

## God's Plan Prepares Us for His Coming

4<sup>th</sup> Sun. in Advent – 12/21/25 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Matthew 1:18-25 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 22, “**All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken...**”

### **Introduction**

- ✘ Well, the waiting is almost over – only four more days until Christmas. But this week the assigned Bible readings seem to want to rush us on toward Christmas.
- ✘ For Matthew in our Gospel Reading, it's Christmastime already – well, as much Christmas as Matthew ever gives us. In fact, this text before us today is really more like the story of Joseph.
  - ➔ And though he never even says a word, Joseph is the center of attention as he first confronts a confounding problem; a problem that was not his own doing. And no sooner does he come up with a plan, then he watches that plan get crumpled up and tossed away.
- ✘ But it turns out that Joseph is okay with that, because, the one tossing his plan just happens to be God. And of course, God's perfect plan is always the best plan to follow.

### **I. Man proposes.**

- ✘ We're told in verse 18 that Mary and Joseph are “betrothed” – engaged to be married. But here, in first-century Judea, betrothal carried much more commitment with it than engagements do now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
  - ➔ Being betrothed, Joseph and Mary were already in a lifelong commitment. Matthew's note in verse 18, that what was in her womb was “from the Holy Spirit”, could have only been known to Mary. There's no way for us to know what conversations already took place between Joseph and her.
  - ➔ But try to place your feet into Joseph's sandals for a moment. How would you respond if your fiancée told you that she was pregnant, but she was still a virgin; that it was all the Holy Spirit's miraculous doing?
- ✘ At the same time, in verse 19, we learn two things about Joseph. The Greek tells us that he was a “righteous” (δίκαιος) man, in other words, he was living as he should be living according to God's Law. And so, it makes sense that, according to God's direction in the Torah (Deut. 22:13–21), Joseph would be prompted to put together what he thought would be a God-pleasing plan to put an end to their marriage.
  - ➔ At the same time though, we see that Joseph is compassionate. And it was his kindness that meant that he desired to do it quietly. He was “unwilling” (μὴ θέλων) to publicly disgrace Mary, which would have been the expected approach so that his reputation could remain intact.
- ✘ This is where Joseph then follows the standard human pattern whenever we are faced with a difficult dilemma. Come up with a plan. Start working on “damage control”. Figure out how to do “what is right” in God's eyes – which means the marriage can't go forward, at the same time that you protect Mary and what she is going through as well.
  - ➔ So at the end of verse 19, Joseph is “resolved” (ἐβουλήθη) to “divorce” and send her away secretly. For Mary's sake – well his sake as well, he wants to deal with this mess quietly and cleanly. So he proposes a plan. Now all he has to do is work that plan carefully.
- ✘ The beginning of verse 20 uses an interesting word in the Greek. It is ἐνθυμηθέντος (enthumaythentos) which tells us that Joseph was contemplating his situation; his plan a lot. I

suspect it was occupying most of his waking hours; trying to fine tune the best way forward in this difficult situation.

→ To me, this seems to show that he really did love Mary deeply; that he likely was struggling at least with some glimmer of plausibility to her claim that she was innocent of unfaithfulness in this matter, as incredible as it certainly had to seem.

- ✧ You and I ... I think we can certainly sympathize with Joseph, can't we? I mean, life just has a way of surprising us all with various kinds of crises; challenges and difficulties at home, work, school, and in neighborhood; things that just come with living in this broken world.

→ And when those times come; perhaps after we've made it through the feeling of shock or panic, what do we instinctively do? We start to contemplate the best plan forward; we resolve that we must figure out how we are going to live life now in this new reality. And we start to work our plan with all that we've got, because just as it was for Joseph at first, we conclude that we've got no one else that we can count on to work it out than good old me, myself and I.

## II. God disposes

- ✧ Back in the mid-1400s, the famous Roman Catholic cleric, Thomas à Kempis wrote a Christian devotional book called "*The Imitation of Christ*". And one of his most famous quotes in this book is this: "The resolution of good men depends more on the grace of God than on their own wisdom. ... Man proposes but God disposes, and man's destiny is not in his own hands."

→ "Man proposes", that's what we see Joseph doing at the beginning of this story isn't it?

- ✧ But then in verse 20 we see everything turned around when "God disposes" of Joseph's plan and shows him that God is always and only the One who determines the actual course of all events.

→ All of Joseph's careful planning went quickly into the trash when God's messenger interrupted his dreams and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."

→ What must have been Joseph's reaction? Everything that Mary told him she had heard from Gabriel (Lk. 1:31, 35) regarding her pregnancy was now perfectly corroborated by the angel speaking to him in his dream.

