

UNEDITED DRAFT

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Just 8 days 7hrs 45minutes. (5hrs 15mins) more days until Christmas!!! As a thoughtful service to everyone, I put the countdown timer in the lobby area – you probably noticed it when you came in. I heard several people comment on it. “What?! It’s coming that soon?” I could hear the stress in their voices. And the kids all thought: Still more than 8 days?! Christmas will never get here!”

The Christmas season usually brings with it a great deal of additional stress. So much to do, so much to prepare, people you’ll see that you don’t particularly want to see, parties to attend. What will help us deal with the Christmas stress?

Today we look at the appearance of one last angel of Advent. It’s the one that appeared to Joseph announcing that the baby Mary was bearing was the Savior of the world.

Imagine the Christmas stress Joseph was experiencing as I read the first part of the account:

Matthew 1:18-25 This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

Matthew doesn’t tell us exactly how Joseph found out about the pregnancy. Did Mary tell him? The text doesn’t say she did. Did Joseph only figure it out when Mary started showing? Right after the angel appeared to Mary, we are told she went to see her cousin Elizabeth who was in her sixth month of pregnancy and she stayed with them for 3 months. Was it after her return that Joseph figured it out? Did Mary personally share the whole story of the angel’s appearance to Zechariah and Elizabeth and their miracle pregnancy with John the Baptist? Did she share with him how the angel appeared to her and all he said? If she did, it would appear he didn’t believe it.

But imagine how Joseph felt. The pit in his stomach, the tears welling up in eyes, the sick feeling. How could she betray his love? How could she break the promise they had made to each other? How could she have been with another man? He thought he knew her. He just knew she wasn’t the kind of girl who would do such a thing. But facts were facts. She was pregnant and he knew he had nothing to do with it. Talk about Christmas stress!

When the initial shock began to pass, Joseph’s mind started to race. Now what? In that culture, an engagement was as legally binding as a marriage. The only thing that could break an engagement was adultery or divorce. So Joseph had two options. He could publicly disgrace Mary and announce that she had committed adultery. Old Testament law allowed for an adulterous to be publically stoned to death, although we don’t know if that was being practiced at that time. Even if it wasn’t, the public declaration of her adultery would have marked Mary for life. She would never have gotten married. She would have been publicly shamed and disgraced. Her reputation would have been ruined forever.

In spite of the feeling of betrayal, Joseph didn’t want to go that route. He was kind and still cared for Mary. He thought of another way. In the quietest way possible, Joseph would seek

to dissolve the engagement with an official divorce decree. He wouldn't publicize the reason. They would quietly part ways.

We're not told how long Joseph knew before the angel appeared to him. Just a few hours? It seems more likely a few days as he had time to determine his course of action. It could have been a few weeks. However long it was, it must have seemed like an eternity. Stress has a way of doing that – slowing time down to a crawl.

Then this:

But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 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 addresses Joseph as “son of David.” That was not Joseph's father's name. But it was the name of a distant ancestor of Joseph from about a 1,000 years earlier: the great King David. The angel reminds him of his royal heritage – a necessary prerequisite for the step-father of the Messiah. Even though Joseph would not be the biological father of Jesus, in adopting him, Joseph's heritage became Jesus' heritage. Jesus was rightly called the Son of David. (Some have also argued that the genealogy in Luke's Gospel traces Mary's ancestry back to David as well.)

So the angel assures Joseph son of David, that the Mary has indeed been faithful to him, and that the pregnancy had supernatural beginnings. He assures Joseph that he can get married to her, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

The angel goes on to tell him what he should name this boy. He should call him “Jesus” which means “the Lord Saves.” Why this name? Because “he will save his people from their sins.” Mary's son would be the long expected, promised Christ – the one chosen and anointed by God to save his people from their sins. The one who is the Son of God from eternity, but took on human flesh at the moment of that immaculate conception in Mary.

Matthew informs us: **“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.”**

Matthew indicates that this all happened in fulfillment of the prophecy we find in Isaiah 7:14. The Savior of the world would have a human mother, but would not have a human Father as he was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Because God is his Father, he would be known as “Immanuel” which means God with us.

The Gospels are always careful about the way they speak of Joseph so that we never forget that he was not the biological father of Jesus.

Mt. 2:11 “They [the wise men] saw the child with his mother Mary.”

Mt. 2:13 An angel said: “Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt.”

Mt 2:20: “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel.

When they presented Jesus in the temple and met Simeon, but Joseph and Mary were there, yet we're told that Simeon only addressed Mary when he said, “This child I destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel...”

So Scripture is very careful to make it clear time and again that Jesus was not the natural born son of Joseph. Joseph was his adoptive father. All of this to make clear that Jesus has no human Father. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Aside from this story, Joseph gets very little press in the Scriptures. But what a man of faith he was. What a blessing to be the adoptive father of the Savior of the world.

What about Christmas stress? Well, what removed the Christmas stress for Joseph?

- **Look at Jesus.** Joseph's stress wasn't relieved until he found out Jesus was the answer to all his problems. Maybe in not quite in as direct a sense, but every bit as true, Jesus is the answer to all of our problems as well.
 - Think about the things that are stressing you out. I don't have to tell you that, because that's all you're doing right? They dominate our thinking, they fill our minds, they overwhelm us.
 - Now look at Jesus. All the most important things are resolved in him. The biggest stressor by far in life is the sin which separates us from God and offends God. Jesus is our solution. He is your Savior. He removes your guilt. He makes you right with God. His perfect life is just what God is looking for, and it is yours by faith. His death on the cross is the full payment for all your sins.
 - With your eyes fixed on Jesus as the ultimate solution and trusting in him, then ask two more questions:
- **“What is God's plan in this?”** Joseph experienced stress until he discovered God's bigger plan. He didn't see it... until he listened to the angel. Do you see God's bigger plan and purpose? He reveals his ways in his Word. Maybe you are stressed because you don't understand the big plan and the big picture. Maybe you haven't given thought to how your current problems may fit into God's bigger plans and purposes.
 - God is the master of turning things for God. Cross. Good? Yes! Your problem. Good? Yes! God can do it.
- **“What does God want me to do?”** Joseph experienced stress until he yielded to God and did what God wanted him to do. Otherwise you're fighting against God! God wanted him to take Mary as his wife. He did. Stress gone.
 - **What does God want you to do?**
 - If you're not sure, look for God's answers in Scripture. Sometimes
 - If you know it, do it! Step out in faith and trust God, no matter what.

8 days... until Christmas! But don't let the stress get to you. It's all about Jesus. He loves you. He saved you. It's his birth we're celebrating. Get that up front in your heart and mind. The rest is little stuff. Consider God's big plan. Follow God's will. That's God's plan for a stress free Christmas – and life. Worked for Joseph and it can work for you too!