

9/11/11

GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR HEAVENLY FATHER AND FROM OUR LORD AND SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST. AMEN. The text is just about everything in the Gospels about St. Joseph, and especially Mt 1:18-23.

18] WHEN JESUS' MOTHER HAD BEEN SOLEMNLY ENGAGED TO JOSEPH, BEFORE THEY CAME TOGETHER, SHE WAS FOUND TO BE CARRYING A CHILD. ... 19] HER HUSBAND JOSEPH, WHO WAS A RIGHTEOUS MAN AND NOT WILLING TO PUT HER TO PUBLIC SHAME, DECIDED TO DIVORCE HER QUIETLY. 20] BUT AS HE WAS THINKING THAT WAY, 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 CONCEIVED THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT. 21] SHE IS GOING TO GIVE BIRTH TO A SON, AND YOU ARE TO NAME HIM JESUS, BECAUSE HE WILL SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS."

22] ALL THIS HAPPENED TO FULFILL WHAT THE LORD HAD SAID THROUGH THE PROPHET: "BEHOLD, A VIRGIN WILL CONCEIVE AND GIVE BIRTH TO A SON AND HIS NAME WILL BE CALLED IMMANUEL," WHICH MEANS, "GOD WITH US."

24] WHEN JOSEPH WOKE UP, HE DID WHAT THE ANGEL OF THE LORD HAD TOLD HIM. HE TOOK MARY HOME AS HIS WIFE, 25] BUT HAD NO UNION WITH HER BEFORE SHE GAVE BIRTH TO A SON. AND JOSEPH NAMED HIM JESUS.

THE CHURCH is Christ's BODY, IN WHICH HE LIVES FULLY. Who lives in us? The One who's coming again, the One who rose from the dead, the One who was crucified for our sins, the One who preached wonder and worked wonders, the One who "was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary" in Bethlehem. We're in His story.

And yet, right from the start of that story – Father Zachariah and Mother Elizabeth and St. Simeon and St. Anna and the Shepherds: if they're not seeing *angels*, they're seeing miraculous *stars*, or having miraculous *births*, or bursting out in Spirit-led *prophecy*: or, if you're the Virgin Mary, *all* of the above. Whereas, if you're me, *none* of the above. And sometimes for all of us and more than *has* to be for a lot of us – would you know what I meant by being *in* on it and yet feeling sort of *out* of it at the same time?

St. Joseph might. Elizabeth *shouts*, and Mary *shouts*, and Zachariah *shouts*, and the Shepherds and Simeon and Anna *shout*. Joseph doesn't shout. Joseph never had the Holy Ghost rushing in him to prophesy. Joseph never saw an angel - except in his *dreams*. And even the Star of Bethlehem - which came right to his *house* - it says, the Wise Men FOUND THE CHILD WITH HIS MOTHER, so it seems Joseph was *out*. Wouldn't you know it? And on the one hand, who could be more *in* on it than St. Joseph? I never saw a manger scene *without* him. But on the other hand, compared to the Virgin Mary – the Holy *Spirit* came upon her and the Power of the Most High *overshadowed* her. How was Joseph even in the same stable with her?

He was a small town blue collar worker, and he and his Mary, both of them *so young*

when it started. Certainly, *both* of them were virgins and doubtless in love when V. 18] they were SOLEMNLY ENGAGED - and soon they were going to be together, like one of our sweet couples in church - you know? And then he found out V. 18] SHE WAS CARRYING A CHILD and he *knew* it wasn't *his*. And it felt like God had let everything crash and burn. Because it seemed impossible, but apparently Mary wasn't what he thought she was. Which was like a bad *dream*, only he didn't wake up. V. 19] He didn't want to PUT HER TO PUBLIC SHAME. He didn't want people to know *that*, not about *her*. V. 19] HE DECIDED TO just break up QUIETLY and he *would* have.

Except he had this *dream*. Which you might not think was all that big a deal anymore than you might think the Bible was all that big a deal. And in this dream Joseph has, an angel tells him that Mary is still a *virgin*, and the Baby is a miracle. And that Joseph is *supposed* to be in on it; Joseph is supposed to be there, because V. 21] *Joseph* is supposed TO NAME the BABY "JESUS," which means, "God-Savior" because He's going to SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS. Then he woke up. But here's how the Holy Spirit came upon that young carpenter and the Power of the Most High overshadowed *him*. That dream wasn't just a dream anymore than the Bible is just a book. It was the Word of God. And by the Word of God Joseph *knew* the Word of God when he heard it and Joseph *believed* the Word of God when he heard it.

God did not *need* Joseph. God the Father Almighty could have taken care of Mary and the Child all by Himself.

But God wanted Joseph *in* on it. Why? Because *out* of it, *everything* crashes and burns and there's nothing left but motions and buzzing and death and the outer darkness. God wanted Joseph there with His Son. God wanted Joseph to call Him SAVIOR. So He sent His Word after Joseph. And by the Word of God, V. 24] JOSEPH TOOK MARY HOME AS HIS WIFE. And then Joseph took her to Bethlehem because the government said, "Go register for your taxes," and the Word of God said, "Obey the government," so Joseph did. Which is how Joseph wound up in that stable as she went into labor far away from her folks and *his* folks - did Joseph have to cut the cord? And for sure, way outside town there were *fireworks* in the sky over the fields where Joseph couldn't see them, *of course*. All Joseph saw was a Baby that wasn't his and then the shepherds, when the shepherds came and told Joseph the Word of God from Heaven. And Joseph believed it.

