

Joseph's Letter Home

Message for Sunday, December 25, 2016
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25

Children's Message:

I heard a story from years gone by about a little boy who had always wanted to go to a circus. One day he was walking down the street when he saw a poster in a store window. The poster said that a circus was coming to town and that a ticket to the circus cost one dollar (that's how you know it's an old story!). The boy ran home and asked his father if he would give him a dollar to go to the circus on Saturday.

His father told him that if he would work hard and get all of his chores done, he would give him a dollar to go to the circus. Saturday morning came and the boy got up early and did all of his chores.

"I have all of my chores done," the boy told his dad.

The boy's father gave him a dollar and the boy headed into town filled with excitement about seeing wild animals, jugglers, and all of the things that come with a circus. Since he arrived in town so early, he was on the front row when the circus parade started down the main street of town. The boy was thrilled when the animals and other circus acts paraded by.

At the end of the parade came the clowns and following the clowns was the ringmaster. When the ringmaster passed by where he was standing, the boy ran out into the street, took his dollar bill from his pocket, and handed it to the ringmaster.

"Thanks, mister," said the boy, "that was a great circus." Then he turned around and walked home. He never knew what he had missed. He thought he had been to the circus, but he had only been to the parade.

Christmas can be like that. We can get so caught up in the food, the decorations, and the gifts that we miss the real Christmas—the birthday of Jesus.

Message "Joseph's Letter Home" ¹

Dear Mom,

We're in Bethlehem—Mary and I, and now our new baby. We named him "Jesus."

There were lots of things I couldn't talk about with you last summer. You wouldn't have believed me then, but maybe I can tell you now. I hope you can understand.

You know, Mom, I've always loved Mary. You and dad used to tease me about her when she was still a girl. She and her brothers used to play on our street. Our families got together for supper. But the hardest day of my life came half a year ago when I was twenty and she only fourteen. You remember that day, don't you?

The trouble started after we were betrothed. Shortly after that, Mary left abruptly to visit her old cousin Elizabeth down south in Judea. She was gone three whole months. After she got back, people started gossiping about the size of her belly.

It was cloudy the next day when I confronted her with the gossip. "Mary," I asked, "are you going to have a baby?"

Her clear brown eyes met mine. She nodded.

I didn't know what to say. "Who?" I finally stammered.

Mom, Mary and I had never acted improperly—even after we were engaged.

Mary looked down at the ground. "Joseph," she said. "There's no way I can explain. You couldn't understand. But I want you to know I've never cared for anyone but you." She gently took my hands in hers, kissed each of them as if it were the last time she would ever do that, and then turned towards home. She must have been dying inside. I know I was.

The rest of the day I stumbled through my chores. It's a wonder I didn't cut off one of my fingers in the woodshop. At first I was angry and pounded out

¹ Amended from article by Ralph F. Wilson, JoyfulHeart.com. Used by permission.

my frustrations on the doorframe I was making. My thoughts whirled so fast I could hardly keep my mind on my work. At last I decided just to end the marriage contract with a quiet divorce. I loved her too much to make a public scene.

I couldn't talk to you. Or anyone, for that matter. I went to bed early and tried to sleep. Her words came to me over and over. "I've never cared for anyone but you.... I've never cared for anyone but you...." How I wished I could believe her!

I don't know when I finally fell asleep. Mom, I had a dream from God. An angel of the Lord came to me. His words pulsed through my mind so intensely I can remember them as if it was last night. "Joseph, son of David," he thundered, "do not fear to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."

I couldn't believe my ears, Mom. This was the answer! The angel continued, "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." The angel gripped my shoulders with his huge hands. For a long moment his gaze pierced deep within me. Just as he turned to go, I think I saw a smile on his shining face.

I sat bolt upright in bed. No sleep after that! I tossed about for a while, going over the words in my mind. Then I got up and dressed quietly so I wouldn't wake you.

I must have walked for miles beneath the moonless sky. Stars pricked the blackness like a thousand tiny pinpoints. A warm breeze blew on my face.

I sang to the Lord, Mom. Yes, me, singing, if you can imagine that. I couldn't contain my joy. I told him that I would take Mary and care for her. I told him I would watch over her—and the child—no matter what anyone said.

I got back just as the sun kissed the hilltops. I don't know if you still recall that morning, Mom. I can see it in my mind's eye as if it happened just this morning. You were feeding the chickens, surprised to see me out. Remember?

"Please sit down," I said to you. "I've got to tell you something." I took your arm and helped you find a seat on the big rock out back. "Mom," I said, "I'm going to bring Mary home to live with us until we're married. Can you help make a place for her things?"

You were silent a long time. "You do know what they're saying, don't you, son?" you said at last, your eyes glistening.

"Yes, Mom, I know."

Your voice started to rise. "If your father were still alive, he'd have some words, I'll tell you. Going about like that before you are married. Disgracing the family and all. You... you and Mary ought to be ashamed of yourselves!"

You'd never have believed me if I'd tried to explain, so I didn't. Unless the angel had spoken to you, you'd have laughed me to scorn. "Mom, this is the right thing to do," I said.

And then I started talking to you as if I were the head of the house. "When she comes I don't want one word to her about it," I sputtered. "She's going to be your daughter-in-law, you'll respect her. She'll need your help if she's to bear the neighbours' wagging tongues!"

I'm sorry, Mom. You didn't deserve that. You started to get up in a huff. "Mom," I murmured, "I need you." You took my hand and got to your feet, but the fire was gone from your eyes.

"You can count on me, Joseph," you told me with a long hug. And you meant it. I never heard another word. No bride could hope for a better mother-in-law than you those next few months.

Mom, after I left you I went up the road to Mary's house and knocked. Her mother glared at me as she opened the door. Loudly, harshly she called into the house, "It's Joseph!" almost spitting out my name as she said it.

My little Mary came out cringing, as if she expected me give her the back of my hand, I suppose. Her eyes were red and puffy. I can just imagine what her parents had said.

We walked a few steps from the house. She looked so young and afraid. “Pack your things, Mary,” I told her gently. “I’m taking you home to live with us.”

“Oh, Joseph!” She hugged me as tight as she could. Mom, I didn’t realize she was so strong.

I could feel Mary’s tiny frame shuddering as she sobbed quietly. “Mary,” I said. I could feel myself speaking more boldly. “No matter what anyone says about you, I’m proud you’re going to be my wife. I’m going to take good care of you. I’ve promised God that.”

She looked up, puzzled. I lowered my voice. “I had a dream last night, Mary. An angel came and told me all about it. I know.”

The anguish which had gripped her face vanished. She was radiant as we turned away from the house and began to walk up the hill together.

That’s how it was, Mom. Thanks for being there for us. I’ll write again soon.

Love, Joseph

There are things about the life of Jesus we will never know; we can only imagine. But we *do* know this:

- That he came into our world to tell us in person God’s love;
- That through his life and his teachings, he showed us how to live in God’s way;
- That he gave his life on the cross, so that we can be forgiven for all the wrong we’ve done;
- That the grave couldn’t hold him. He rose up from the dead, and he will do the same for us.
- That he lives with us today, through the Holy Spirit.
- That he promises to be with us always, and that we can live with him forever in our new home.

And that’s why we worship him as Lord and Saviour.