



December 4, 2022 – “Fearless Faith” – Matthew 1:18-25

## OPEN

Advent is the first season of the liturgical church calendar year. The use of Advent wreaths and candles dates back to the sixteenth century German Lutherans. Traditionally, the candles are purple (symbolizing repentance, fasting); pink (symbolizing joy, triumph); and white (symbolizing Christ’s purity, holiness, restoration). Please get a copy of the [Advent Pamphlet](#).

Of course, good symbols help us in worship and ministry. But Christmas is also a time to “go and tell it on the mountain”. There are three opportunities at our church this season to reach out to our community:

- December 11 [Neighbourhood Christmas](#)
- December 18 [Christmas Banquet](#)
- December 24 [Carols & Candlelight](#)

The film “[Power Game: The Story Of Qatar](#)” highlights corruption associated with the World Cup. Over 240 billion was spent to host the tournament. There were many deaths of migrant workers. Reporters explain that the event is “sports washing” in which states use athletic events to hide crimes and create geopolitical influence. And commentators believe that once the first whistle sounded, the problems are forgotten.



Mary and Joseph were caught up in the geopolitical events of their time. As poor, rural people they could easily have been forgotten and their lives covered by the sands of time. But we mark the story of Christmas with them cast in leading roles. Their story is remarkable and one of **fearless faith**.

## DIG

What is the **Promise of Christmas**? That is the question of our current sermon series. Last Sunday our theme was **hope**. Whether the first or second Advent of Jesus, the Christian’s hope is certain and sure.

In addition to hope, Christmas promises us **faith**. What does it mean to wait on God in readiness and expectation? What do we do when our quiet lives are rocked by instability and threat?

Please read **Matthew 1:18-25**. The story seems simple enough, and familiar. But there is great significance in this short “origin story” of the Messiah. Specifically, what does it teach about faith? Let’s look at this passage from two perspectives.

### Perspective One: two lives linked

In his book *The Call* (Thomas Nelson, 2003, 93) Os Guinness tells the story of French protestants (Huguenots) in the village of Le Chambon. They worked together to rescue more than five thousand Jewish children in WWII from the death camps. He writes,

The story of Le Chambon is a stirring but all too rare example of the church of Christ in action as a corporate body in the modern world. It is also a reminder of a dimension of calling that modern believers tend to forget – the call of Jesus is personal but not purely individual; Jesus summons his followers not only to an individual calling but also to a corporate calling.

When followers of Jesus are linked together in true unity, humility is nurtured and “super-starism” is avoided. Mary and Joseph were not self-made, spiritual super-stars. Mary was addressed “favored one” (Luke 1:28) but the grammar highlights **imputed**, not **innate** goodness.

Joseph was not sinless, though he was a “righteous man” (Matthew 1:19). What is more, God intertwined their spiritual journey of faith.

### **1. Linked by lineage**

The genealogy of Matthew 1:1-17 begins with Abraham, following the line through David to Jesus through the family of Joseph – rooting Jesus’ lineage in **Israel**. The genealogy of Luke 3:23-38 traces Mary’s family back through David to Adam – rooting Jesus’ lineage with **humanity**.

The emphasis is upon Jesus being of the line of David, though not Joseph’s physical son (see Matthew 1:17; Luke 3:23). And every one of those who were linked together, by God’s grace, reveal that the walking by faith is a team sport!

## 2. *Linked by marriage*

Joseph and Mary were engaged. In Jewish practice, this was a yearlong *kiddushin*. They were in a binding contract of marriage, but Mary remained in her father's home; she remained a virgin (Isaiah 7:14; Luke 1:27,34). Later would be the *huppa* phase when Joseph would bring Mary to his father's home, host a wedding celebration, and the consummate their marriage. God called Mary and Joseph to trust Him **together!**

## 3. *Linked by challenge*

The third way Joseph and Mary's lives were intertwined was the way in which their world was shaken. They were rocked by an unexpected pregnancy. After the initial shock Joseph was considering giving Mary a bill of divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1) and "*send her away secretly*" (v.19).

Additionally, their lives were destabilized by the census decreed by Augustus (Luke 2:1) and the summons to Bethlehem. God bound together Mary and Joseph in their journey of faith.

Laura Story sings a powerful song, [God Of Every Story](#) – "*He's the God of every story, He sees each tear that falls. We may not understand but one thing is certain. He is faithful, He's a faithful God.*" Without question, the story of Mary and Joseph was unique. But God is also God over our stories – whatever they might be, He will be faithful.

### **Perspective Two: two lessons lived**

Joseph and Mary provide a living demonstration faith. Given their challenges, how did trust in God make sense? In verse 21 we read "*she will give birth...He will save*". The central theological theme of Matthew's gospel is that God's purposes are fulfilled in Messiah – "*all this took place to fulfill*" is used ten times.

## 1. *Overcoming faith*

What threats did Mary and Joseph overcome? They certainly faced shame and dishonor. Mary could have been stoned to death (see Deuteronomy 22:23-24). No wonder Joseph was told "*do not be afraid*" (v.20).

In this story we see overcoming or victorious faith, described in **I John 5:1-5**. In ***The Promise of Christmas*** (Our Daily Bread, 2021, 22) John Greco offers two observations about Joseph's faith.

Joseph shows himself to be a man strong enough to trust the Lord, even when doing so might prove costly.... His character was carved out over time...long before...he found out Mary was expecting a child.

## 2. *Obedient faith*

Verse 24 tells us that "*Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him*". This meant following through with the marriage, but not having relations with her until she gave birth. His obedience including naming the baby Jesus (legally confirming Him as "son of David"). We also know from Luke 1:38 that Mary was obedient – "*I am the Lord's servant*". John Greco (19) writes about Mary,

Though we may be tempted to believe that, like the rugged, never-say-die Mary of our imaginations, we must bite our bottom lips in fury and make a way for God in this world, such is not our role in the story. As with Mary, it takes a miracle for God to include is in the story at all. Our joy is simply to embrace the miracle, listen for God's voice, and obey.

### REFLECT

Sallie Burnett wrote in ***Forbes*** (July 2019), "[Taking A Stand: How Brands Are Tackling Social Issues](#)"...

Today's consumers are belief-driven. This means that, unlike traditional consumers, who may have prioritized price or convenience, they want to see brands that improve the world along with making a profit....

Is your life value driven? Is your life lived by fearless faith? Or do our lives become defined or directed by the challenges coming our way?

What we learn from Mary and Joseph, is that life can be lived with confident trust in God?

Is Cornerstone faith-driven? Read carefully through **I John 5:1-5** and assess how well we...

...love one another?

...obey God's commands?

...live with implicit trust in God?