

Sunday, December 19, 2004

Scripture Reading: Matthew 1:18-25

Text for Today: *Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "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."*

Perhaps the greatest miracle in the account of the birth of our Lord and Savior from Matthew's gospel, which serves as the lectionary gospel text for this fourth Sunday of Advent, was that Joseph trusted in God enough to step outside of the expectations that his community had assigned to him and in humility served as Jesus' earthly father.

Most biblical scholars and historians suggest that the events of this story took place around 4-6 BC. In those days in ancient Israel, women who became pregnant outside of the marriage contract were deemed unworthy of marriage, cast aside if not executed, or left to the mercies of their community. Mary, the young mother of our Lord, was understood as a means to extend the lineage of the man that she was contracted to in marriage. Unfortunately, love was not the reason for marriage in those days.

Joseph was under no obligation to treat Mary or her unborn child with any kindness. Within the laws of his community, Joseph had every right to publicly disgrace her and set her and her baby on a journey of perpetual poverty and abuse by the not-so-righteous of her community. Instead, Joseph turned his culture upside down, trusted in the vision that he received, and ultimately entered into the marriage covenant with Mary and with God.

As our day of celebration draws closer, we may wish to ask ourselves in what ways might we turn our own cultural views and expectations upside down, trusting in God's vision of hope, peace, love and joy for every person regardless of whom we name them to be? Which miracles are we expecting to participate in?

Prayer: Holy God, thank you for your undying faith in your children in every time and place. Move our hearts and our hands that we may be faith-ful servants of your love and grace and bless us with your peace. Amen.

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