

The R's of Advent  
Routine  
Mathew 1: 18-25

Many of us have heard the story of the birth of Christ numerous times in our lifetime. We have also read about it, sang about it, maybe even watched numerous kids plays about it. We have probably watched movies and television shows about it. Who hasn't seen a Charlie Brown Christmas? The birth of Jesus was far from routine, and we have become so familiar with it all that we often fail to ponder the mystery of it all. In fact, it is so familiar to some of us that we are no longer amazed by the incredible miracles that marked an event that changed the world in which we live forever.

Because we are creatures of habit, our routines and day to day activities often blind us to the signs and wonders that God provides to reveal His glory. How many of us have welcomed a fellow worshiper with the words "good morning" even though it is 5:00 PM in the evening at a Good Friday service? When we do things the same way over and over, our mind ceases to question the need for the activity, and instead simply tells the rest of our body to just do it. Doing things without thinking is OK most of the time, but when we allow our minds to process God's Word in that fashion, we are in trouble.

This morning it is my hope that we will do what Mary and Joseph did when they were first told about God's plan for their lives. They pondered in their hearts the significance and meaning of what was to take place. The birth of Jesus is recorded in the gospels of Luke and Matthew, with Matthew writing from a Jewish perspective and Luke from that of a Gentile. Matthew provides no clues as to when, where or how the birth of Jesus happened, but he does provide some significant information we dare not overlook. For instance, he provides a glimpse into the struggle that Joseph had through this amazing event. Just as Luke reveals much about Mary's thoughts and prayers, Matthew does the same for Joseph. He tells us that Joseph was "a just man" and had fears about marrying the woman he had promised to love and support.

We know from verse 20 that fear is the right word. The Bible doesn't say what was he afraid of, but it is reasonable to conclude that it was the fear of God. If he took Mary as his wife, he would have to deceive others into believing that the child was his, and Joseph knew that God is no fan of deceit. Character and integrity meant something to him, and Joseph was more concerned about pleasing God in this difficult situation than he was pleasing his relatives and friends. The world needs more Josephs. I don't mean more men named Joseph, but more people that desire to please God.

Joseph's role in the birth of Christ is somewhat overshadowed by that of Mary. He is often overlooked, perhaps even considered an innocent bystander at best. However, he had questions and fears just as Mary did. It is obvious God chose him to be the surrogate father of Christ, just as he chose Mary to be Jesus' mother. God allows nothing to happen by chance, or by mere routine. God sent an angel to both to alleviate their fears and provide guidance and direction and both willingly accepted the role that they would have in this world changing event. Because they were obedient to the will of God creation would be changed forever.

In the Old Testament, we find that God gave people many signs to reassure them He was completely in control. In fact, the far from routine birth of the prophet Isaiah's son to a virgin was a sign to a nation of little faith that they need not fear their enemy to the north. It was a mysterious sign from God that He was still on the throne, and they were still on His mind. Seven hundred years later, the unconventional birth of God's Son to a virgin is a sign to us that God is still on the throne, and we are still on His mind. The difference is that our enemy is to the south- way south. Like Mary and Joseph, we too will face the enemies of fear, anxiety, and doubt. It will be easy to let that evil trinity steal our joy this Christmas season. We must not allow that to happen.

The birth of Christ was the first of many miracles meant to reveal to the world that Jesus is God. It was far from routine. More than just a great teacher, more than just a great prophet, at Christmas we are celebrating the fact that Jesus is God Almighty, God in human flesh, born without sin, born a child yet a King. The wonderful thing is that this King named Jesus loves us.

So, in this chaotic season it will be good to interrupt our normal routines and do something different. As did Mary and Joseph, let us stop and consider what less than routine thing God is asking us to do that could influence our world for good in some fashion. God only knows the plans He has for us. **Jeremiah 29:11** Advent is a season for readiness, repentance, and recognition, and like the other seasons of the year it is a time where God reveals something new to us every day. Let us ask for grace to recognize them. Morning by morning new mercies I see. May they renew our faith in Christ and help us to please Him in all we do. Let that remain our routine until Jesus returns for His church. Amen