

December 6, 2015 “Christmas: The Basics” Matthew 1:18-25

What a week! It became obvious from Monday morning through to Saturday, that we are in the final countdown to Christmas. There is so much that happens that comes as a surprise. I suddenly discovered that my neighbour in Belleville had volunteered to bake for the cookie trays and I got volunteered to deliver them here to the church. And then I discovered they were involved in the Christmas parade float, and as I was coming, I volunteered to drive. There was the trip to bulk barn to pick up the cherries to decorate the coffee bread. (I should have seen that coming)! And the emergency call to Barbara at the grocery store to pick up more ingredients for the bread. I don't know where I was, but I had totally missed the fact that Barbara had presold bread in Belleville, so I felt the need to bake an extra batch....more than planned. And somewhere in there was everything else the week and work, required!! The Christmas crush has begun.

And yet how can we complain? It is only because the Christ child was born in Bethlehem, and because we have chosen to celebrate his birthday that we find ourselves doing the decorating, the baking, provisioning the feast, buying gifts to give in imitation of the wise men. And when I feel the heat of the chase, I tend to turn to Matthew's Gospel to refocus on the basic details of the greatest miracle of all time, the birth of Jesus.

As we strive to understand the Christmas season all the fundamental details are here in Matthew chapter 1 verses 18-25. Mary and Joseph, the couple pledged to be married, were God's choice to host this grace filled, all be it challenging event. They could both trace their families' lines back to David and through him, all the way to Abraham. But before the wedding occurred, Mary is discovered to be expecting a child. She has not been with Joseph. She has not been with any man. It is God's miracle. The child is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We are tempted to say we find that hard to believe. There are even theologians who reject the idea of a virgin birth. Why? Because we know biology requires a woman's egg and a man's sperm to produce a child. Even among the faithful, there is a desire to explain everything so that it makes sense to our lowly minds. This basic detail forces us to face the truth that we do not find believing in God and trusting His word easy. And of course believing God is really what Christmas is all about. It is fundamental. Basic.

The modern mind is not the only one that stumbles at this point. Over 2,000 years ago, Joseph stumbled too. He had gone so far as to plan an exit strategy from his relationship with Mary when an angel...a messenger from God...invaded his sleep and righted him, putting him back on the path, back on the track, behaving faithfully...not only to God but to Mary. Is it not marvelous how those 2 things go together? Faithfulness to God, begetting faithfulness in relationships, producing a love filled marriage.

Joseph was not even free to choose the name of the child. The angel said, “You will name him Jesus.” Why? “Because he will save his people.” That is what the angel who appeared in Joseph's dream told him. Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua. At the time Greek had become the international language of trade and commerce. Bilingualism was a basic to “world wide” business and imperial government. Jesus means...”the Lord saves.” And that insight is absolutely basic to the meaning of Christmas. It is why every charity that does business in the western world has a Christmas campaign. It's why we find ourselves labouring to help out the local food bank. It's why we feast on the period that leads up to the 25th and even beyond it. The Lord saves. The Lord saves us. Not because we deserve it...but because of Jesus. Because of the cross. Because of the open tomb. God has chosen to

save people...including us. Including me. The basics about Christ's birth are as personal as it gets. Christmas is for you and for me, and it has to be shared. We cannot, we must not, keep it to ourselves.

Matthew goes on to explain that the words of the prophets in the Old Testament are full of the foretelling, that these things would happen, that this is indeed how God would have it unfold. A virgin giving birth. A son being born into a family. The Spirit of God having been the power that makes this particular life, the life of Jesus possible, to redeem sinners, by grace, (it is a gift), received through faith and faith alone.

Miraculous you say? Interesting that we might say that. That is just the way Joseph reacted, responded to the visitation God gave him by means of an angel. When Joseph woke up he had to act. He had to respond to God's leading, God's touch. He persuaded Mary to marry him. Think about that! Somehow, it may only be a mere man's sinful mind, but I suspect there was a certain amount of grovelling involved, especially if she had any idea of Joseph's first plan to end their engagement.

Funny thing. Matthew finds it necessary to remind us that the new couple did not celebrate their married status until after Jesus was born. And Jesus was the name Joseph gave Him. Why? It is really basic. Christmas is about God. It is about the Lord. And it is about the fact that HE has plans for us, for all of us.

Let us pray;

Lord as we worship this morning we try to keep one eye on the cross and the other eye on the stable in Bethlehem. Beneath the light of your birth star, You came into the world to save it's people. We will celebrate at the communion table. We will remember how it all happened. We will sing the carols and read the lessons in the coming weeks. We choose to give the glory to your name, as the basic exercise of faith in You. Amen