

**“Fear Not”**  
**Matthew 1:18-25**

Please turn in your Bibles to **Matthew 1:18-25** this morning. I invite you stand with me as we honor God’s Word by reading this passage aloud.

Christmas, it seems that the older I get the faster it comes. **Is it just me or do you feel the same way?** There are so many events and activities going on. Making lists of things to do before Christmas. Trying to fit in all the family and friend invitations. Shopping for presents. Baking. Sampling the baking. Decorating. Choir rehearsals. Choir recitals. Attending school events for kids – my own and yours. Preparing and cleaning for company. Cleaning up after company. Traveling to celebrate with family.

It may be that you may have a house full of guests on one or more occasions in your home at this time of the year more so than at other times. They have been invited to enjoy the celebration and wonder of Christmas over a dinner or a dessert.

Tim Clinton, President of the American Association of Christian Counselors speaks about two guests at this most festive time of the year. They are unusual and unwanted and he tells us to watch out for them. They come at unexpected times, unannounced and with no invitation. Most of the time their arrival is inconvenient. Maybe they have visited your home already this year, but mark my word, they have a tendency to show up year after year during Christmas and at multiple times.

The two unwanted guests he refers to have names and you have probably met them. You know them as stress and anxiety. He continues by noting that

they usually show up as a result of what he calls the three “R”s”.

The first “R” is *Relationships*. The holidays for some reason seem to increase the level of tension in families. Conflict between family members can escalate the stress and anxiety that we feel.

Tuesday night is trash night. This past week it was around 10:00 at night when I began the weekly trek to the roadside with that week’s collection of bags. It was raining and Robyn had just gotten home from some shopping she needed to do. She was on the phone with her sister while I was wrestling the trash out to the curb. One bag was particularly heavy. I had already re-bagged it twice because our dog had chewed a hole in the corner to allow its contents to spew out. The trash was now in its third bag as I muscled it down the drive when the unthinkable happened, the bottom gave out and I had to pick it all up again. She told her sister that I was grumpy.

Stress and conflict in families around Christmas seem to peak this time of year. Paul advises in **Romans 12:18** that **“if possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with everyone.”** That puts the responsibility squarely on each person’s shoulders to minimize the risk of stress and anxiety from entering the home and creating greater conflict within the family. Don’t let the unwanted guests of stress and anxiety wreak havoc in your relationships

The second “R” is *Resources*. You may already be on a shoestring budget trying to make ends meet from month to month. Maybe for you there always seems to be more month than money and along comes Christmas and the list of things you feel you need to buy for the holidays increases the stress and anxiety level a notch or two.

According to the American Consumer Credit Council, the average American spends \$935 on

Christmas each year and carries an average credit card debt of \$8,562.

In a Gallup survey they found that 60% of women find shopping and spending money a joyful experience. 36% found that it was a chore leaving 4% too busy to answer the survey because they were out shopping either joyfully or otherwise.

On the other hand, 50% of men find Christmas shopping to be joyful, while 44% said it was a chore and 6% were too busy eating all the goodies to answer the survey.

In today's economy and with the fiscal cliff looming ever closer resources are already stretched thin. The likelihood of our taxes increasing in the next year coupled with the rising cost of living keep us on edge. It's a stressful time for many. Add to that trying to keep all the people on your gift list happy can cause anxiety. The emotional and financial drain can be enormous.

Tim Clinton suggests that we consider anew whose birthday we are celebrating and why we celebrate it as a way of putting things in perspective.

The third "R" he suggests is *Routine*. Christmas time adds extra demands besides the normal routine. Putting up decorations outside when it's cold or rainy or both is stressful. Moving furniture around to put up the indoor decorations is time consuming when you could be doing other chores. Fitting in extra trips to the Mall, keeping the house cleaner than normal because of company coming over, getting out of your normal nutritional routine with all the holiday goodies and a lack of rest can make a person not so jolly. Especially during the holidays we need to take care of ourselves by getting proper rest, eating right and making sure that all those other added things don't nudge out time with the Lord. After all it's His birthday we celebrate. So don't push Him aside.

As I read Matthew's account of the Christmas story, there is one other unwanted guest that appears all too often. This unwelcome guest has been around since the dawn of civilization. It's evident throughout history and it's evident in the Christmas story.

Notice again what Matthew records in **v. 20**. **"But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.'"**

I would suggest that a third unwelcome guest that shows up in our homes and in our hearts to some degree is fear.

As we ponder the Christmas story, let's focus on that verse as it relates to the words of the angel to Joseph – don't be afraid.

