

“Waiting is bad.” At least it seems many believe this by the way they talk and act, including me. We do all we can to avoid waiting. When we must wait, we get can huffy, impatient, and even angry. I get it. I don’t enjoy waiting. I was tested in this area this past week on Tuesday, when it was -70 in the morning, I had to wait. I waited at the light coming down the hill from the hospital on Boudreau Road and Bellerose by the Police Station. I was looking at the police station to my right as I waited at the light. I was the third car in a row of cars waiting for a green light. The light turned green and the 2 cars in front of me begin to move. Suddenly the light turned yellow again after maybe 4 or 5 seconds. So I had to stop.

Why? The Fire station red light is flashing. It must be linked to the traffic lights on that intersection. So a fire truck must be coming. But no fire truck came. No ambulance. Just nothing. Yet this seemed to completely mess up the traffic light sequence. The cars going the opposite direction to me got an endless green light. They get so much green that there’s no car in sight going that direction.

Meanwhile, we southbound folks continue to wait. The people on Bellerose wait. We all have red lights. Then finally the Bellerose people get to go. They go through their left turn cycle. And straight through cycle. I pray that the fire stations light does not begin flashing again. Maybe it’s a cold weather malfunction.

My light finally turned green. I take off to try to make it through lest it turn yellow again. Then when passing the fire station, I see a guy re-parking an ambulance. Maybe he accidentally got too close to the sensor that sets off their red light to initiate this red-light cycle that caused me to wait. I confess that my thoughts towards him were not filled with Christian compassion at that moment.

So, in a way, I failed that waiting test. And I acted like waiting is bad. But could waiting sometimes be good for us and others? We wait to open Christmas presents until Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. If we didn’t, we’d lose that special part of Christmas. Waiting at a red light can save our lives. If we

ignore it we could get in a serious accident. Yet it is still hard to wait. But what if we knew that it might bring good? Maybe we could tolerate it better and even embrace it.

Today, we're going to look at the possibility that good can come from waiting on the Lord. We're going to think about how Joseph, Jesus earthly father, had to wait because of the Christmas story.

I pray that God might use His word today to increase your confidence that He can bring good out of times of waiting. If you have not waited on God in some area, I pray you will sense His forgiveness and grace He offers you. We will conclude by looking at one way we can gain strength to wait on the Lord. Please find Matthew 1:18-25. It's on page 678 in the Bibles here.

### **Matthew 1:18-25 (ESV)**

**<sup>18</sup> Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. <sup>20</sup> But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." <sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:**

**<sup>23</sup> "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel"**

(which means, God with us). <sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, <sup>25</sup> but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Last week we looked at the account of the angel Gabriel appearing to Mary. The angel reveals that she is favored by God. She will bear a son. She asks, "How will this be since I am a virgin?" The angel replies "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." So, this will be a supernatural conception. Mary accepts this and is willing to be the Lord's servant. She becomes pregnant. Then she goes to visit her relative Elizabeth who is in her 6<sup>th</sup> month of pregnancy. That too is a miracle since she was barren and advanced in years. After 3 months with Elizabeth, Mary returns to Nazareth.

She's pregnant and she's betrothed. We saw last week that you entered a legal agreement with betrothal. Then the couple was legally married. Yet the groom would not take the bride home to be his

wife for about a year. This would ensure that the woman was not already pregnant. Then the wedding would take place. The groom came to the bride's family home and brought his bride back to his place. They would feast. Then he would take her into his home, and they would begin the fullness of married life. But if she did get pregnant apart from her husband before the wedding, he could divorce her and be released from his betrothal obligations.

This brings us to the account in Matthew. He immediately tells us his purpose in verse 18. "Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way." Matthew will not take us to the manger. He will not talk about shepherds or the angels. He wants to explain how Jesus was conceived and born. Why?

Matthew writes to a Jewish audience. What do you think was the talk in that Jewish community of Nazareth about Mary? She comes home pregnant after a 3-month absence. Then Joseph will marry her. But everyone knows he's not the father. In those days they called children born out of wedlock "illegitimate." This label will follow Jesus into his adult life. In fact, when Jesus disputes with some religious leaders, they seem to throw this charge at Him. In John 8:41 they say, "We were not born of sexual immorality. Or to put it another way, "we were not born illegitimate like you were Jesus." Matthew might have witnessed this exchange. So he determines to explain exactly how the birth of Jesus came about for a Jewish audience that may have heard this rumor.

