

December 9, 2018 The God Who Changes Things
Matthew 1:-25

There are things we need to be aware of as we approach the Christmas history and turn to the Gospel accounts. First of all, Mark does not tell us anything about the birth of Jesus. There is a reason for that. Mark was a teenager during the ministry of Jesus. His faith and his knowledge about Jesus is that of a teenager looking at Jesus as an adult. He was not a member of the circle of disciples. He learned a lot about Jesus from his uncle who the disciple Peter, the big fisherman, and the first recognized leader of the Church in its infancy. John also does not tell us a great deal about Jesus birth. And yet that said, (we need to recognize the facts) he is dramatically blunt in telling us that at the precisely right moment, the creative word of the living God became flesh and blood to redeem us. That is John's foreword, to everything he does tell us about Jesus, his ministry, his death on the cross and the resurrection. John spells out that Jesus was God incarnate, and a normal man at the same time.

Which brings us to Luke and Matthew. Their accounts are not the same. Matthew tells us in 7 verses what Luke tells us in 2 chapters. Matthew's outline fits with all the detail we find in Luke. And there is so much more detail in Luke. And yet there are also 2 stories that are singular to each of those 2 Gospels. Luke tells us about the shepherds, Jews who are perpetually unclean. Matthew tells us about the Magi, the

wisemen, Gentiles, meaning they are not Jews. I cannot emphasize sufficiently that what we heard read from Matthew this morning, is what Luke tells us much more completely in his account. Matthew gives us the outline. Luke tells us the detail. The two accounts fit each other, complement each other. So this morning's question is what does Matthew tell us in the outline, that Luke tells us in so much more detail?

It is an evangelical insight: God changes lives. And I will liberally borrow from Luke's detail to explain what I am getting at. Luke tells us the time by naming who was in power. It was the time of Caesar Augustus. Matthew places the birth of Jesus squarely in the history of Israel. That is why his prelude is the long list we call the begats. And he tells us this birth of Jesus took place 14 generations after the Babylonian captivity. There was this couple, Joseph and Mary. They were pledged to one another to be married. In a culture where marriages were arranged, the arrangements had been made....money either changed hands or was promised. Mary knew she was to be the wife of Joseph. Joseph knows she will be his life partner. They are just waiting....for the marriage date and a formal wedding to occur.

Before the wedding occurred, before they came together according to the customs of the predominantly Jewish province of the Roman Empire, before Joseph has touched her, she is found to be pregnant. Her story is that this is a result of the Holy Spirit. God did it. And Luke of course tells us about the

visitation of Mary by an angel who explains that this Son will be called the Son of the most high...God. HE is to be named Jesus which means God with us. Mary, Luke tells us, reacted. She said, "there has been a mistake...I'm going to be married...I'm a virgin!" Matthew tells us that when Mary told Joseph what was happening he did not take it well. Joseph was a righteous man. That's what it says in verse 19 of Matthew chapter 1.

Hear me on this. The inference is that Joseph lives by the commandments of God. He labours to do things God's way. By inference, Joseph assumes he has been deceived. It seems obvious that Mary is not the nice girl, the proper girl, the faithful girl he thought she was. It is not that Joseph is a judgmental unkind man, but he is a man. He knows how babies are made. And frankly the deal is off. There won't be a wedding involving her...Mary. He does not want to disgrace her publicly. He wants...to disgrace her privately.... It is called a divorce, and what it means is he has no intention of marrying her. Luke tells us the same thing. Luke also tells us in great detail how it was that Mary's greatest fears did not come to pass. She had every reason to be afraid. Joseph does not want her anymore....because she is pregnant...and it is not his.

Matthew tells us what Luke tells us. An angel of God appeared to Joseph, in a dream while he was sleeping. The experience was so real, Joseph got the point. God is not taking no for an answer. Joseph is to, not be afraid. Mary has not deceived him. She is the young woman he was willing to

marry just days ago. “What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit of God. She is going to have this baby. And Joseph is going to announce to the world that he has given his son, his new born son, the name of Jesus, because he is going to save his people from their sins.” There is a lot more detail in the Luke account but this is an extremely accurate and blunt outline. And Matthew point out that all of this occurred to fulfil the prophecy in Isaiah chapter 7, that the virgin will give birth and the son born will be called Immanuel...God with us.

God changes things. Whatever Mary’s heartfelt, girlish dreams about Mr. right were...she becomes the bride to be of Joseph. Being righteous he goes into shock when it comes out that she is going to have a baby. Joseph plays the disgrace card. She knows what Joseph has concluded about her. And if Joseph will not have her, you can count on it, her family is not going to take her back. Her life is in ruins. As I said, she has every reason to be terrified. There is no way out. There is nothing she can do. And God, who has changed her life, intervenes to save her life. Joseph may think he is righteous, but Mary is very simply faithful in every detail of this. God saves her when it appears she is going to be destroyed by this....catastrophe.

Joseph was afraid. He was afraid of what people would think. He was afraid of the possibility that Mary had betrayed his trust and deceived him. He was afraid there was another man. And God changed Joseph just as radically as

HE changed Mary. He intervened. Angel Gabriel. It is Luke who tells us it was Gabriel. He is the reason we put an angel at the top of our Christmas tree. He is the reason that angels of God are involved fictional Christmas stories. He is the reason we make snow angels in the new fallen snow. The reason that angels of God are an intricate part of the Christmas traditions of people who believe in Jesus. He changed Joseph. How did God do that? He pronounced Mary, the accused, the judged, the sentenced...righteous. She told the truth. She did what was right. You see? That means Joseph was wrong, he thought evil of the woman he said he would love honour and cherish. And God saved Joseph from his sin. "All you have to do Joseph, is love her like you did 2 days ago." Marry her. And you have to give Joseph credit. He did it. Loved her. Honoured her. Cherished her. And he was husband to her and father to Jesus. Taught HIM the family trade.

What Matthew and Luke portray is that Joseph did not simply do what he had to do. He was faithful to God in terms of leading, providing for, and being the husband and father in this family. I said back there at the beginning of this message....it is an evangelical truth. God changes things. He changes lives. He changed the life of Mary....forever. He changed the life of Joseph. He was a righteous man...he became a faithful man. He changed the life of some shepherds watching their flocks during a cold winter's night doing lonely work that by its nature isolated them from other people, even from their religion. He changed the lives of some Magi Priests.

Tradition says HE brought them together from their different nations making common cause of finding this child born to be KING. He changed an Inn Keeper. Whether you believe it or not...HE changed you, and me too.

He has given us a measure of faith. We always tend to wish we had more. And what we really mean is we tend to fail in the matter of believing we really make a difference. I tell you, that is because we are usually standing too close to the miracles that are part of our lives to see them for the gracious realities they are.

I said at the beginning of these thoughts it is important to understand the 4 Gospels are different. Different accounts by different men. And yet for all the differences, each account tells us what? That God was in Christ, that Christ is the God who changes lives, here in the real world. Each Christmas, we celebrate the Bethlehem reality. Jesus was born into our fractured, broken and polluted world. The reality is, HE has touched you. You will never be the same. On a morning like this...two weeks and a bit from the day on which we celebrate HIS birth...you can't help it...you want to praise HIS name and break bread with HIS chosen, a circle in which you belong.

Let us pray;

O the wonder of the story, to Father, Son and Spirit be the glory. We thank you for the writers who witnessed

miraculous moments, and heard Mary tell her story. We thank YOU for what they have shared with us that we too, might be filled with hope. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.