Eight days later, his wife's Son was circumcised, and V. 25] JOSEPH NAMED HIM JESUS. When they took the knife and Mary's Son bled for the first time, it was *Joseph* who said, "His name is Savior! HE WILL SAVE us FROM OUR SINS." How did he know who that Child was? By the Word of God.

And when the Baby was forty days old and the Word of God said to take Him to the Temple, Joseph took them and St. *Simeon* was filled with the Holy Ghost and prophesied! And St. *Anna* was filled with the Holy Ghost and prophesied! And St. Joseph knew the Word of

God when he heard it and when he heard it, he believed the Word of God.

The Wise Men came and left - And Joseph had this *dream*, where an angel tells him, "HEROD IS GOING TO SEARCH FOR THE CHILD TO KILL HIM. Take Them and run for Egypt. Now!" And *spectacular* Joseph, who couldn't speak one *word* of Egyptian - he got up in the night and he packed up the girl he loved and the Child that wasn't his and took off for Egypt and lived there for years - a stranger in a strange land, like Father Abraham, because like Father Abraham, he believed the Word of God. And then, in a dream – isn't Joseph *ever* going to see anything when he's *awake*? No. Not till Heaven. The Word of God came, "Herod's dead. Go home." So Joseph went. And BEING WARNED IN A DREAM, he kept on going all the way back to nowhere Galilee, back to nothing Nazareth, back to carpentry, day after day, which might seem like kind of a let down after everything, except that it was day after day with – even when Joseph forgot, and he did, once – it was day after day with the boy who wasn't really his, except He really, really *was* his. JOSEPH CALLED HIM SAVIOR.

In the middle of all the wonders and the shouting, there was a man who just believed the Word of God. I want to be like Joseph.

And I think that what Joseph's doing in the story is not just for his sake. I think he's kind of saving a place in the story for me and for you, who have the Word of God for it all, like him. And in him, you see what the Word of God can do. I mean that when the Word of God turned Joseph's life upside down, Joseph *could* have said, "No. I've got my life planned already!" Too many of us *have* said that. Maybe some of us are still saying it inside, which means insisting on staying *out* of it, which means WITHOUT GOD AND WITHOUT HOPE. Joseph *could* have said, "Why should I believe You when You go and break my heart like that?" and a lot of us have said that, too. Joseph *could* have said, "How could You just take over my wife? How could You just take over my life?" But what else is God supposed to do? Leave you out?

The Word of God knew who he really was, namely, V. 20] JOSEPH, SON OF DAVID, the lost heir to the throne. We're all lost heirs. And the Word of God called him and kept him and brought him to that stable and through all the rest of his strange adventure. And the Word of God knows who you are, O lost heir: Read and *see* yourself. Then read and see yourself with Jesus, when He's found a lost heir. The Word of God is calling us, to keep us and to bring us, not just to a stable where God was born, but all the way to His throne.

Can it all really be true? Ask Joseph. Heaven and Hell and things way more impossible than a Virgin Birth, things like, BY THE OBEDIENCE OF ONE MAN SHALL MULTITUDES BE MADE RIGHTEOUS, and BY THE SACRIFICE OF THE BODY OF JESUS, HE HAS MADE HOLY FOREVER ALL WHO BELIEVE. You know how we "have not because we ask not?" In the same way, we doubt because we hear not, because FAITH COMES BY HEARING AND THE CAPACITY TO HEAR COMES BY THE WORD OF GOD. It's *by* the Word of God that we know the Word of God when we hear it, and when we

hear it, believe it, and therefore follow it, in on it *all*, like Joseph. But if we rarely hear it, we can barely hear.

What's happening at devotions morning and night and in sermons and Adult and Kids' and Youth Bible Hour? It is THE WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE coming after us. What's happening at Women's Bible Study and Adult Instruction and Junior Confirmation? God is sending His Word after you, to get you in on it *all* – IN on all THE TROUBLES AND THE KINGDOM AND THE ENDURANCE and the peace and the joy and the life THAT ARE OURS IN CHRIST JESUS by the Word of God. That's how the Holy Spirit comes upon us. That's how the Power of the Most High overshadows us as He did Blessed Mary and her young husband, too. It's the Word of God's Grace that gets us in to the Huge Story all the way to the Finale. Because His WORD WILL ACCOMPLISH THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH He SENDS IT: YOU *SHALL GO OUT IN JOY AND BE LED FORTH IN PEACE* impossibly in and all the way up to the face of Love, where we'll see St. Joseph in on it all, and where we'll see with our eyes what Joseph's seeing now.

Here and now, while our own righteousness crashes and burns as it has so often, the Word of God knows who you are, and the Word of God says, quote, YOU ARE TO CALL HIM JESUS. It says, CALL HIM SAVIOR, BECAUSE HE WILL SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS. Tell Him, "You WILL SAVE Your PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS." The Word of God says so.

And HIS PEOPLE are sinners who, when it's all too strange and painful and wonderful and too good to be true – HIS PEOPLE are the ones who are like the carpenter from Nazareth. Not Jesus, but His foster father. I mean, I've never burst out with Spirit-led prophecy and I've never seen one angel, not yet. And *you've* never seen a miraculous star or had a miraculous birth. With you, God has worked direct! The Word of God has come to HIS PEOPLE. And by the Word of God they know the Word of God when they hear it, and when they hear it, they believe it and go where the Word of God sends them, namely, on the road to joy everlasting, day after day of this strange adventure.

And while we're still on the road, we are, as a matter of fact, closer to Mary's Son than Joseph was on the road to Egypt. We're HIS CHURCH, HIS BODY, IN WHOM HE LIVES, by the Word of God on bread and wine and by water with the Word, and by the Word and the Word and the Word of God. Amen.