**How did the birth of Jesus Christ come about? Through the powerful work of God and the patient obedience of Joseph and Mary.** Matthew immediately goes to the supernatural conception in verse 18. "When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit." So Matthew acknowledges that Joseph was not Jesus' biological father. But he also refutes the charge that some other human male was the father. It was the powerful work of God through the Holy Spirit that caused this conception. This is one of the greatest miracles done by God. He somehow puts the divine and human together. Somehow, he protects the baby from the sin nature of his parents. So far from illegitimate this child is holy in the fullest sense.

But at some point, Joseph discovers that Mary is pregnant. We don't know if she told him. We don't know if the news spread through the town on the gossip vine. He concludes that she has been

unfaithful. In verse 19, Matthew tells us Joseph is a just man. He wants to honor the Lord with his life. He thinks Mary does not want this. So he will not go forward with this marriage. He will divorce her. But he was unwilling to put her to shame. He could have publicly accused her resulting in major disgrace for her and her family. In a small, quick, private ceremony with 2 or 3 witnesses, the betrothal would be dissolved and they would go their separate ways.

But the power of God intervenes again. God sends an angel to Joseph in his dreams. The angel addresses Joseph's fear. Then the angel explains it. Verse 20 – "For that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit." The angel gives two commands to Joseph. One – Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife." That would involve going through with the wedding ceremony and taking her to his home. Then in verse 21 the angel commands Joseph to name the child Jesus. If a father named the child it meant he recognized the child as his own. The angel ties the name Jesus to saving people from their sins. This info is enough to convince Joseph. So the birth of Jesus Christ came about through the powerful work of God. The miraculous conception and the angelic messenger.

The birth of Jesus Christ also came about because of the patient obedience of Joseph and Mary. Last week, we considered some of the cost to Mary. Yet she responds with obedience and submission to the Lord. Joseph responds in the same way. Matthew reveals 3 actions of Joseph after the dream.

First, verse 24, he awoke and "did what the Lord commanded and took his wife. " That means they did have the wedding. Maybe it was a subdued and small affair because of the community's suspicion. Joseph likely does not have the wedding he's dreamt about. We don't hear anything about his parents and their thoughts about the whole thing. But Joseph goes ahead anyway.

Second, in verse 25, "He knew her not until she had given birth to a son." That means he did not have sex with her until after Jesus was born. But he took her into his house. Since they were poor, they likely slept in the same bed. Yet they both refrain from relations because of their desire to honor the Lord. Matthew includes this detail to address the question about Joseph fathering Jesus.

Third, Joseph names Jesus accepting the child as his own. He will take this child entrusted to them by God as his own.

Now let's think about how Joseph had to wait because of the Christmas story. We know he had to wait was in having relations with Mary. Remember he is a young man with normal desires. She sleeps right beside him. He thought that when he took Mary into his home, he would experience the fullness of marriage right away. But he has to wait and adjust to this new reality.

Another way Joseph had to wait was for the recovery of a good reputation. Some of their friends or family may have supported them. But this is an honor and shame culture. If you did something shameful or were thought to have done something shameful, the community excluded you. They would not socialize with you or even talk with you. They might insist you move to another part of town. Maybe the local priest shunned them. Maybe they were banned from the synagogue. This all may have happened to a devout God-fearing man like Joseph who did nothing wrong. Yet he now lives under suspicion.

Joseph also had to wait for wisdom on how to raise the Son of God. Talk about a heavy responsibility. I love the scene in the film "Nativity" where Joseph and Mary talk about their fears on their journey to Bethlehem. I think she asks him "are you afraid?" He answers, "Yes." He asks her, "are you afraid." She answers, "Yes." Then he says something like "I wonder if I'll be able to teach him anything!" Those of you who are parents might remember the months leading up to your first child. Remember the anxieties. Then when you have the baby, the questions about "what do we do in this situation?" Joseph would have to wait for wisdom from the heavenly father to guide him as earthly father of Jesus.

Yet Joseph also received a tremendous privilege. This poor tradesman in a far away village gets the responsibility of caring for God's Son. Through Joseph's life, we can learn about the good that comes from waiting on God.