The passage reminds me of two things:

Joseph's fear was aroused

Joseph's fear was answered

## I. JOSEPH'S FEAR WAS AROUSED

We aren't told when Joseph learned that his fiancée Mary was pregnant. Did she tell him before she went to the country to stay with her cousin Elizabeth? Did she wait until she returned home? Maybe she needed some sage advice. Shortly after the announcement to her by the angel she arrived at the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth sometime following the 6<sup>th</sup> month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. Mary may have stayed there for the months leading up to the birth of John the Baptist. We're unsure about how long she was there, but sooner or later she had to return and face all the finger pointing and name calling. Sooner or later she would have to tell Joseph, the man she was engaged to. What would he think? He was such a godly man. Surely the news would be difficult.

Engagement in that culture in those days was binding. It was a legal contract that had been made and usually lasted about a year before the consummation of the marriage took place. For all intents and purposes they were considered married with the exception that they did not live together yet. It was a way to demonstrate fidelity.

However he heard, he now faced a very difficult decision. What should he do about this engagement? What would you have done?

Matthew records information that Joseph was not yet privy to. Why the angel didn't tell Joseph and Mary the news at the same time that she was going to be the mother of the Messiah we will never know. It would have made sense to me to do it that way. Maybe the Lord wanted Joseph to learn to trust him more even in the things that don't make sense. That's good advice for us as well.

We have the privilege of reading about the events of the virgin birth so that everything is tied together neatly. God wants us to be clear about how it all took place. Matthew also wanted his audience to understand with clarity about what he is going to share so that there would be no mistaking it. Matthew wrote his gospel primarily with a Jewish audience in mind. They would read it and ponder the prophecies related to it given in the Old Testament. He wanted them to understand that this was to fulfill what had been written earlier, as a matter of fact 600 years earlier. He was showing them that the promised Messiah born of a virgin written about by Isaiah had come.

So he wrote that **"she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit."** Joseph didn't know that. From his viewpoint there was only one way to get pregnant and it wasn't by him. He had to give this some serious thought about what to do.

According to the law found in **Deuteronomy 22:23-24** she could be stoned to death.

Though not stated directly, that he loved Mary deeply is evident in the text. In verse 19 it states that he was a righteous man and didn't want to publicly humiliate or embarrass her. He was a strong follower of God and lived in a right relationship with the Lord wanting to be obedient in his actions. He had high moral and ethical standards. Logically the best course of action in his mind was to quietly divorce her by sending her away. In time people would find out what had happened but Joseph perhaps thought that this course of action would have minimal impact or ramifications on Mary. By then he hoped that the backlash would have died down.

That he deeply loved her is also evident in verse 20. Matthew records that he considered his options. It's

a word that means to give serious thought to, to examine or look at carefully or to think about in order to make a decision. I'm sure he thought through all the options to their conclusion and the least damaging to Mary was to divorce her quietly.

It was after he had taken time to ponder his options when the Lord's angel came to visit him. He presented Joseph with yet another option. **"Don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife."** Maybe he had thought about it, but didn't seriously consider it because of all the tongue wagging they would have to endure. People wouldn't understand. Maybe they didn't want to understand. It can be difficult to change a person's mind when they have a strong opinion. Taking her as his wife would in the minds of the townspeople confirm his guilt and he would bear the same shame as her. Among the number of things that could have been legally done, it looks like the path he was leaning to was divorcing her.

In his deliberation Joseph shows us the depth of his godly character and love for Mary that he was very concerned about her reputation and what would happen to her.

Notice though, the words of the angel who came to Joseph in a dream. **"Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife."**

Fear is defined as a feeling of anxiety and agitation caused by the presence or nearness of danger, evil, pain, dread, terror, fright, apprehension. It doesn't even have to be the thing itself, just the fear that it might happen. A person might be fearful when speaking in public or a person might be fearful just thinking about speaking in public.

The word used here by the angel is the Greek transliteration *phobew* from which we get our English word *phobia*. Initially it meant alarm or fright but also came to mean to flee or run away from.

The information we are given by the angel is that of the options he must have considered, he was afraid to take Mary as his wife or he was afraid of what might happen to Mary.

Fear can cause us to react too quickly or not react at

all. It can cause us to be rash in our decisions or to be paralyzed into not making any decision. Joseph was still wondering what to do when he received the angelic visit. He was perhaps even fearful of making the wrong decision.

As I said earlier, fear has been a part of civilization from the beginning. Man had lived for some time in sweet relationship with God. Everything was peaceful in the garden. They met regularly to talk, until the man and his wife disobeyed God and took the forbidden fruit. When God came as normal to visit with them, they heard him coming and hid. God called to them and eventually they came out of hiding. Now, God knew where they were, but man did not. He had never been in this condition before and Genesis says that he told God who was afraid.