- ✧ I can't help but wonder, what made Joseph trust a dream over Mary's own words. How could he be sure it was God's Word that he was hearing from that angel?

→ These are the times that we have to be okay with just saying, "That's the work of the Holy Spirit." The One who gives us faith, is also the One who confirms His Word as absolute truth when we hear it proclaimed and we come to believe it in all confidence.

- ✧ Another interesting aspect of this angel's declaration to Joseph is when verse 21 says, "you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from sins."

→ Imagine hearing that in a dream about your future son, even before He is ever born. But this points us all to see a different view of what the promised Messiah's primary purpose was to be. He was not sent to merely save God's people from political or social oppression as most of the people had come to think.

→ No, He was going to "save His people from sins." Jesus was coming to deal with the root problem that lies beneath all that is evil, wrong, and out of place in His own creation. He was going to heal and set right again what all mankind had torn apart in our relationship with God.

- ✧ Verse 22 really takes us to the main point of the angel's proclamation, and what you and I today are to make of it all. "All this", meaning everything that Joseph and Mary have been dealing

with, including the messages they have received from God; “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet” Isaiah in our Old Testament Reading this morning. “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel’ (which means, God with us).”

➔ All of this confirms even more the continuity and orchestration of the plan of salvation that God has put in place, and the fact that He is working it out to perfection.

➔ In other words, God is not just making sure that He dots every “i” to meet some textual or technical requirement imposed upon Him, but He is simply unfolding His plan just as he had designed it from before the beginning of time itself. All that the Old Testament prophets declared is being fully and perfectly realized in the conception, birth, life and work of Jesus.

- ✘ So when Joseph woke up, we’re told in verse 24 that “he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.” He started living out God’s plan instead of his own.

➔ And God’s plan would prove to be much more challenging than his own. It meant dealing with the complications of a pregnant fiancé. It would actually mean even more dreams right after Jesus’ birth and living on the run from a murderous king (Mt. 2:13–15, 19–23).

- ✘ What about you and me? Well folks, it’s time for us to wake up and do God’s plan as well. And yes, we have just as clear and certain of a message from God about His plan for us as Joseph and Mary did.

➔ We know that it’s God’s plan because it comes from Jesus Himself. He caused it to be written down in His holy and inspired Word! That is even more certain than waiting for dreams to guide us.

➔ And just as it was for Joseph, so we shouldn’t be surprised to find that God’s plan is often challenging; frequently it goes against what we would like to do, or what “makes sense” to our sinful and selfish thinking. But it is God’s plan. And so we do it. God’s right plan is always the best way to go.

### **III. Jesus transposes**

- ✘ And when it comes to working out God’s plan, it is Joseph and Mary’s Son alone who is able; and who does fulfill and work out God’s plan to perfection...for us!

➔ In fact, we could add to Thomas à Kempis’ quote by saying, “Man proposes but God disposes” ... and Jesus transposes.

- ✘ To transpose something is to take something that is in one place and transfer it to an entirely different place. That’s God’s plan for His only begotten Son; to send Jesus from the throne room of heaven, into our human flesh upon His first earthly throne – a lowly manger; and eventually for Him to take your sin, my sin and the sins of all mankind upon Himself on the throne of His cross.

➔ But that’s not all that Jesus transposed. He also took His perfect righteousness; that is, following God’s Law without even committing one sin ever and gifting it to us in our baptism so that now when the Father looks at you and me, instead of our sin, He sees Jesus and He proclaims us innocent and worthy of eternity before His throne in heaven.

- ✘ He even covers the sins of our reluctance to follow God’s plan and He works in us to change our attitude; by giving us the sincere desire more often to stop obsessing; to stop stressing about the surprises that we face; to stop thinking that we’ve got to plan it all out in our own way, so that we actually more often now are able to let go of the control and turn it over to God.

➔ You see, Jesus saves us from ourselves and He sets us free to joyfully and confidently follow Jesus in following and living according to God’s plan.

## **Conclusion**

✧ And what is God's plan for your life and mine? We don't have to wait for a dream to know what God wants us to do. He's already told us. His plan and purpose for you and me is that we...that we believe in Jesus; that we live in His Word; and that we worship Him in all that we think and say and do.

➔ To follow that plan; God's plan, may be difficult at times, but in the end it is so much easier to live in confidence and peace every day. No more do we need to rely on our ever-changing and often misleading feelings, ideas, and instincts. Instead we rely on God and His plan and His Savior, Jesus – who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

➔ Yes, He is still and forever will be, God with us in the flesh. Amen.