

The Advent and Anxiety of the New (*Matt 1:18-25*)

Introduction – Christmas is a time of celebration and Advent is a season of preparation; even unbelievers get this right. As we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Savior, God seems to naturally walk us through the anxiety and messiness of Christ's appearing. This is illustrated for us in the story of Joseph. When Jesus comes, everything changes, and God continues to surprise us with His supreme sovereignty.

Following the First Israel – Many think that Matthew's gospel parallels the stories of the first Israel. After Jesus, the “New Israel” is born, He flees to Egypt (2:13ff) until it is safe to return (2:15, 19-20). Just as Israel was baptized in the Red Sea, so Jesus was baptized (Matt 3), and just as Israel was then led in the wilderness of temptation for forty years, so Jesus was tempted for forty days (Matt 4). But there are parallels even before this, for instance, in our text this morning.

The Genesis of Jesus – Consider this: “Genesis” is translated, “birth” in v18. Jesus is born of a virgin because God is doing something new by means of His Holy Spirit, reminiscent of the Spirit hovering over the earth at the first creation. Joseph, reminding us of Adam, awakens from a sleep and takes his wife. She will bring forth the One who will save God’s people from their sins, reversing the curse of the first couple. He will be the firstborn from the dead; a new world will be filled with this blessing.

Joseph’s Story – And so it was that Jesus came into Joseph’s life. And everything changed; but it didn’t seem to be for the good. Mary was found to be with child; this was nothing less than a scandal for Joseph and for his family. Imagine his disappointment and shame. However, while he had the right to bring a lawsuit against her (Deut 22:23f), Joseph displays biblical just-ness, “*being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly*” (Matt 1:19). Most would want to vindicate their own name, yet Joseph remains concerned for Mary.

Joseph’s Dream – Just as another Joseph (favored son of Jacob) had a dream, so his namesake has a dream. In it, an angel addresses him as the “son of David” and tells him not to fear; the baby in Mary’s womb is begotten of the Holy Spirit. He should also not fear this work and what it means, but take Mary as his wife. And just like the other Joseph, the results of this dream would radically change his life – and not necessarily make it easier. In the story of the first Joseph, we often forget that decades go by before he is finally able to say to his brothers, “God meant it for good” (Gen 50:20). In the gospels, after the incident in the temple when Jesus is twelve, we never hear about Joseph again and most guess that he died before the public ministry of Jesus. We do know that this “father” of the King of kings had to help his wife give birth to the Babe in an animal-stall, he had to flee with his family to Egypt, and when he returned had to relocate in Nazareth. In all of these difficulties, Joseph remained a just man.

Pondering and Thinking – When Jesus appeared in the lives of Mary and Joseph, both had to ponder what all of this meant. But Joseph found himself wondering what was going on before he heard from the angel (v20). And while he received divine instruction rather quickly, his life was anything but easy after that. Later, Jesus would do many miracles and yet many who saw these and heard His words turned away. Divine instruction does not guarantee faithfulness nor make life easier always. And yet, the Lord promises peace and rest to those who seek to understand His ways.

Pondering During Periods of Anxiety – Disciples of Jesus find themselves overwhelmed with the circumstances of life in little things and enormous events. These are often connected to faithfully following Jesus. We learn from Joseph (and from the scriptures what we are to do –

Psalm 94:19 – *In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul.*

Psalm 143:8 - *Cause me to hear Your lovingkindness in the morning, For in You do I trust; Cause me to know the way in which I should walk, For I lift up my soul to You.*

Isaiah 26:3 – *You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You.*

Advent Applications – “*Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took to him his wife*” (v24). The One who looked like Joseph’s ruin, it turned out, would be the Savior of the world, and Joseph’s Savior as well. But the moment after the dream it didn’t look like that. Joseph, by faith, gets up and obeys the Lord. It didn’t matter what it cost his reputation; it didn’t matter what others thought. It didn’t matter what little or large inconveniences it cost him.

What has it cost you to follow your Savior?

What unexplained inconveniences are before you because you are following Jesus?

What looks like your ruin even though you have been “just”?

What wrongdoings have yet to be made right in your life?

These are good questions to ponder while you consider the story of Advent and Christmas, while you search the scriptures, while you come again and worship the God who is sovereign over all of this and Who, with both Josephs, would vindicate His actions in such a way that they, and you, will be able to say, “God meant it for good.” Just as the Holy Spirit had come upon Mary and brought forth something New, so the Spirit is still at work upon the body of Christ, bringing forth newness all the time. But just as that first work of the Spirit brought messiness to lives of even those who were faithfully following God, so His continuing work will bring forth messiness in our lives – to a glorious end.