In **Genesis 15:1** God told Abraham not to be afraid. Later on God told Isaac not to be afraid.

He told Jacob's family not to be afraid to move down to Egypt.

Moses told Israel not to be afraid to possess the land or to be afraid in battle. God would be with them if they were obedient.

God told Joshua not to be afraid.

David told Solomon not to be afraid to lead as king. When the women came and found the tomb empty where Jesus had been buried an angel told them not to be afraid.

Jesus told His disciples not to be afraid.

In **Luke 1:13** the angel told Zechariah not to be afraid.

In **Luke 1:30** the same angel told Mary not to be afraid.

And in our passage the angel told Joseph not to be afraid. The sin nature makes us fearful.

As a people, our nature is prone to fear. I was curious about something so I tried to look it up on the internet. I didn't find what I was looking for. Research or myth states that an animal can smell fear. I wanted to know what fear smelled like but I couldn't find anything. There are lots of cues we give that exhibit fear like sweating or shaking or fainting, but I couldn't find anything that told me what fear smelled like, even if it has a smell. Is it sour or pungent or rotten smelling? I don't know. You can see it, feel it, and hear it, but you can't taste it or smell it. Joseph was fearful.

God knew the heart and thoughts of Joseph and He wanted to reassure him that everything was by His design. So he sent an angel to tell him not to be afraid.

God knows when you are afraid. Maybe you are today facing something that has you fearful. God hasn't sent an angel, but He has sent reassuring words in Scripture to remind us not to be afraid about whatever it is we are facing. Let these words be a garrison around your heart to guard it from fear

**Isaiah 41:10 – “Fear not because I am with you, don't be dismayed (discouraged) for I am your God, I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right arm.”**

**Psalms 34:7 – “I sought the Lord and He heard me and delivered me from all my fears.”**

**Psalms 37:1 – “Do not fret...”**

**Psalms 37:3 – “Trust in the Lord...”**

**Psalms 40:1 – “I waited patiently for the Lord...”**

**Psalms 42:5 – “Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God...”**

**Proverbs 3:5-6 – “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not in your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths.”**

How many of you would agree that if you don't have all your trust in Him there is something you will stress over or be anxious about or be fearful in?

**Philippians 4:6-7 – “Be anxious for nothing...”**  
Phillips translation – **“Don't worry over anything whatever; tell God every detail of your needs in earnest and thankful prayer, and the peace of God which transcends human understanding, will keep constant guard over your hearts and minds as they rest in Christ Jesus.”**

Does God want you to be fearful? Does He want you to be at peace? Do these life events help you trust God more or fear more?

God wanted Joseph, a righteous man, to trust Him. Faith is developed in the crucible of adversity.



Joseph was afraid and he needed some reassurance from God that it was going to be okay. Remember that what God allows is for His glory and our good. **Was God going to get glory through the birth of His Son?** It was at the birth of Jesus that the angels proclaimed **“Glory to God in the highest.”** At His Baptism and then again at the transfiguration God said **“this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”** Jesus brought the Father glory.

**Was man going to receive good through the birth of God’s Son?** **“He will save His people from their sins.”**

**“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”**  
(John 3:16)

This last week we ventured over to hear Rebekah’s choir concert at school. I was amazed at the number of Christmas hymns they sang, even the Hallelujah Chorus. It was a wonderful concert, but I wonder how many of those kids have yet to receive the good that came through Christ whom they sang about. The gospel message is very clear in many of those songs.

Even during this season in which we proclaim peace on earth, there is plenty of cause for fear and God has sent a message through His Word for us not to be afraid because born in that stable in a little insignificant town was a Savior. It was for our God’s glory and our good. There shouldn’t be any fear when we place all our trust in Him.

**Why does God tell us not to be afraid? Isn’t it because He will enable us to do what He has called us to do? Isn’t it because there is no fear because the Savior had come to reconcile us to God? Isn’t it because to know Christ as Savior, we have peace in our hearts? Isn’t it because His grace is sufficient for everything we go through?**

**What have we said before?** If God brings you to it, He will bring you through it. There isn’t anything to fear because God has everything under control. God knew Joseph was the right man because, as Matthew records, he was a righteous man. Don’t be afraid.

Joseph’s fear was aroused.  
Joseph’s fear was answered.

