



Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Matthew 1.18-25

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I. Introduction to this Series and Study

This week we continue our Advent series Home for the Holidays, engaging the Father(s) of Jesus.

II. Connecting With One Another

When have you had to be courageous – for one reason or another?

III. Study the Text

- a. Last week Pastor Paul helped us think through Jesus' radical resumé in Matthew 1.1-17 – one which included the “mothers of Jesus” who were outsiders in many ways, due to their gender, culture, race, and morality (click gdshp.ch/2h34RkB if you missed the sermon and/or study guide).

In addition to highlighting how God includes outsiders, in these verses Matthew also evokes great heroes of Israel's history. In doing so, “Matthew reminds his audience of the ultimate hero of Israel's history to whom all these stories pointed... so much is Jesus the focal point of history that his ancestors depend on him for their meaning.” The author of Hebrews has the same idea in mind in 11-12.3.

Spend a few minutes thinking through your favorite stories in the Hebrew Scriptures. How do they find their fulfillment in Jesus?

- b. Read Matthew 1.18-19.

The word “pledged” in verse 18 may conjure up our modern day practice of engagement, though this first century version was much more serious: “It was a formal pre-nuptial contract entered into before witnesses, which gave the man legal rights over the girl and which could only be broken by a formal process of divorce.”

One author explains: “Under these circumstances, Joseph would be righteous in divorcing Mary; to fail to do so would violate law and custom, would bring enduring reproach on his household and would constitute embracing as wife one who had betrayed him in the worst manner conceivable in his culture.” As such, Joseph is righteous for seeking to dissolve their pre-nuptial contract quietly, thereby minimizing additional shame and suffering.

- c. Read Matthew 1.20-21.

While we often remember the angelic messengers who visit Mary and the shepherds, we may forget that Joseph received a message from these heavenly beings, too.

What does Joseph learn in this interaction?

Imagine being in Joseph's shoes: What would you do with this information? Why?

- d. Interestingly, the angel declares to Joseph, "do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife."

Why is this statement important? Why would Joseph be afraid? Would you?

- e. Tim Keller writes, "...if Joseph marries her, everybody in that shame-and-honor society will know that this child was not born nine or ten months after they got married; they will know she was already pregnant. That would mean either Joseph and Mary had sex before marriage or she was unfaithful to him, and as a result, they are going to be second-class citizens forever. So the message is, 'If Jesus Christ comes into your life, you are going to kiss your stellar reputation goodbye.'"

We can see how this would affect Joseph's life, but how could following Jesus prompt us to "kiss our stellar reputation goodbye"?

If this is true, that following Jesus will upset our social standing, what character trait do Christians need to exhibit?

- f. Joseph's story reveals at least three kinds of courage required of those who claim the name Jesus. The first: Courage to endure the world's disdain.

Imagine the accusations leveled at Joseph for *not* divorcing Mary! While we do not experience the physical persecution common to many around the world, followers of Jesus in America increasingly receive ridicule and contempt for holding to historical, orthodox Christian beliefs.

When have you experienced such treatment for your faith? How did you respond?

Would you respond differently if you could do it over again?

Time permitting, meditate on these passages: Matthew 5.10-12, John 15.18-20, Romans 12.14, and 2nd Timothy 3.10-17

- g. A second kind of courage: Our right to self-determination. Notice, the angel gives Joseph specific instructions on naming his adopted son. "In patriarchal culture it was the father's absolute right to name his child. He had complete rights over his children, and naming was a sign of his control over the family. The angel, however, takes that away. By refusing to let him name Jesus, the angel is saying, 'If Jesus is in your life, you are not his manager. The child who is about to be born is *your* manager.'"

When we come to Jesus we often have conditions: "I'll obey you if..."

But Jesus declares we must "deny ourselves and take up our cross" (see Luke 9.23). Tim Keller writes, "Only if we give him our supreme allegiance will we get what we need most from him. We need him to name *us*. He made us. He knows who we are, what we were made for, what will fit us."

When have you come to Jesus with conditions?

Where do you need courage to give up your right to self-determination?

- h. A third kind of courage: The courage to admit you're a sinner. Jesus is sent to "save his people from their sins." This offer of forgiveness continues today, but to receive it we must have the courage to admit we need it!

Romans 3.23 tell us "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," but only some admit their guilt and our need for forgiveness. Why? Because it takes courage.

Where do you need courage to confess the ways you fall short of God's glory?

IV. Pray

- a. Lift up the worship gatherings offered at Good Shepherd over the next few weeks, that God would draw new believers unto Him through the good news of Jesus' birth,
- b. Pray for yourself, your friends and your church family – that we might be courageous in the midst of a culture that increasingly mocks orthodox Christian faith,
- c. Ask God to guide the leaders of Good Shepherd as they lead us into the future He has for us.