

December 7, 2014 “The 2nd Miracle” Matthew 1:18-25

She said, “You can't really believe that. You've studied biology with the rest of us. You know how babies are made!” She was a classmate in High School. We had been talking about what we were going to do in our lives. I had said, “The game plan has changed. God has called me to the ministry.” He said, “You can't do that!” I knew him well enough to know he was getting angry. “You've got too good a mind to do that!” Years later, Dr. Kalda found me through the internet. He was going to be in Toronto and came to see us, with his wife. We had a good time. I could not help thinking that I had become Dr. Mitchell, made a difference.

You see, it is so easy to find reasons in this modern world, in this time of ours not to believe. The first miracle involved a star. What the star caused was a paradigm shift for several Gentiles. They were Magi Priests. They watched the stars. But what they saw in the night sky, along with their knowledge and the results of their research, brought them to the edge of the faith cliff, and then nudged them over. The second miracle involves something of the same kind.

Miracle: according to the Oxford Dictionary, a wonder, something that strikes us with awe. According to George Bernard Shaw who did not believe in the Christian sense, a miracle is an event that creates faith. Again according to the Oxford Dictionary, a miracle is a marvelous event due to the supposed action of God. The dictionary was nervous about that last bit. I have to admit I translated it for you.

How interesting it is that this second miracle is an equal

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opportunity miracle. To the woman, young Mary, Joseph's fiance, it brought terror. Her future could be at stake. Heavens, who would believe her story? The answer is simple. No one. Not even Joseph would believe it, and we are led to understand that he was devout. His reason for not marrying her, not seeing the commitment they had made to each other through, is that she has obviously been unfaithful. Joseph understands “how babies are made!” Mary is desperate. This can't be happening to me! Type desperate. Joseph is dismayed. “How could she?”

What changes everything is that God is indeed involved. For Mary the rest of the story is told in detail by Luke, who either got the story from her. After all he was a physician. And if not from her, from the midwife, or some of the women who undoubtedly helped in the birth. Most women understand exactly how...useless men can be in those circumstances. An angel of God, a heavenly messenger spoke to her and said what amounts to, "You have been chosen. This is what is going to happen." It did not (I am sure) take away her fear, her sense of panic, her sense of "O God!" But you do know what she said. "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me, as you have said." (Luke 1:38). I suspect her submission...and that is what it was. Faith that submits to God's unchanging plan. I suspect her submission did little for the butterflies in her tummy when the rest of that verse unfolded. "The angel left her. Alone. However great the experience of the angel, the absence of the angel left her with the world, and in the world, and Joseph's knowing how babies are made.

She met him. She told him. He knows. She is going to have a child. He did not beat her. "He was a righteous man," says Matthew. What does that mean? Well in part it means he was a very

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rational man. He had a good mind. He was concerned about doing what was right. He did not want her to be put to death. No interest in that option at all. Remember it was an option!! But if she could do such a thing...be with another man...he had no intention of marrying her either. Being religious is part of why he wants to be and is righteous. He obeys the rules. He keeps the commandments and suddenly it is easy to be judgmental...she apparently has not kept the rules, has not obeyed the commandments. That is where a good mind can take you. Using your head. You did not in those times and you do not in these times, hear the voice of God by simply using your head. Faith may be rational but faith takes us places and causes us to do things that the purely rational would not approach.

This second miracle is an equal opportunity miracle because the Lord God Almighty is an equal opportunity God. Jesus said, "Your Father in heaven, he causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, on the righteous and the unrighteous." (Matt 5:45). As God has chosen Mary, to

bear this child, to be the seed pod for this pregnancy, so he has chosen Joseph, to love and to cherish Mary, to protect her, and provide for their family, which as it turns out is sizable. Remember that the disciple James was in fact brother by blood to Jesus. What was it James would teach us all? “Faith without works is dead.” I wonder if James learned those words from his father, Joseph of Nazareth, and Bethlehem and most of all, the loving and committed partner to Mary.

They are well paired. As it took an angel in Mary's case to produce the submission to which faith in Jesus is ultimately the heir, so it took an angel to produce in Joseph faith that is not simply eager to be rational, proving itself with words, showing itself by its knowledge of the commandments. The rules. The Law. As the result

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of this encounter with God Joseph too, submits himself. He discovers that faith requires you do things. Concrete things in a concrete world. And if they say or imply or mean you are crazy....faith makes a choice....to have the approval of God....more than the approval of men.

It is significant what the angel says to Joseph. He had considered all the facts. He had done the rational thing. He had come to a decision. He had made a plan. “Failing to plan is planning to fail.” That is very rational, reasonable. The angel said, “Don't be afraid Joseph.” Because he was afraid. He was afraid of what people would think. He was afraid of what he would think. What he would remember about these moments in later years. “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife...what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.” The same Spirit of God, that hovered over the waters in that hour when creation was conceived, revealed in the unfolding days in which the creation was born. Put that in your rational, reasonable mind and smoke it!! And if you want to try and “understand all this Joseph...read Isaiah 7:14... “Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: the virgin will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel....and by the way....Immanuel means God is with us.

The movie Avatar is about a marine who has travelled in cryogenic suspension to the other side of the universe ... to the planet Pandora...where his destiny awaits him. As he says, the problem with cryogenic suspension is, “you always have to wake up”! For Joseph too,

the problem is you always have to wake up and face the day. The choice is simple. Not easy. Simple. If he believes God, he has to do something. Faith requires deeds. In Joseph's case faith requires that he take Mary to be his wife....faith requires that he

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submit...as she has already done....to God and God's agenda.

Surprise! The second miracle is like the first. Events, experience, create faith. This time in a young Jewish maiden, and an older Jewish man. Suddenly everything has changed. Life is in fact in orbit around the Son....S-O-N-. God's saving mankind from sin.

Let us pray.

Lord this season is filled with miracles. And all of them bear your fingerprints, and affect us, deeply. We find ourselves called to be....generous. Even more generous. We find ourselves challenged to think with our hearts, as well as our minds. We find ourselves led to the edge of the faith cliff and invited to step boldly into the unknown, where faith is tempted to metamorphose into fear. O Lord bear us up on the wings of angels. That we might treasure the salvation's song. Amen