## II. JOSEPH’S FEAR WAS ANSWERED

**v. 20 “But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, (here’s the answer) because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.’”**

The angel laid it all out for Joseph. Mary is pregnant because God the Holy Spirit did it. Perhaps Mary tried to explain it to Joseph the same way it was explained to her when she asked how she could get pregnant without being intimate with a man. The angel told her that nothing is impossible with God. He emphasized to Joseph the supernatural nature of her conception and affirmed His royal lineage.

**While we believe that up here in the old noodle, do we believe it in our heart?** If we really believed that with God nothing is impossible there wouldn’t be any fear. Mary believed and Joseph needed to hear the same message. In essence the angel was telling Joseph not to think any less of Mary because what he assumed about her pregnancy was not true – God brought about the miraculous conception within her. Therefore, don’t be afraid.

He would be born and would be given the name Jesus. In that day many boys were named Jesus. It’s a name that literally means Savior. Naming a boy Jesus wasn’t because their parents claimed him to be the Messiah. People naming their sons Jesus were testifying to the salvation that would one day come through the Messiah. That Joseph and Mary were to name Him Jesus meant that He was that Savior. He was the One the Jews were looking for. That’s what His name meant and that’s what the angel made clear. He will save His people from their sins.

The promise of the Messiah had been given on numerous occasions in the Old Testament.

At the very first time sin entered the world through Adam and Eve, God gave the promise that a Savior would be born of a woman (**Genesis 3:15**).

In **Genesis 22:18** the promise was made that the Savior would come through the lineage of Abraham.

In **Genesis 49:10** the promise was made that the Savior would come through the tribe of Judah.

In **II Samuel 7:12-13** the promise was made to David that the Savior would come through his family line.

**Micah 5:2** and **Isaiah 9:6-7** prophesied the place of His birth and affirmed the eternal nature of His kingly reign.

**Isaiah 7:14** speaks about the person to whom He would be born, that she would be a virgin and it speaks about the purpose for His birth.

This is the passage that Matthew quotes. **“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel.”** Matthew adds that Immanuel means **“God with us.”**

The pieces to the prophetic puzzle had now come together in this word of affirmation to Joseph that he had nothing to fear, the long awaited Messiah had finally come in the baby Mary carried. God in person with us. It wasn't man's timing or through man's effort. Paul states in **Galatians 4:4** that **“when the fullness of time had come, God sent His Son...”**

This event in recorded history was predetermined by God at just the right time and to just the right couple. As the text states that she had to be a virgin is explained by **John MacArthur who writes “Mary’s virginity protected a great deal more than her own moral character, reputation and the legitimacy of Jesus’ birth. It protected the nature of the divine Son of God...Had Jesus been conceived by the act of a man, whether Joseph or anyone else, He could not have been divine and could not have been the Savior...and mankind would forever remain lost.”**

If He had been conceived by man He could not save us and neither could He be God with us.

Without having a divine parent He could not have been the sinless, perfect sacrifice needed to appease the wrath of God on account of our sin. His human birth at the time we celebrate Christmas was necessary so that He could in time accomplish the redemptive act achieved on

the cross at Calvary. But that could come only if He was also divine.

The coming of Jesus is more than giving the promised Messiah. Wrapped up in these swaddling clothes is the gift God promised to give to us so that we could have eternal life.

Joseph was given an answer as to why He did not need to be afraid to take Mary as his wife. She would give birth to a son. That son would be named Jesus. That Jesus would be our Savior.

**Luke 19:10** succinctly sums it up. **“He came to seek and to save the lost.”**

We may be afraid of heights or spiders or public speaking or any other number of things, but one thing we don't have to be afraid of is death. When we have taken God at His Word and by faith placed our trust in His Son who died on the cross for our sins we are saved. That's what Jesus came to do.

**Why do we have nothing to be afraid of?** We have nothing to be afraid of because God fulfilled His promise by sending His Son to live among us so that He could die for us – to save us from our sins. That He saved us from something implies that He saved us to something. He saved us from sin and to eternal life with Him.

Of all the guests that you may invite into your home this Christmas, make certain that you have invited Christ there not just to visit, but to live and to save.

**Why do we have nothing to be afraid of?** We have nothing to be afraid of because God has everything worked out. All we have to do is be obedient to Him, trust Him, and follow Him. The virgin birth of Jesus was for His glory and for our good. When we learn to trust in God with us, we won't be afraid either. The unwanted guest of fear fades into peace and joy.

**Psalm 5:11 – “But let all who take refuge in You be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread Your protection over them, that those who love Your name may rejoice in You.”**

**Psalm 56:11 – “In God I trust; I will not be afraid.”**

Joseph was told not to be afraid. The same message is for us as well because **“Perfect love casts out fear.”**

This Christmas focus on and give thanks to God for His indescribable gift, live in His peace and joy.