**A reading from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 1, beginning to read at verse 18.**

**18** This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about[: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. **19** Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yetdid not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

**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. **21** 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.”

**22** All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet:

**23** “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”

(which means “God with us”).

**24** When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. **25** But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

I wonder if you have ever noticed how differently Luke and Matthew tell the story of Jesus' birth?

Luke emphasizes MARY'S role. In Luke's Gospel, the angel appears to Mary and tells her about the child whom she is to bear. Mary goes to visit Elizabeth, and Elizabeth says wonderful things about Mary's baby. Mary sings a song of praise that is beautiful poetry.

In Luke's Gospel, we hear almost nothing about Joseph.

Matthew's Gospel is just the opposite. Matthew's Gospel starts with Jesus' genealogy--traced from Abraham through JOSEPH, not Mary. The angel appears to Joseph.

Matthew describes Joseph as a RIGHTEOUS man --meaning that Joseph tries to live according to God's law--tries to do what God wants.

But Matthew also portrays Joseph as a KINDLY man who wants to avoid subjecting Mary to public disgrace (1:19).

In other words, Matthew portrays Joseph as righteous, but not self-righteous.

The reason for these differences is simple. Luke was a Gentile writing for Gentiles, but Matthew was a Jew writing for Jews.

Jews took great pride in tracing their lineage to Abraham, and the genealogy that we find in Matthew's Gospel would have been very important to them.

They lived in a patriarchal world and wanted a Jewish **boy** to trace his lineage to Abraham through his **father**.

Matthew tells us some important things about Joseph that Luke skips entirely.

Matthew tells us that Joseph--not Mary--is to name the baby (1:21). Why is that important? It's important, because by naming the baby, Joseph claims the baby as his own. Joseph is not the baby's father, and he knows it.

* The angel tells him that the real father is the Holy Spirit––
* but the angel also tells Joseph to marry the girl––
* and to name the baby––
* and to assume the public role of father.

Those would not have been easy things for a righteous man to do, but Joseph did what the angel told him to do.

**In other words, Joseph did exactly what God called him to do. Exactly!**

That was just the beginning. Later, the angel told Joseph to take Mary and the baby to Egypt to escape Herod's wrath.

Matthew tells it this way.

**"Joseph arose and took the young child and his mother by night,**

**and departed into Egypt,**

**and was there until the death of Herod" (2:14-15a).**

**In other words, Joseph did exactly what God called him to do. Exactly!**

By the way, that verse about Joseph taking his little family to Egypt has a footnote--an important footnote for a man like Matthew writing for Jews. It says that God had Joseph go to Egypt:

**"That it might be fulfilled**

**which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet,**

**saying, 'Out of Egypt I called my son'" (2:15b).**

And when God calls us to do something, He has a purpose behind that call

something important

possibly something LIFE-CHANGING,

maybe even something LIFE-SAVING.

Then, when Herod died, the angel told Joseph to take mother and baby back to Israel. Matthew tells the story this way:

**"Joseph arose and took the young child and his mother,**

**and came into the land of Israel" (2:21).**

**In other words, Joseph did exactly what God called him to do. Exactly!**

Then, when Joseph was trying to figure out where to settle, God warned him in a dream not to settle in JUDEA, because there was a bad king there. So Joseph took his family to GALILEE, far to the north.

**In other words, Joseph did exactly what God called him to do. Exactly!**

All of which is to say that Joseph was a really fine man--a Godly man--a man who put God's will ahead of his own.

 We don't know much more about Joseph. We do know that he was a carpenter.

We know that Joseph and Mary took Jesus to Jerusalem for the Passover when Jesus was twelve years old (Luke 2:41 ff.).

And that's it! That's all we know about Joseph! Joseph has no speaking role in the Gospels. We hear nothing more about him after the trip to Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve. We assume that he died while Jesus was a teenager.

But we do know that Joseph was faithful to God and that made all the difference. It made all the difference to his family, and it makes all the difference to us.

