentimes) week-long marriage celebration would take place – at the end of which the groom would escort his wife to their new home – and then, and there, the marriage would be consummated (but not until then).

So, plans have been made – everyone is looking forward to the time of the marriage celebration – even Joseph and Mary are looking forward to the fullness of what it means to be husband and wife --- and then comes this message from the Lord. The angel of the Lord throws a wrench into the plans – and into Joseph’s life!

His wife is pregnant. That can only mean one thing – Mary has been unfaithful – she has committed adultery. And whether that was voluntarily on Mary’s part, or not – Joseph doesn’t know – but he knows this child is not his.

So, what’s a “righteous” man to do? Well, the Law of Moses says that those who are guilty of adultery (according to Deuteronomy 22), were to be stoned to death.

Joseph has a lot to consider. Think about that for a moment. This child is not his son. His genesis is not from Joseph – so, should he receive Joseph’s inheritance? Should Joseph be responsible for taking care of someone else’s child? That’s like paying someone else’s taxes, or student loan. Who would do that? That’s, not “right.”

The Law of Moses called for the stoning of the adulterer in order to “purge the evil from Israel” (Dt. 22:22) – to protect God’s people. But there were other things for Joseph to consider as well – and it might not surprise you – that some of them were financial. Following the law and having Mary stoned would allow him to recoup the bride price – and possibly impound her dowry

Yes, Joseph is a “righteous” man, we are told – but we also see that he is a compassionate man. He loves Mary, his wife. In spite of what he assumes she has done – he desires to be merciful to her, not revengeful. So, Joseph “resolved to divorce her quietly” – avoiding any unnecessary shame for Mary – even if he forfeits a financial gain, and even suffers loss.

Joseph is, for the right reasons, about to do the wrong thing. Joseph’s thoughts are not God’s thoughts – and God’s way is not Joseph’s way. So, God must intervene – and He does! His countermove is to supplant Joseph’s human understanding with His divine perspective – so that Joseph may see things the way God sees them.

God must reveal the way that Joseph is to go. God must reveal His will – because Joseph “cannot by his own reason or strength” – fathom what God is doing. God sets things right – with a message delivered by His angel.

“Son of David,” He says to Joseph – reminding Joseph who he is, that the Messiah will be born from his family line – reminding him of the Lord’s promise to send a Savior. “Do not fear ...” Yes, Joseph was afraid! Fear often runs the show when you are caught between a rock and a hard place.

Do not fear what? To take Mary home as your wife – to continue this betrothal, moving towards marriage. Do not fear to have Mary as your wife – “for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.” “You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” And all of this is to fulfil the prophecy – that this One, born of Mary – is “Immanuel,” which means, “God with us.”

And then comes the most shocking thing of all – “Joseph ... did as the ... Lord commanded him”!! As inconceivable as it seems – he actually does what God says.

God's Word, His message, His revelation, turned Joseph and aligned him with God's will – empowering him to do as the Lord commanded. Joseph takes Mary as his wife. There is no fear, no shame – only faith in God's Word.

Back to that prophesy from Isaiah. “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel.” This was a sign first given to Ahaz – who didn't want a sign from the Lord – but the Lord gave him one anyway. For Ahaz, it would be a sign of judgment – of destruction. But for Joseph, this descendant of David – this sign is a blessing – the fulfillment of the promised Messiah, given to his father of old.

Dearly beloved, the Lord gives signs TO YOU – with promises FOR YOU. The sign of Holy Baptism and His promises – giving you life from God as you are “born from above” – the presence of God with you (even as He was present in the womb of Mary) – chasing away your fear with His, “and I will be with you always, even unto the end of the age.”

This One, “born of the Virgin Mary” – is the Holy One, without any sin of His own or inherited from Adam – whose holy, precious blood and innocent suffering and death is “for you” – to save you from your sins. He gives His holy, precious Body and Blood to you – so that you may have life – life from God Himself.

Such is the genesis of Jesus – the birth of your Savior – and the genesis of your eternal life. So, with Joseph, and Mary – let us receive the message of the Lord in faith, saying – “let it be unto me according to your Word.” Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.