

Date: December 21, 2025 (Advent 4)

1. Texts: Isaiah 7:10-16; Ps. 80:1-7, 16-18; Romans 1:1-7; Matthew 1:18-25.
2. Subject: discipleship.
3. Topic: surrender to the will of God.
4. Aim: illustrate model.
5. Proposition: "Mary and Joseph together provide a pattern for our future ahead."

A JOINT MODEL AND PATTERN

Mary of Nazareth gets all the praise and adoration. She's proclaimed as the righteous mother of Jesus. She's a heroine to millions and serves as a direct connection to God. Mary is viewed as more approachable and less intimidating than disciples like Peter and Paul. Mary is beloved as the representative of the gentler, kinder and more loving aspects of the Christian faith.

All this loving devotion to Mary leaves poor Joseph of Nazareth out in the cold. His great claim to fame is that he didn't have Mary stoned to death, nor did he divorce her.

It will be worth our time to look at both Mary *and* Joseph to see what they have to say about our futures.

Mary is an example of submission to the will of God. When the archangel Gabriel confronts her with the proclamation of the virgin birth, Mary responds with, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."¹

Mary is also a model of faithful reflection. After the proclamation of the shepherds, "Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart."²

Then, in a quirky little incident, Mary proves that she's willing to trust God for the sake of people and their relationships.

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of

¹ Luke 1:38.

² Luke 2:19.

Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."³

She trusts God even in a situation as mundane as a wedding with no wine.

So, Mary is our model for submission, reflection and trust in God. Now, what about Joseph?

Interestingly, but not surprisingly, Joseph, too, is a model for submission.

Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do 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 as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ... When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.⁴

Joseph did as God directed even though that subjected him to public ridicule.

But we also learn that Joseph was a righteous man. But not righteous in a legalistic way.

The engagement ceremony was presided over by a rabbi and the documents witnessed by leading men in the town. All that remained to further cement the relationship between the two families was the wedding itself.

So, Joseph would have been within his rights to not only divorce Mary, but once her pregnancy began to show, it would have been legal to have her stoned. But Joseph righteousness was tempered with compassion. He didn't want to

³ John 2:1-5.

⁴ Matthew 1:19-21, 24-25.

humiliate her. They would just separate, and Mary could go live with her cousin, Elizabeth.

Joseph is the model for submission, righteousness and compassion. Mary is the model for submission, reflection and trust in God. These are the parents who were able to raise Jesus ben Joseph so that he could minister as the long-awaited Messiah.

With these two models we now have patterns we can use to fashion our future lives. Our faith will be molded by submission to the will of God, reflection upon God's proclamations, righteous living, trusting God to be God and dealing compassionately with those around us.

It would be far too much and far too long a sermon to give practical examples of submission, reflection, righteous living, trust in God and living in compassion. That's because all of these characteristics of faith are contextual. How you live according to them will depend upon your circumstances and the circumstances of the people with whom you come into contact. There is no formula for living faithfully. There is no script for faith. It is all improv. You work faith out day by day, relationship by relationship. But you will have to set yourself up in advance.

Prepare yourself to submit to God's will by asking God what he wants to do with you. Read Scripture to see how others submitted to God's will. Listen for God's "still, small voice". Learn to expect God to speak to you.

An essential part of this is reflecting on the proclamations of God. Work on conforming your life to the principles we uncover in the Old and New Testaments. It's not easy, because their circumstances are nothing like ours. But pondering what God is saying to you is certainly part of surrendering to him.

We also have to figure out what righteous living means in today's world. It likely does not mean overturning the tables holding the Christmas baking for the annual bake sale. But it might mean fighting for justice and truth for the sake of

the oppressed. “Righteous living” means “living rightly according to God’s evaluation”. We have to work that out in our circumstances.

The same is true with trusting God. To trust is to rely on someone to be who they present themselves to be. God presents himself as loving, gracious, righteous, just and compassionate. We rely on him to be who he is, and so we act accordingly. That’s trust–reliance lived out in word and deed.

But such trust must always be contextual. It is one thing for someone in northern Alberta to trust God to be God, loving, gracious, righteous, just and compassionate. It is quite another thing to do that in Gaza City or Kyiv or Bahri, Sudan. Trust is contextual.

While living and loving compassionately is also contextual, this is slightly different because of the larger element of choice in compassion. Compassion is all about our response to others. We choose to live compassionately. We decide that compassion is going to mark our choices and relationships with others. Our context may make that decision easier or harder, but compassion flows from our hearts out to others. We choose compassion.

Mary, with her gentle acceptance of God’s plan, wins the affection and devotion of millions. Joseph gets honourable mention with a participation medal. But their combined lessons teach us a lot about living out our faith in our daily lives. Their examples of submission, reflection, righteous living, trust in God and loving compassionately lay out a path into God’s future for us. Today, let’s choose that path for ourselves and live according to their pattern.

AMEN.