

"Christmas Control"
Matthew 1:18-25
Fourth S. in Advent
Messiah, Boerne
December 18, 2022

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Text: Matthew 1:18-25

Dear Friends in Christ:

Introduction: "The human need to 'be in control'"

- A. As human beings, we want to be in control of our lives. In fact, if it were possible, many of us would like to be in control not only of our lives but of the lives of other people as well. We consider our situation in life and then take actions that we think will benefit us and our families, friends, and interest groups, for example, the churches, schools, and community organizations we belong to. Oftentimes this not only puts us in conflict with other people and groups who are likewise looking out for their best interests, but also with God, who *is* in control of all things, working them together for the good of all people, especially His chosen people, believers in the Messiah, the Christ (Rom 8:28).
- B. Our text this morning is the Christmas story from the viewpoint of Joseph. Unlike the Christmas story in Luke, Matthew makes no mention of a census or shepherds or multitudes of angels. We'll hear about those things on Christmas Eve. Instead, he tells us about an unexpected pregnancy, a quietly planned divorce, and a dream-induced and Spirit-led change of plans by Joseph.
- C. Now, we don't know a lot about Joseph. Our text tells us that he was a descendant of David, a righteous man, that is, a believer in God's promise of the Messiah, and a thoughtful individual. We also know from other literature that he was a successful carpenter in the city of Nazareth in Galilee and that, according to custom, having successfully arranged his engagement to Mary, he was busy preparing his house to be the future home for Mary, his betrothed, after their marriage was finalized at the wedding ceremony. In other words, Joseph was the kind of man you probably hope your boys will grow up to be like and

your daughters will marry someday. It probably seemed to Joseph like he was in control of his life.

- D. But Matthew makes it abundantly clear that Joseph was not. God was in control, and always is. God was working out a much bigger story than Joseph could have imagined. That's how it is for God's people. As the famous Christian author, Eugene Peterson, writes: "When we submit our lives to what we read in scripture, we find that we are not being led to see God in our stories but our stories in God's. God is the larger context and plot in which our stories find themselves."
- E. When Joseph found out that Mary was pregnant, he realized that he was no longer in control of his life. Joseph's plans—his hopes and dreams—had to change. After considering the situation, he thought he might regain some control of his life by divorcing Mary quietly, that is, by involving only the necessary people in the divorce proceedings, so as not to bring additional shame upon Mary. But then God revealed to Joseph in a dream that *He* was in control of the situation for the good of His chosen people.
- I. We are not in control of our lives.
 - A. We also need the assurance that God is in control of the situations in which we find ourselves in life, especially during the busy Christmas season. It often seems like the more we try to manage our families and our busy holiday schedules, the more we become aware of our lack of control. This time of the year has a way of putting us in our place, which is at the mercy seat of God. Our loss of control, often including unrighteous words and actions, not only reveals our sinful nature but also our need for a loving Savior.
 - B. You see, the problem for Joseph (and for us) is that we generally think of ourselves as the central figures in our lives. This is a result of our fallen humanity. We only see life through our own two eyes, which happen to be focused on our own concerns, responsibilities, and capabilities. This leads us to act in ways that are narrowly focused and usually selfish. For example, during this season of peace and good will toward others, we are often so focused on our own situation that we neglect the needs and concerns of others. We fail to obey the Golden Rule, to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

II. God reveals His control through the Scriptures

- A. In our text, however, God opened Joseph's eyes to see something much bigger, His "Christmas control." By means of an angel in a dream, He revealed His plan of salvation for His people through Mary's child. God expanded Joseph's understanding to see how Mary's extramarital pregnancy was not due to her infidelity but, in fact, the work of the Holy Spirit.
- B. Furthermore, God revealed that He had been in control of these events for a very long time. Isaiah had foretold this miraculous birth some eight centuries earlier when he wrote: "The LORD himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (7:14). In the child born of Mary, God was coming to be with His people in the flesh. This child would be God's instrument for saving His people from their sin.
- C. Thus, by means of the angel's message delivered to Joseph in a dream, God broadened his perspective. It changed his mind and determined his course of action. Certainly still afraid, but now emboldened by the Holy Spirit, the man without control trusted God, took Mary to be his wife, and served as the adoptive father of Jesus. In doing so, Joseph fulfilled his small part in God's much bigger story.

III. By faith, we see our part in God's story

Today is one week until Christmas Day. If you haven't become aware of it yet, you're likely to become increasingly aware of your lack of control. You're not in charge of your life, much less the lives of other people and the situations in which you find yourself. This may seem like a problem, but it is actually good news. It's Good News because of the One who is in "Christmas control." He is Jesus, "God with us." Even more than that, Jesus has come to be "God *FOR* us." Through Joseph's adoptive son, God is saving his people from their sin. By means of your baptism, you are now a part of God's people, and you have the privilege of proclaiming this promise to others for their comfort and assurance, too.

Conclusion: "Christmas Control"

- A. Dear friends in Christ, as things didn't go according to the plans Joseph had made, so things may not go according to your plans for this Christmas either. Remember, however, the God who is in "Christmas control."

- B. He cares for you and sent His only-begotten Son to be born, to live, and to die for you, so that by believing in Him, you may have life in His name, the saving name of Jesus.
- C. God grant you the Holy Spirit, so that you may see your lives as small parts of God's bigger story, trust His promises, and serve others in Jesus' name. Amen.