



Christmas Eve 2023

“Today and Tomorrow”

2 Samuel 7:4-17 (SP), Matthew 1:18-25 (PP) 9am

Today, the eve of Christmas, we embark on a journey of reflection and anticipation of tomorrow, the day we celebrate the birth of our Saviour, Jesus.

Today we stand on the precipice of a momentous occasion, and our hearts echo with the anticipation of the miraculous.

Tomorrow, we rejoice in the birth of Jesus and in His promise of redemption, forgiveness and eternal life that He brings to all who turn to Him.

Today, let us ponder the magnitude of God’s love, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a humble manger.

Tomorrow we are reminded that the Almighty chose humility, choosing to be born among us, to share our humanity and bring salvation to all.

Today we extend our hearts in love and compassion to those who are lonely, hurting or in need.

Tomorrow, we are thankful for the greatest gift, God’s gift of His Son, Jesus, who came to dwell among us and be the only One to meet our greatest need and restore our relationship with His Father.

Today we worship a righteous and just God, who is faithful to His people, always.

Tomorrow let us join the heavenly chorus in proclaiming glory to God in the highest and peace on Earth.

Today, as we read from Matthew chapter 1, we are in anticipation of the big event that has been foretold through the prophets; the coming of the promised one.

Matthew tells of events from the perspective of **Joseph**.

Do you think there is a hierarchy of characters in the Sunday-school Nativity play? All the girls wanted to be Mary and hold baby Jesus. It was fun to dress up like a shepherd or make sheep noises. It felt important to have a role as a wise man.

But not many put their hand up asking to be Mary’s husband. Joseph is often the forgotten figure in the Nativity scene, but he shouldn’t be.

The Heavenly Father deliberately chose him to be the earthly father of Jesus. There is not a lot about Joseph contained in Scripture. Most of what is found in the Bible is right here in Matthew 1:18-25.

Joseph’s Family

Matthew 1:1–17 gives us Jesus’s family line, from Abraham to Joseph. Two figures stand out in this list: Abraham and David.

Two thousand years before Jesus, God made a promise to Abraham: all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through your nation of offspring (Genesis 12:3). In Jesus, God kept that promise.

One thousand years before Jesus, God made a promise to David. When David became king of Abraham's nation, God promised to raise up one of David's descendants to rule over an eternal kingdom. 2 Samuel 7:16 says 'Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.' Jesus was the fulfillment of that promise: the anointed one, the Messiah, who would rescue the people and establish an eternal kingdom.

A descendant of Abraham and David, Joseph was qualified to be the earthly father of Jesus because of **his family**. But it's more than just his family that makes Joseph a character worth remembering. It's also his *faith*.

Joseph's Faith

In (Matthew 1:18–25), Joseph displays God-pleasing character and unique faith, expressed in two ways:

1. His Example of Balancing Righteousness and Love:

First of all, the Bible tells us here in (V19) that Joseph was "a righteous man." To be "righteous" means to be in "right" standing; to be right with God and in right standing with other people.

Joseph was a "righteous" man — that is, he wanted to do the right thing before God. In this case, that meant that when his fiancé, Mary, was found to be with child. He didn't know at the time that this was by the Holy Spirit.

For all of human history, there was only one explanation for this: that she had been unfaithful to him while she was engaged to him. In Jewish culture, when you were "betrothed" to someone, it was a strong bond; you basically had to be "divorced" from it — which was what Joseph was going to do. When (V19) says "he planned to SEND HER AWAY" the word for "send her away" there in Greek is "apolusai", which is the same word Jesus uses for "divorce" in (Matthew 5). So, Joseph was going to do the right thing. Mary was found (or so he thought) to be immoral, and so he was going to do the right thing and sever that relationship. He was a righteous man, who had godly, righteous standards.

But Joseph was not only an example of a man of righteousness and holiness; he was also an example of offering dignity and love. The second part of (V19) says "and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly."

I think this is important for us to see this side of Joseph as well. Not only was he a righteous man, but he was also sensitive and caring towards Mary. He didn't drag her out into the streets, the way that the scribes and the Pharisees did with the woman who was caught in the act of adultery, as described in John 8. There was going to be nothing like that from him.

