

Isaiah 7:10-16

Matthew 1:18-25

Romans 1:1-7

“Restore us, O Lord God; let your face  
shine upon the world.” AMEN!

Close your eyes and imagine now that  
you’re engaged to be married and  
your fiancé comes to you.

The one you’ve been longing to marry.

She says, “I’m pregnant.”

Adding to the surprise, or shock, is that  
you know you have not done the thing  
that makes babies. :-)

What would you feel?

Anger, heartbreak, disgrace, confusion?

One thing’s for sure, you’d  
probably break off the engagement amidst your  
feeling, and the town’s whispering and gossip.

You’ve done the right thing most of your life.

A hard worker and someone who people  
call on for an honest day’s work, but  
now even that is threatened to be ruined

because of what she has done.

Who'd hire the husband of an adulterer and  
father of an illegitimate child? (Pause)

You didn't even do anything wrong and  
this is all crashing down on you.

One thing, I know, is for sure, life is messy.

Think of all the truths from the Advent season,  
amidst the shopping and trade,  
the long lines and traffic,  
we come to this truth:

God comes along into our messy lives and  
makes them a whole lot messier.

Gee, thanks a lot, God! (Pause)

This Jesus, not even born yet, completely  
overturned the lives of Mary and Joseph.

This child came at a time when, at best,  
unmarried parents faced certain social disgrace.

This child was born in a time when, at worst,  
an unmarried mother would have been  
stoned to death for adultery.

This baby was already a burden that  
Mary and Joseph had not asked for.

For Joseph, there's only one "right" thing to do.

Shut it all down and send her away... move on.

Matthew tells us he wished to divorce her quietly  
for he was a righteous man. (Pause)

I think many of us find ourselves in Joseph's shoes  
at one time or another in the messiness of life.

It may not be in dealing with another's  
mysterious pregnancy, but in finding  
the spark of God growing in someone  
to who we are promised.

That spark changes them in ways  
we'd never planned nor imagined.

When God grows in someone you want  
to be devoted only to you, your life gets upset,  
disoriented, and sometimes even painful.

You see, when you or I are used to being  
the one getting total devotion,  
the spark of God in another

can feel like betrayal. (Pause)

Lee was an avowed atheist and  
his wife Leslie shared this belief.

The couple built their lives around career, success,  
and comfortable lifestyles.

A neighbor became friends with Leslie and  
she gently answered Leslie's questions about  
faith and belief.

The neighbor invited Leslie into a Bible Study and  
she was welcomed into a church community.

Over a period of time, Leslie let the spark grow  
and found herself wanting to commit  
to follow Jesus' message of love and mercy.

When Leslie told Lee about her decision,  
he felt betrayed, shocked and even a little angry.

"It felt like I was losing my wife," he said.

He worried her new faith would ruin their  
success driven and comfortable lifestyle.

He even considered divorce, after all, he didn't  
sign up to marry a Christian.

Yet, overtime, Lee could not ignore  
the positive changes in Leslie's character,  
integrity and love.

Lee began to find his own hostility soften,  
but driven by love for his wife and (honestly)  
a desire to disprove her beliefs,

he launched a long, detailed investigation  
into the historical and intellectual basis  
for Christianity, using his skill as a journalist.

The result, after about 2 years of study and  
wrestling with the evidence,

Lee Stroebel concluded that following Jesus  
and trusting in his teaching was creating  
a similar spark in him.

Lee and Leslie's marriage, once on the brink  
of divorce began to grow and deepen as  
they began to follow Christ together.

His two years of work to disprove Jesus  
led to his best selling book "The Case for Christ."  
(Pause)

The angel's invitation to Joseph,

to not be afraid to take Mary as partner,  
was no small task.

Joseph knew it.

It was in fact a wondrous and awesome one.

As we stand upon the threshold between  
Advent and Christmas

we pray perhaps the way Joseph prayed.

There may be some “why me’s?”

There may even be some fear about  
what others might whisper, but we hear  
Joseph’s story and are reminded that we

are also called to be companions to the one  
in whom the spark of God is growing.

This may be a harder task than we think,  
to welcome God’s transforming  
spark and work in the lives of those  
closest to us.

They’ll change and grow into new and  
different people before our very eyes.

It will be messy.

It will likely break hearts and souls wide open.

Yet, there are also rewards.

We join Joseph in accompanying another  
who carries Christ within them.

In the accompaniment we become awestruck at  
the love embodied in the other.

We can also hold the Christ child in our arms.

Let's be like Joseph, here, and go find Mary.

When we find her let's tell her we are still here.

Then let us set out together on the road to Bethlehem,  
knowing God is with us.

AMEN!