

Sermons at First Church

A Ministry of the Word
December 4, 2022

First Presbyterian Church
Clarksburg, WV

Rev. John F. Koerner
1:18-25

Pregnant

Matthew

“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.” (Matthew 1:20 N.R.S.V.)

Discombobulated

My name is Joseph, the husband of Mary and the stepfather of Jesus. Your Bible doesn't tell you a lot about me. I am mentioned only a couple of times in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, and not at all in the letters of Paul. That doesn't bother me, I was never interested in fame or in making a big splash.

I was far more interested in living quietly and serving God humbly. My family could trace its ancestry back to King David and beyond him to Father Abraham. Everybody knows those names. Abraham and David were famous, bigger than life figures. But that was not for me. I am just a humble carpenter

What I was looking for in life was stability, safety, order, and predictability. My family had arranged for me to marry a young woman named Mary. I was several years older than Mary, but I liked Mary and just knew that we could have a good life together. I dreamed that I would build us a warm little house with a carpenter shop attached. We would have a dozen children or so, and everything would be ordered, rupted, and conbobulated.

Sorry, did I not get that quite right? English is not my native language. I grew up speaking Aramaic with a spattering of Hebrew. So I don't always get the English words just right.

Anyway, I thought my life would be ordered, rupted, and conbobulated. Instead it was disordered, disrupted, and discombobulated.

Mary and I had been engaged for a few months and everything was going according to my plans. I already had our home built and was working on the carpenter shop. Then Mary revealed to me that she was pregnant. She said something about the child to be born was from God. I wasn't listening very closely at that point. All I could think about was that the child was not mine. We hadn't been together that way. Look, I may have been born at night, but it wasn't last night.

In a single blow, all of my life plans were shattered. I was totally adrift and discombobulated. I gathered the shredded pieces of my dignity around myself and quickly fled. I had to get away. I knew that if I stayed, I would say things that both Mary and I would regret.

I felt as if I had been played for a fool. There was no way I could marry her now. I just couldn't! But after I had cooled off a little, I realized that I also could not publically condemn her either. The elders might decide to stone her. I couldn't let that happen.

So I decided that I would talk with my parents and have them arrange a divorce, quietly so there would not be a big fuss about it. That night I had a dream and an angel of the Lord appeared to me. The angel told me that I should not be afraid to take Mary as my wife, that the baby was the work of the Holy Spirit.

This was still a giant disruption of my plans. And I knew that people were still going to talk. They were going to add up the months and tongues were going to wag. Still, I was determined to follow God. So I went to Mary and told her about my dream and my decision to still marry her. She was so relieved that she broke down into tears. And I felt like a heel for having ever doubted her. Yet, there was also a great strength to Mary. Her faith always felt like it was so much stronger than mine.

All right that was quite a bump on the road of my plans, but now that was over and I felt like we were more or less back on track. That was just so much wishful thinking on my part. This child kept disrupting my best laid plans.

First there was the birth in the stable and the strange visit from the shepherds. Then there was the later visit from the Magi. After they left, another angel visited me in my dreams and warned that King Herod was going to try to kill the baby Jesus. The king was after my baby. Because by that time, I could think of him in no other way.

So we fled to Egypt. Up to that point I had always secretly looked down on refugees and immigrants. Oh, I felt sorry for them, but I wasn't all that eager to help them. Then suddenly here I was a refugee in Egypt. We were in a strange land with strange customs. And yes, many of the native people looked down on us.

Fortunately there were those who did help us, gave us food, gave me work. It was not the settled, safe, predictable life I had imagined for us. But by the grace of God, we survived.

One night a few years later, I was once again visited by an angel in a dream. I must admit that I flinched even in my dream. What new disruption was God bringing to my life? But the angel only came to tell me that King Herod had died and that it was safe to go home again to Nazareth.

So we packed up and set out from Egypt to go home again. It was another disruption, but a pleasant one. There is a world of difference between trying to make a new home in the strange land of Egypt and going back home again. Coming home, we were greeted by extended family

and friends. And so with a minimal disruption, we settled back in again.

All I thought I wanted in life was safety, stability, and predictability. What I got in the birth of Jesus into our lives was disruption and change. It wasn't what I planned. No, it was infinitely better. I count myself among the most blessed of people, because I was part of God's plan to save the world. What could ever be better than that!

So here are some parting words that I want to share with you. The Christ Child wants to be born in your heart this Christmas. Like the birth of every child, this is wonderful and exciting, but it will also bring changes, challenges, and disruptions. It will mean that your agenda will no longer be yours alone.

Friends, there is no more blessed way to live than to have Christ in your hearts. Are you willing?

Amen.