This says a lot about Joseph. He was indeed righteous and of note, there was no hint of arrogance or self-righteousness. He did want to do the right thing, and uphold a holy, righteous standard for his family. But he also cared about Mary, and he was not going to just throw her out on the streets to be a public spectacle. He had a balance of both holiness, and of love; of godly standards, and yet giving dignity and concern for people.

With our past seven weeks studying Biblical justice what would you have to say about Joseph's sense of justice?

I think one of the hardest things in the world is to keep a balance of both things: to hold to the righteous standards that God has given us in His Word, and yet not to hold them coldly, but to genuinely love and care about the people who are involved.

Keeping love and truth in balance, is one of the most difficult tasks of the individual Christian life, and of the Christian church. We need to pray fervently that God would help us to do that;

and we can learn better how to keep that balance from following the example of Joseph here in Matthew 1.

2. His Example of Obedience:

In Matthew 1:24 it says, “and Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him ...”.

Joseph demonstrated his obedience to God in a number of ways:

- **First** in (V19), he determined that he was going to obey the Law by sending Mary away, just as he should have as a righteous man.
- **Secondly**, when the angel told him to take Mary as his wife, despite every objection any natural person might have had, (V24) says he awoke “and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.”
- **Thirdly**, (V25) says “He called His name Jesus”, just like he was told. Jesus, the angel declared, would save the people from their sins (V21) and Joseph believed it. He demonstrated his obedience to God by naming the child Jesus.

Joseph’s obedience to God was preparing the today in his life for the impact and result that has since become evident to all who believe. The choices of Joseph’s today paved the way for tomorrow.

Joseph is a great example of what obedience to God looks like. Just like Joseph, we need to obey even when it is difficult for us, when we don’t understand why. Joseph didn’t understand everything about the virgin birth — but he accepted it and obeyed.

In the same way, there are going to be things we do not understand about God’s Word or His work in our lives. Our commitment needs to be like his. We need to always allow the work of the Holy Spirit to teach us, transform us and trust that God is at work for good in our lives and in the world. It must always come back to trust in our belief. Is that what you understand in obedience of Jesus?

Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” (John 14:15). He also said, “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord’, and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46) We aren’t saved by our obedience. But if we know the grace of God by accepting Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, we are going to obey.

Joseph: Faith Hero

Joseph took responsibility, sacrificed his reputation and wedded a vulnerable Mary. He did this because he trusted that Jesus was who the angel said He was.

While Joseph’s *family* made him qualified to be the earthly father of Jesus, what stands out about Joseph, the man whom the heavenly Father chose to be Jesus’s earthly father is his *faith*.

Joseph acted on his faith, putting God first and himself second. Joseph may stand quietly in the background of the Christmas story, but that’s precisely what makes him a hero of faith.

Today’s passage highlights the miraculous conception of Jesus, the dilemma of Joseph, the divine intervention through the angelic message and Joseph’s faithful obedience to the will of God. It sets the stage for tomorrow, the birth of Jesus.

Through the birth of Jesus, we witness the unfolding of God’s justice through His saving grace. The birth of Jesus, future King, was unjust and lowly. Jesus’ obedient life opened the way for the New Covenant; a restored relationship with God.

Jesus lived, honouring the character of God, making friends with the outcast and the vulnerable. He was tried unfairly and died disgracefully and in shame, on a cross.

God's perfect justice was seen on the Cross as Jesus died for the rebellion of all. What we could not achieve, Jesus has achieved for us. We do not deserve God's forgiveness but because of Jesus, we receive God's forgiveness. We the unjust, are shown grace and brought back into relationship with God. God calls us His children and has prepared a place where we will worship Him perfectly, forever.

God's justice, through His saving grace, transcends earthly understanding and transforms lives.

Today, remember to thank God for His justice of tomorrow. May the Holy Spirit empower us to follow in Joseph's footsteps, embracing righteousness, love, and obedience in our journey of faith.

Come back tomorrow and think afresh about the birth of Jesus. In Jesus our today is His tomorrow!