

Why Did Jesus Come? (1)

Matthew 1:18-25

Doug Sterrett

¹⁸This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about^[d]: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet^[e] did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

²⁰ 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. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,^[f] because he will save his people from their sins.”

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”^[g] (which means “God with us”).

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

(At this point gather the congregation, holding hands in a large circle)

As you stand here, holding hands, look around, look to your right and to your left. You are a community about the size of Nazareth, the home village of Mary and Joseph. Everyone in Nazareth belongs to the village synagogue. There’s the Rabbi standing in the circle. Over there is the village carpenter. You pass by his shop everyday. As a child you played with the curly shavings from his plane. Across the way stands a burley man--heavily muscled. He’s the blacksmith. The sound of his hammer ringing against metal can be heard all over the village. There is the butcher, and over there the candlestick maker. And there the wool merchant and his friend the man who sells olive oil to light your lamps and flavor your food. Several shepherds are standing in the circle and all of the women are homemakers. You know them well. You’re kin to most of them. You even know their genealogy for genealogies are important in Nazareth.

Mary, one of the teenagers in the close knit town is probably about fourteen, a marriageable age in those days. She is obviously pregnant. You can see most of the women looking at her with expressions of disapproval. Joseph is standing with his father the carpenter, under whom he learned his trade. He’s a little older, more mature looking than Mary. He had to learn and prove himself capable of supporting a wife before a marriage arrangement could be made. And, you remember Joseph has Rahab in his genealogy. She was a Cananite prostitute living in Jericho when Joshua led the people of Israel across the Jordan. She hid the Israelite spies from the people of her town and after the walls came tumbling down she became an Israelite—the mother of Boaz an important man. You’ve wondered about Rahab—so different, yet accepted among the people of God. You can see it in the faces of the villagers—everyone thinks Joseph is the father of Mary’s baby. What a scandal, angels, indeed! What nerve—the father--God Himself. Humph! Do Mary and Joseph think we are all fools? What a story.

Mary and Joseph’s fathers, probably friends since childhood, would have gotten together and arranged the marriage of their two children. The arrangement could have been made years ago while they were still children. Mary and Joseph would have had little or nothing to do with it. Romantic love, as we think of it, would have had almost nothing to do with it. It was a family arrangement binding upon both of them. Jewish Law at that

time required a written letter of divorce to break off a betrothal and that is what Joseph was considering.

As you stand there thinking about your village you think of the latest gossip about Mary. Months ago there were rumors that she was pregnant and she suddenly left Nazareth. Recently, she returned from her long visit to her Aunt Elizabeth near Jerusalem. The gossip has been proven true for she is obviously nearing the end of her pregnancy. Was Joseph the father or someone else? Would the village elders stone her to death for her obvious sin as Jewish law required? No one in the circle is making a move to pick up the first stone. . .hmmm, strange isn't it? **Yet, as far as we know today no one even thought about leaving the synagogue because they did not agree to stone her.**

Suddenly, someone brings Joseph a donkey and he helps Mary up on to its back. They are going to Bethlehem to sign the census papers for both are in the lineage of King David. They don't know it but it will be over two years before they returned to the village leading a small boy named Jesus. Most likely they lived with the taint of scandal for the rest of their lives. Have you ever stopped to think of the scandal the birth of Jesus must have caused? Mary and Joseph's parents must have felt crushed. Obviously, the situation was swept under the rug for the couple was not stoned to death in accordance with God's commands to Moses. I wonder, why did Jesus come like that?

Now let's fast forward to Jesus as an adult. One Sabbath He rises to speak to the congregation in the synagogue in Nazareth. This is what He read from Isaiah and said according to **Luke 4:18-19**.

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

He went on to tell the villagers that He was sent to fulfill this prophecy and that He like the prophets of old would not be accepted in His home town. Listen to their **reaction**:

28 All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. **29** They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. **30** But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

His life and ministry began in scandal, yet He paid no attention and went right on proclaiming the Good News. Along the way He taught according to **John 3:16-18**:

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. **17** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. **18** Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

And in **Luke 6:37**: **37** "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

In Matthew 13:24-30 **He taught**: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. **25** But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. **26** When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

²⁷ “The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come **from?**’

²⁸ “‘An enemy did this,’ he replied.

