

Third Advent Wednesday
December 16, 2009
Matthew 1:18-25

I decided this year for these three Wednesday Advent worship services to focus on New Testament sermon texts and to use the general theme – Prepare the Way for The Savior. First, we saw how Zechariah, John the Baptist's father, prepared the way. Next, the special preparer of the way, John the Baptist himself, was considered last week. Tonight, we come even closer to the Christmas celebration itself, but still stay within the preparatory season of Advent, as we think about how Joseph prepared the way for the Savior. May Joseph help us in our preparation.

I could have entitled the theme for this sermon not merely, "Joseph Prepared the Way for the Savior" but "Isaiah and Joseph prepared the Way for the Savior."

But Joseph certainly did prepare the way in his own unique way.

Joseph was a righteous man. That's what God says about him here through the Apostle Matthew. That righteousness showed itself even before God's astounding revelation to Joseph about Mary and her baby.

Can we appreciate how Joseph had to have been hurt and shocked beyond our imagination when he knew Mary well. He knew her also to be righteous. Joseph was so certain that Mary trusted in and loved the Lord God as he did. He was sure she also loved Joseph as he did her.

The righteousness of Joseph showed in how he was going to end his relationship quietly. He absolutely did not want to put Mary through a public disgrace. Joseph planned only to make a legal end to the relationship he thought Mary had already broken by sexual unfaithfulness. Joseph certainly did not, however, seek to punish Mary or to get even with her for what he thought she had done.

Joseph's hurt and awful disappointment could very easily and quickly have turned into anger and bitterness. It did not! That was evidence of his righteousness.

May the gift of righteousness you and I have from our Savior/God show similarly. People do things that hurt us and bitterly disappoint us sometimes. But the Savior's righteousness does not first look out for self. It always operates in love to try to help the other person. Can anything be done to help the wrongdoer out of the sin by repentance? Is my reaction to being wronged godly and helpful to leading anyone to repentance, or is it itself a sinful reaction? In other words, in real life, as we function with people, we need prayerfully to think how Jesus wants us to serve rather than just react.

Joseph's righteousness certainly should also after God revealed His truth to Joseph about Mary. God's revelation to Joseph surely was very necessary. A revelation from God is needed when human beings cannot know something otherwise.

Mary was going to have a baby. Joseph knew he was not the father. Joseph knew where babies come from. People then did NOT think an occasional baby was born of a virgin. There is no way Joseph could have thought anything other than what he was thinking. Only God could tell Joseph that an absolute, full-fledged miracle of God took place here. The baby would be a boy and He was Mary's biological son but not Joseph's biological son, in fact, not any man's biological son. The Baby had been conceived by the Holy Spirit's almighty power doing a miracle, really a miracle of creation, creating the genetic material, which normally would be provided by a male.

This flew directly in the face of Joseph's logic and reasoning and understanding. But Joseph submitted his human reason and understanding to God's Word to him. In this regard, you and I have done the same thing. This does not fit our human knowledge or reason either. But we have done what St. Paul said he and Christians do, and need always to do, "we demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God (God's knowledge), and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

Third, Joseph showed righteousness in that he did what God told him to do, took Mary home as his wife, and in effect, served as the legal father of Jesus. Joseph took Mary as his wife. He was willing to serve God in the awesome responsibility of bringing up Jesus who was given that name by God because Jesus would save, rescue, His people from their sin. Jesus means 'The Lord saves.' Did you ever consider the fact that by doing this Joseph was risking ruining his reputation? Other people knew the timing here. Wouldn't other people assume Joseph had consecrated the wedding before the wedding? The Jews of that day did not share our society's ungodly idea that the privileges of marriage can rightly be exercised without an actual wedding. If a person is not married in the sight of the state, he/she is not married in the sight of God.

Anyway, Joseph again risked himself in order to listen to and obey his Savior/God. That's what it means to serve God. Let us also risk ourselves by serving God according to His Word.

Notice that Matthew tells about Isaiah's prophecy of the Virgin birth of God in the flesh even before Matthew tells us how. Joseph did what God wanted Joseph to do.

Joseph knew his Old Testament. When the angel delivered God's revelation to him about the virgin conception, certainly Joseph thought of this verse. So, what the angel said was the fulfillment of what God had already said through Isaiah. Joseph might very well have thought even of God's very first promise of the Savior from satan, sin, and death. "I will put enmity between you (satan) and the woman, between your offspring (unbelievers) and hers (believers). He will crush your head (satan) and you will strike His heel (the Savior's)."

Really, all the prophets, from Moses to Malachi, prepared the way for the coming of the Savior through the Word of God they wrote. And it is absolutely faith-building to see all

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the Old Testament preparations for the coming of the Savior in direct prophecies and many pictures and illustrations.

Let us humble ourselves under our God, using the gift of righteousness our Savior Jesus has gifted to us by faith in Him. Let us do what He wants us to do. Let us serve Him and our neighbor. Focus on God's Word! Amen.