

**Hinde Street Methodist Church**  
Sunday 22 December 2019 10am  
Rev Peter Cornick

### **Joseph's point of view.**

Three points to explain Joseph's story:

1. Genealogy
2. Honour
3. Salvation

### **Genealogy**

One of the most popular programmes on television is 'Who do you think you are'. A celebrity looks into the history of their family and travels around at the licence payer's expense to piece together the story of some distant relative. Usually, this relative has done something terrible or has saved the lives of countless children. The conclusion one could draw from the programme draws, is that to be a celebrity, you must have some skeleton in the cupboard.

Joseph has plenty of skeletons in the cupboard. And we hear all about them in his family tree in Matthew chapter 1. From Abraham, through King David, to a host of less famous Kings, we recount a story of people who doubted that God could use them in their old age, or young age, or of those who manipulated their people for their own ends thinking God wouldn't notice. It is quite a family tree with plenty of intrigue.

***17 So then, there were fourteen generations from Abraham to David, and fourteen from David to the exile in Babylon, and fourteen from then to the birth of the Messiah.***

For Matthew, it is highly important that the birth of Jesus is linked back, through Joseph – because that's how Biblical genealogies are done – through the male line. Jesus is the culmination; the denouement; of a long line of God's people traced back to Abraham. So, Mary *must* be involved with Joseph.

***18 Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah<sup>[a]</sup> took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph,***

## Honour

Joseph discovers that Mary's child has been conceived with the Holy Spirit. Now technically, Matthew doesn't say that. It might be better to say, Jesus was conceived out of a 'spirit of holiness'; which is quite different from the Holy Spirit. And technically, a betrothal or engagement of marriage in first century Palestine was marriage with the ceremony coming later. So, for Matthew, the issue seems to be, that Mary was pregnant before the engagement.

Joseph, for whatever reason, was embarrassed by Mary's pregnancy. In Deuteronomy 22: 21, you will find that a woman who is found not to be a virgin at marriage, may be stoned to death.

So Joseph has a problem.

Either abide by the law – like the righteous man he is – have Mary stoned to death. Out of the question.

Or, find a way of getting rid of Mary – quietly, without anyone noticing.

Both outcomes are still the fate of women around the world today. But the powerful message of this story is something quite different – and demonstrates Joseph's honour.

Joseph stays with Mary.

And this is what makes Joseph, and this story, stand out. Caught between carrying out the law, and being merciful, Joseph does the honourable thing and finds a new path.

*being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. <sup>20</sup> 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.*

Joseph, rather like Mary in her own visit from an angel, decides to stick to God's plan, however uncomfortable it seems at the time.

A righteous act – a just act? Joseph, like Abraham, David, and all the Kings from the genealogy, finds himself caught up in the work of God. Facing impossible choices, his communication with God, his

prayer, via the dream, leads him to do what is right with God – what is with honour.

## **Salvation**

In Joseph's dream, he hears this:

***<sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."***

Jesus is a translation from the Hebrew Joshua, meaning, 'God saves'. Jesus, will save the people, from – what? Their sins.

Sin, biblically, is really turning away from God. Refusing to acknowledge God; particularly, when one has erred – strayed from the right path. So, for Matthew's gospel, and for that day and age, this untimely pregnancy would be seen as straying from the right path. But God wants to use Joseph – Joseph and Mary are part of the salvation story. They have to turn towards God. Bear the Son.

They are to be the servants of the Lord: they are to name the child Jesus for he will be salvation.

But the prophet Isaiah, you recall, suggested a different name:

Immanuel – which means 'God is with us'

Jesus, who as we've heard, will save the people from their sins – is God with us.

## **Conclusion**

***<sup>18</sup> This was how the birth of Jesus Christ took place.***

