

Scripture Reference: The Story of Christ's Birth in Matthew and Luke

Jesus' was born over 2000 years ago, but as the children just shared with us, Jesus is still alive today! He is alive inside each and every one of us - God's gift to countless generations of people. The way in which the children shared with us today, helps us to realize how timeless the story of Jesus really is... How each person involved in the original story is simply another version of who we are today.

Joseph, a young man looking forward to what adulthood would bring for him... looking forward to a life with Mary as his wife. And Mary preparing to leave her family home to become a wife - and then beginning a family one day -- We have all known young people like that haven't we? Some of us have been young people like that!!

We heard Mary's part of the story last week. We heard about how the angel came to her to let her know that God had chosen her to bear a son - HIS son - who would be conceived by the Holy Spirit... And we imagined the confusion, and the fear she must have felt. And we learned the meaning of Unabashed Joy. We learned that God's Joy is rooted deep in our souls and that it just waits to come to the surface and express itself for all the world to see.

Today, I want to talk a little bit about Joseph... We don't talk about Joseph very often, but Joseph's role in Jesus' story is VERY important. Joseph's role in the discovery of true Joy is almost imperative. It is in Joseph that we find the meaning of Peaceful Joy. In exploring Joseph's part in the story, I went to the book of Matthew and re-read the news of Mary's pregnancy. Now, think about Joseph hearing that news... HOW do you suppose he would feel, would react to that kind of news? I would have thought differently than he actually did but you see, Joseph was a good man, a man of God and that had a lot to do with how he did react... If Joseph had facebook, he would NOT have used that platform to ridicule Mary or "put her down"... He didn't want to expose her to public disgrace, but at the same time, she really didn't want anything more to do with her. We read in Matthew that "he had in mind to divorce her quietly."

But then he didn't do that either because...

While he was trying to figure a way out, he had a dream. God's angel spoke in the dream: "Joseph, son of David, don't hesitate to get married. Mary's pregnancy is Spirit-conceived. God's Holy Spirit has made her pregnant. She will bring a son to birth, and when she does, you, Joseph, will name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. (Matthew 1:20-21)

And after Joseph woke from his dream, he did exactly what God's angel told him to do. (Matthew 1:24)

That angel brought Joseph understanding and allowed him to accept what was happening with Mary - with BOTH of them because Joseph was also part of this bringing Christ to the world...

The visit that Joseph received from that Angel, brought him Joy. But this was a different kind of Joy than the Joy Mary felt. Where Mary was bursting with Joy that God had chosen her, Joseph found a more peaceful Joy in the role God had chosen for him. And the promise God made to Joseph, which gave him that peace, he made to each and every one of us. We are reminded of this promise in Luke 2:14: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests." God's "favor" rested on Joseph; God's favor is available to each of us. So, how do we receive God's favor or goodness? We can find instruction through stories by authors like Max Lucado, or Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen. We can find instruction by example in any number of Hallmark movies, and we can certainly find that instruction in our bibles. I believe the instruction for finding - or receiving - God's favor and finding that "peace" we talk about is clearly stated in Romans 12 which tells us: "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

We can find that peace with others when we recognize that even though we cannot control certain circumstances, God can. And that knowledge is what brings us Peaceful Joy. Writer, Annie Johnson Flint, understood how confidence in God leads us to a peace of mind, to a kind of peace God offered to Joseph and that same peace He offers to each one of us. She captured the process of finding peaceful Joy, in her poem titled "But God". Here is an excerpt from that poem:

*I know not, but God knows;
Oh, blessed rest from fear!
All my unfolding days
To Him are plain and clear.
Each anxious, puzzled "Why?"
From doubt or dread that grows,
Finds answer in this thought:
I know not, but He knows.*

God knows. God knew then when he was with Mary and Joseph. God helped Mary find the unabashed joy she needed, and He helped Joseph find the peaceful joy He needed in order to fulfill the roles He had planned for them. And God knows now, with each one of us. Let us allow God to help us find our places in the Christmas story and let us find peace with the role God has chosen for us. Peace that allows us to truly feel the Joy of Christ within - The Joy of Peace. AMEN