**What good can come from waiting on God? We can experience deep soul satisfaction through participation in God's eternal purposes.** Joseph got to participate in God's eternal purpose of bringing His Son in the world to save people from their sins. God's eternal purposes include things like shaping us into Christ's likeness. Romans 8:29 – God aims to conform us to the likeness of His Son. God's eternal purpose includes reuniting Himself with His people to recover from the fracture in the

Garden of Eden. So Jesus' coming will show us Immanuel, God with us. God's purposes include entrusting His people with influencing other lives for His glory. He wants us to bring His love, His purposes and His life to those in our little world. He wants us to love Him and Love others with His Love. Whatever we do, he wants us to do it in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for His glory.

When we think about these eternal purposes of God, they can fuel our everyday activities with purpose. It can also help us as we wait on God. Think about having and raising kids. To do this, parents must wait on some of their own goals and passions for years. But investing fully in the hard work of raising your kids can lead to equipping them for life in the world. You can experience deep soul satisfaction of participating in God's eternal purpose of shaping a young life to know Him.

Staying faithful and persevering in marriage involves waiting on God. Instead of becoming impatient and saying we're going to find excitement with someone else, we depend on God to grow and change with our spouse. He uses them to change and shape us where we need to grow. If we cooperate with God, we will experience maturity and growth because of our spouse.

Some of you have had to make very difficult choices about a marriage or relationships with children or family. Yet you have sought and trusted the Lord to take these steps. You went through hard times and sadness. There was deep pain. Now you wait on God to bring you through and sustain you until a new season of joy arrives.

Pregnant moms must wait on God through a difficult pregnancy. Moms endure a lot to bring a child into the world. I remember in one of Lori's pregnancies there was a time she had 7 health challenges. Yet she wouldn't take certain pain medications to protect the baby. It was amazing to see this sacrifice of love. Then came the joy of the birth.

Some of you have waited on God through the journey of singleness. You could have had a relationship if you'd compromised your faith or your convictions. Yet you said no to honor the Lord.

Some of you wait on God for the salvation of a loved one. You have continued to pray and hope that they will turn to Christ. You have not yet seen this. Yet you have not abandoned your faith. The

Lord hears the prayers of His people. You might be surprised to discover who you meet in heaven that is there partially because of your prayers.

Some of you have waited on God through tragedy. You could have cursed God – like Job's wife encouraged him to do. Yet you have continued to live one day at a time, trusting the Lord to see you through. Your testimony and example have been used by the Lord to encourage others to keep going. For some of these, we will only see the fruit of waiting on God in eternity. Yet the Scriptures tell us again and again that waiting on God is valuable, good, helpful.

**How can we keep focused while we wait and act on God's eternal purposes?**

**Look to Jesus:**

**As an inspiration for perseverance in waiting. Hebrews 12:1-2 (ESV) 12** Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup>looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus persevered through the agony of the cross by looking at the joy beyond it. He also despised or scorned the shame of the cross. This does not mean that he sneered at the shame or mocked it. It means he thought it of little weight compared the joy that was on the other side. You and I need that same approach when we wait. We must look beyond the waiting to the joy or the promise on the other side. Yes, the shaming hurts. But it's nothing compared to the joy on the other side of waiting on the Lord.

Look to Jesus **for an example of waiting**. He waited until he was 30 years old before he began his public ministry. Luke 2:23 – Jesus, when he began his ministry was about thirty years of age.

He waited for His Father to glorify Him and did not run ahead despite Satan's invitation. Matthew 4:8-9 – "Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, "all these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only

shall you serve.” But Jesus waited and went through the agony of the cross. Philippians 2:9-11 – “Therefore, God has highly exalted him and given him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”

**Look to Jesus for forgiveness for not waiting and help to move forward.** Hebrews 4:16 – Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

**Look to Jesus for very present help during waiting.** Matthew 11:28-30 – “Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” I think that Jesus’ yoke would include teaching and power to wait on the Lord.

**For what you’ve been waiting for all your life.** Forgiveness; Reconciliation with God; A purpose higher than yourself; A new beginning in a forever life with God. That can happen when you receive Him as Your Saviour and Lord and begin the journey of life together with Him. What happened with Joseph waited had 4 boys and an unnamed number of girls; reputation his devout life is preserved in the Bible. His wisdom for raising Jesus must have been okey for Jesus learned obedience.

The birth of Jesus Christ came about by the powerful work of God and the patient obedience of Joseph and Mary. Through them we learn that good can come from waiting on God. We can experience deep soul satisfaction through participation in God’s eternal purposes. So I want to invite you to reflect on this and meet the Lord in prayer about this as we prepare to receive the Lord’s Supper.