



Matthew 1:18-25 New Revised Standard Version

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

²³ “Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,”

which means, “God is with us.” ²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife ²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.



I Want to Love and Be Loved

Shocked. Betrayed. Devastated. These words, and many others like them, may communicate what Joseph must have felt upon learning of Mary’s pregnancy. They were in the midst of

betrothal, a period which bound their relationship. The only thing which could sever such a bond was death or divorce. It was the latter to which Joseph resigned himself, but not in a manner which would create public humiliation for his wife. This week’s Gospel Lesson indicates Joseph to have been “a righteous man,” but his righteousness was not the conventional form of his day. He was special in that mercy and love directed him to act in a manner which some may have found (and still do) hard to imagine.

Love is the focal point for the Fourth Sunday of Advent and concludes the cycle which began with hope, peace, and joy. Over the coming days, we will exchange tokens of our love toward others in the form of Christmas presents. They will come in various shapes, sizes, and packages, and communicate to others their importance in our lives. For some on our list, it will be a no-brainer as to what he or she will like. For others, it may prove to be a bit more challenging. Regardless of what we make or purchase, we will do so because we find the recipients worthy of such goodness.

Through the lens of the Law, Mary did not deserve the response for which Joseph was preparing. In the moment, it appeared Mary had been unfaithful to the commitment made to Joseph and she was worthy of punishment. However, God revealed to Joseph just what was taking place and reassured this righteous man it was of God’s own doing. Out of obedience to God and, I believe, love for his espoused wife, Joseph went forward in his relationship with Mary.

Although that which was unfolding was divine in its origin, it involved risk on Joseph’s part. What would others say? What would people think? These were challenges which Joseph was willing to face with Mary. Love has a way of doing the unimaginable. Love takes risks even when the rewards are not fully understood or are delayed. It is true not only in the story of Mary and Joseph, but also true of God’s dealings with humanity. It was God’s great love toward us which brought God into human flesh. God wished to do life with us rather than holding us at arm’s length. Even as we overlooked our need for a Savior, God became the means for our salvation. We are capable of loving because God loved us first.

Prayer Pebble: Lord, it is one thing for me to be a righteous individual and another to be one who expresses love through showing mercy. As I come to know your love more and more, help me to love others. Amen.