



“Wait In Wonder...Resolved!”

Fourth Sunday Of Advent

Saturday & Sunday, December 21 & 22, 2019

The Reverend John H. Brock
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Isaiah 7:10-16; Matthew 1:18-25

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

I'm going to need you all to hold on, because we're going to be jumping around a bit throughout time.

We're starting off in the far eastern edge of the Roman empire, back to the First century, Common Era. The nation of Israel is a vassal of Rome, but they can still pretty much keep their own traditions and societal norms. A Hebrew man named Joseph, is engaged to a young woman named Mary. He has just found out that his intended is pregnant. He knows for a **fact** that the child is not his.

We know that Mary is a young woman. The Greek words (παρθενος) used to refer to her in Luke imply a female who is above the age of *bat mitzvah*, but not yet wed: παρθενος means, literally: an unmarried young woman *virgin, maiden, girl* (**Friberg, Analytical Greek Lexicon**)

Generally, culturally, women in that era got married in their mid-teens, and men in their late-teen, early twenties. So, Mary was probably 14-16 years old, and, going with my hypotheses, Joseph was 19-21 (some folks want Mary to remain a perpetual virgin, claiming she *never* had marital relations with Joseph. In order to support those sections of scripture [Mark 6:3 & Matthew 13:55-56] which talk about Jesus' brothers and sisters, they say these are not biological siblings, but step-siblings from Joseph's previous marriage – and go on to speculate that Joseph is actually an *old man* and Mary is his second marriage. But there is no scriptural evidence one way or the other about Joseph. I, personally, prefer to think of him as a young man).

Joseph and Mary are betrothed, but not yet married. *Betrothed* is more than being engaged, but the deal hasn't been sealed yet, so to speak. It was probably an arranged marriage, which always makes us twenty-first century Americans kind of uncomfortable. The reasoning behind this is that families often know their children better than the young people do themselves, and a match made by parents can often be far more successful than if left to hormones, I mean, the kids.

Mary and Joseph probably met and liked each other enough to agree to proceed. Agreements were made on both sides: she would still live with her family, but he would begin supporting her financially. They wouldn't co-habitat until they were actually, officially married, which also means any *consummating* wouldn't be done until that time.

So, imagine Joseph's surprise when he finds out this young woman, to whom he is betrothed, is preggers. **He** knows the child she is carrying is **not** his. A whole lot of trust has been broken, along with social norms and contracts. Joseph is within his right, according to the law of their day, to bring Mary to either the town center or the main gate, depending on whether there was a wall surrounding the town, and publicly divorce her. *She* being visibly pregnant, and *he* denying the child is his, is all the proof needed. What's more, it would not be out of the norm for a woman in that situation to then be either run out of town or stoned to death.

This is where we learn that Joseph is an upright kind of man: He does **not** do any of that. How do we know this? Verse 19

¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly.

But what happens? God happens.

*²⁰ But just when he had **resolved** to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream*

An angel of the Lord! You know what happens when an angel of the Lord talks to you? *Either* you're in BIG trouble, or you've been chosen by God for a special task, and you're in *bigger* trouble. As it turns out, Joseph is chosen by God, *specifically* to be the caretaker of Mary and her Child, who is named Jesus, which means *to deliver*, or *Savior*.

But a lot of this still begs the question, what's so important about this pregnancy? For that, we need to turn to Isaiah. You might not have caught it, unless you're already aware of these **both** these readings.

A real brief background: this Isaiah passage comes from a time when the king of Judah is a guy named Ahaz. While he's a great *politician*, what he's *not* good at is following the Lord God Almighty. Basically, Ahaz was leading the people, especially those folks there in the capital Jerusalem, **away** from the Lord God. The enemies of Judah are pounding at the borders, and the people are afraid they're going to be conquered – again! The Lord God sends Isaiah to dope slap Ahaz, and to give the people **hope**; to give them a *resolution* to their problem. Isaiah steps up to tell Ahaz that **God is with them**, and to prove the point, that the people will be delivered, God is going to give them a sign. The sign is to remind them that God is **with** the people, the sign that God will not **forsake** the people. A sign that God will deliver the people from their enemies. And that sign is in Isaiah 7:14:

Behold, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel.

Immanuel, which means, *God with us*. (oh, and the Greek word used for *young woman* there – παρθενος (*parthenos*) – that's the **very same word** Luke uses in his telling of the story).

That child, says Isaiah, shall grow up to deliver the people from all their enemies, and the people shall be saved! **That's** the good news that Isaiah brings to the people of his day. The savior is coming – God just doesn't say *WHEN*.

Now let's jump back to Matthew's gospel and Joseph. The roughly six hundred years of waiting since Isaiah gave this message of hope that the people of Judah have been doing, waiting for this prophesied child to be born, come to fruition with the birth of this child, to this teenaged mother. This child is the *fulfillment* of a promise made **to** the people, **through** Isaiah, aided along the way by countless others. And all this waiting, all this anticipation, comes to completion with the birth of this little child in an out of the way place, in an unremarkable part of the Roman empire.

All this waiting for a savior to lead them – a savior to lead **us** – is now over. With the birth of this child, the wait now resolved!

Immanuel! God is with us!

Amen.

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