

Sermon: Longing for Hope
Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25
Date: November 28, 2011 Advent 1
© Paul F. Soderquist, Interim Pastor
First Presbyterian Church, Brighton, CO

¹⁸Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰But 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. ²¹She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²²All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.” ²⁴When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Advent is here. Christmas is coming.
But have you ever heard why Jesus is better than Santa Claus?

Santa lives at the North Pole.
But JESUS is everywhere.

Santa rides in a sleigh
But JESUS rides on the wind and walks on the water.

Santa comes once a year
But JESUS is an ever present help.

Santa fills your stockings with goodies
But JESUS supplies all your needs.

Santa comes down your chimney
But JESUS stands at your door and knocks.. and then enters your heart.¹

Today we begin an Advent sermon series. And each Sunday we'll cover an aspect of our longing. Advent means coming. God's people were waiting for the coming of the Messiah, and we are waiting for his coming again. In waiting, there is a longing.

Hope in Personal Life Circumstances

From Matthew 1, verse 18: *“Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.”*

This poor unmarried couple in 1st century Palestine had their whole lives ahead of them. Mary with her dreams, as all young women dream. And Joseph, with his, as all young men dream. Joseph longed for a son. But suddenly his fiancé was pregnant, and he knew he wasn't the father. Indeed this child had no earthly father. Mary was with child from the Holy Spirit. And what it would mean is that Joseph wanted a son and hoped for a son, but he was given that and so much more.

For what do you hope?
What are your dreams and aspirations?
What longings do you hold in your heart?
And where is God in all of that?

Hope that People Will Understand You

Reading on in Matthew 1, verse 19. *“Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly.”*

Verse 18 says Joseph and Mary were engaged. They were not yet married, but the text here at verse 19 also says Joseph was Mary's husband. Mary

¹ Online reference accessed Nov. 22, 2011
http://jokes.christiansunite.com/Christmas/Jesus_is_Better_Than_Santa.shtml

was pregnant. Today, society doesn't have the same sense of shame that once was. Mary and Joseph lived in a time when that was a shameful thing. Joseph hoped for a son in time. He hoped that people would understand he and Mary had done nothing wrong. He hoped that people would not look down on them.

Years ago back in Iowa a young man died in his early twenties. His parents, Christians, were devastated. They missed him so. Months later, the father told me he had a dream one night, a dream in which he had had a conversation with their son in their basement. And it was the strangest thing that in the dream their son drank a Coke. It was strange because they didn't keep Coca-Cola in the house. But in the morning when the man awoke, he went downstairs to the basement, and there was an empty Coke can. He knew he didn't put it there. How do you explain something like that? He told me about it in hopes I wouldn't ridicule him or dismiss that dream. I didn't. Along with that father, I believed it was some message from beyond.

What do you hope people would understand about you?
What do people around you hope you will understand about them?
And are you understanding?

Hope that Helps People Look Up

There is a kind of hope that helps people look up in faith.

Matthew tells us in chapter 1, beginning at v. 19, speaking of Joseph and Mary, that he “...planned to dismiss her quietly.”²⁰ *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.”*²¹ *She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”*²² *All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:*²³ *“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.”*

So Mary was pregnant by divine design. And Joseph had a dream with divine consequences, showing him that God was with them. Emmanuel. Together, both Mary and Joseph could look up from their strange circumstances, and have faith, faith in God, faith in each other.

One day in Arizona I visited a young man in his twenties who had been lying in his hospital bed, unresponsive. He had been in a terrible accident. I left the room and found his family. They were in a waiting room. I introduced myself, and told them I had just seen their son, and I had held his hand, and prayed with him. I told them his eyes remained closed and he was otherwise still and unresponsive to me, but he squeezed my hand to let me know he heard me. **And** I told them I loved the mobile of clear crystal angels hanging at the foot of the bed. Quite unique. Well, the family was in tears. I asked why they were crying. And they said, their son had been totally unresponsive, comatose, for days, and they were sure I must have talking about someone else's son, until I mentioned the mobile of clear crystal angels. It was the sign of life they had been praying for. Now not every tragedy ends with such a happy ending. But we all felt God had come near that day.

What is going on in your life that helps you, or people around you, to look up?

Jesus came to turn our frowns into crowns.

Jesus came to turn our tearful sorrows into joyful tomorrows.

When God's kingdom comes near, people look up in faith.

Hope that Conquers Fear

Matthew chapter 1, and verse 24: *“When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife,²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.”*

God spoke to Joseph in a dream and said don't be afraid. Joseph was helped to release whatever fear or shame he felt, and instead to live in joy for all that was given to them. Because a son would be born. A Savior would come. God's promises would be realized.

Joseph needed hope. We all need hope. Is there hope?

Is there hope in Iran for the Rev. Yousef Nadarkhanian, whose only crime is that of being a Christian? Iranian officials give assurances that if he will only renounce his faith, he will be spared the death penalty. So far, Rev. Nadarkhanian refuses to renounce his faith. His execution seems certain, but perhaps Iranian officials will bend to world pressure. There is hope.

Is there hope for the church? I see we Presbyterians are re-organizing. Not only do we have a new Form of government, but we are probably going to replace seventeen synods with just five regional offices to help streamline the bureaucracy a bit. A little rearranging now and then doesn't hurt.

I see Congress admits to being gridlocked.. And the news reported this week people booed Michele Obama and Jill Biden at a NASCAR charity event. Wow. Where are our manners? Still, America is a land of great resources beginning with our people. There is much good will in America. There is hope.

Do you know what else gives me hope? Parents bringing their children to be baptized.

There Is Hope

Whatever life may have thrown at you, whatever challenges or disappointments, there is hope.

- Hope in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Hope in God.
- Hope in the good will of your brothers and sisters.
- Hope that the good feelings shared at the Thanksgiving Table may continue throughout the year.
- With God watching over us, and Jesus Christ as our Savior, there is hope.
- Whoever you are, won't you choose hope, even though you may be surrounded by people who can see only doom and gloom.
- Choose hope, even though people may not understand you.
- Choose hope, even though you may have been in the grip of fear.
- Choose hope, not despair.
- Live in hope.