God used faithful Joseph as a hinge on which to swing the door of history. Without a faithful man like Joseph, none of this Jesus-stuff would have happened. There wouldn't be any Christmas. There wouldn't be anyone to save us from our sins (1:21).

God needed a Godly man and a Godly woman to carry out his work. Joseph was the Godly man. Mary was the Godly woman.

 **Why do we need to remember the Joseph story?**

FIRSTLY, Joseph is an important part of the Christmas story, but we don't usually talk much about him.

 But we don't want to forget Joseph's faithfulness or his contribution to the Christmas story. None of it would have happened without Joseph.

SECONDLY, allow me to suggest to the girls and women in the congregation that, when you are looking for a husband, try to find someone like Joseph, a man who loves God and tries to do what God wants him to do.

 A Godly man will stand by us when the going gets tough - when our baby need protection from the Herod's of the world. A Godly man will help us to raise our children as Christian disciples.

 • That doesn't mean that Godly men are always angels--
**they aren't.**

• It doesn't mean that we won't have disagreements--**because we will.**

• It doesn't mean that a Godly man won't disappoint us--**because he will.**

• It doesn't mean that it is a guarantee--**because it isn't**.

But it does mean that when the going gets tough, we will be a lot better off if your husband is a Godly man.

 The same wisdom applies to boys and men. Find yourself a Godly woman--for all the same reasons.

 And finally, we can all learn something from Joseph's **faithfulness**. In every instance that Joseph is mentioned, he is doing what God wants him to do:

 • Joseph is trying to avoid embarrassing his pregnant fiancée unduly.

 • At God's direction, Joseph marries her and names the baby.

 • At God's direction, Joseph takes his family to Egypt.

 • At God's direction, Joseph returns to Israel.

 • At God's direction, Joseph settles in Galilee instead of Judea.

 • Then we see Joseph taking his twelve-year-old son to the temple in Jerusalem.

The Bible portrays its heroes honestly. It deals with David's adultery. It deals with Samson's foolishness.

 But it has only good things to report of Joseph. Joseph was a faithful man. In every instance, he tried to do what God wanted him to do.

It doesn't matter who we are, the world will be a better place if we follow Joseph's example, and our lives will be better too.

Perhaps the quality of our life will start getting better the day we get serious about doing what God wants us to do.

And perhaps it will keep getting better as long as we **continue** doing what God wants us to do.

That doesn't mean that we won't have problems, but it does mean that God will be there with us--guiding us--giving us strength--helping us to overcome those problems.

A story that came to mind when I was preparing this sermon. Stephen Beck told about crossing a narrow bridge on a country road.

When I read his story, I knew exactly what kind of bridge he was describing.

There are a few of these in this area.

Two cars could not pass each other on these bridges.

If there was a car on the bridge when you got there, you had to stop and wait for it to finish crossing before you could go.

If you and another car got on the bridge at the same time,

you would be nose-to-nose and one of you would have to back off the bridge.

Beck told about coming to one of those bridges and seeing a YIELD sign. After he crossed the bridge, he happened to look back and noticed that there was a YIELD sign on that end too. He was curious enough that he stopped to check and, sure enough, there were YIELD signs on both ends of the bridge.

Perhaps this should make us think of Joseph, because whichever way Joseph was going, he always **yielded** to God.

He never insisted on doing it his way. Once he knew what God wanted him to do, he did it. **Exactly!**

What would our life look like if we did that?

What would our life look like if you were to ask, "WWJD"—

"What Would Jesus Do?"--and then do it? Exactly!

I think that many of us are already living like that:

 But perhaps we all need occasionally to assess our own lives, asking:

• Am I really willing to obey God?

• Am I asking, "'What Would Jesus Do?"

• Am I doing it?

• Am I seeking God's path for my life?

• Am I taking that Godly path?

Let’s try living obediently for a week--or a month and try doing what God wants us to do.

I’m sure that God will **bless** us.

He might even **surprise** us.

 **Amen**