“The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’

²⁹ “‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’”

Then **in John 8:1-11** there is the story of the woman caught in the act of adultery. The Church leaders brought her to Jesus and ask what they should do. They had already made up their minds for they carried large stones. They were about to stone her to death for her sin. Jesus knelt down, doodling in the sand then He said, “**Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.**” Everyone stood quietly for a moment and then the stones began to thud against the ground as each one dropped his weapon. Looking up at the woman Jesus found that she was alone. He said, “**Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?**”¹¹ “No one, sir,” she said, “**Then neither do I condemn you.**” Jesus declared. “**Go now and leave your life of sin.**”

So why did Jesus come in the way He **came?** “**God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.**” Notice that it is our Lord who does the saving. The only people He condemns are the Church leaders--Sadducees and Pharisees.

We live in a dark world, filled with all kinds of sin. The Bible teaches that we are ALL without hope unless we believe in Jesus, the Son of God. It is dangerous to pull a single verse out of the Bible and build a case upon it, rather we must try to get an overview of the context in which Christ ministered to people like you and me. I have tried to give you some of this overview this morning for I firmly believe that if Jesus stood in this circle with us this morning He would say, “**Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her**” or him. Could you throw a stone at anyone in your circle? It is in the midst of this kind of sin that **He came to bring Hope the very gift we celebrate on the first Sunday of Advent.** Yet many of us think we have the right to condemn those who sin in ways we do not, or, maybe we do. Are we ready to leave our village church because our church leaders do not, symbolically pick up and cast the first stones? Some of you know what I am referring to. Others are wondering so let me be clear.

For over thirty years a battle has been raging over whether the Presbyterian Church (USA) should ordain practicing homosexuals as deacons, elders or pastors. Until two years ago the conservative representatives to the General Assembly and to our Presbyteries have defeated every attempt to approve that ordination. In latter years we have carried a paragraph in our Book of Order or Constitution upholding marriage between a man and a woman or singleness in chastity as a prerequisite to ordination. Two years ago the General Assembly approved a new Book of Order in which that provision has been changed. The new provision **states:**

(G-2.0104) “To those called to exercise special functions in the church—deacons, ruling elders, and teaching elders [pastors]—God gives suitable gifts for their various duties. In addition to possessing the necessary gifts and abilities, those who undertake particular ministries should be persons of strong faith, dedicated discipleship, and love of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and in the world. They must have the approval of God’s people and the concurring judgment of a council of the church.”

This simply gives our Presbytery and our Congregation the right to decide who is to be ordained as officers and who will serve in our local congregation. The decision was recommended by our General Assembly in 2010 and ratified by a very slim margin by our 173 Presbyteries last June. It went into effect in July 2011. Some have complained that we, meaning our congregation, did not vote on it. Our Constitution does not give congregations a vote on constitutional changes. As stated I see nothing wrong with it. With respect to ordination of Deacons and Elders interpretation is up to our Session and our Congregation when new officers are ordained and installed. It is up to our Presbytery when ordaining a new Teaching Elder (Pastor) and to the Congregation when a call is extended to an ordained Minister.

Nevertheless, we have recently lost at least two couples because of this change. My bet is that they don't even know what this paragraph says. My message to you this morning is that we have a healthy and ongoing ministry in the spirit of Christ. In a nutshell we have this morning reviewed why Jesus came. He came to bring Hope. I see nothing in any of His teachings that compels any of us to leave this congregation anymore than His home villagers would move away because of the scandal His birth had to have created in Nazareth. Every other denomination or independent church has problems of its own. There is no perfect church and I don't think God sees one group as being more important than another. We are called to follow Jesus! That means that we are to realize that we are all guilty of sin and none of us can make ourselves perfect. It is only through our faith in Jesus and what He has done on the cross that we can be made perfect enough to enter into His salvation. **This is the assured hope He has given us.** This Hope was given to the people of Nazareth, the people of Israel, to you and to every sinner who has ever been ordained as a deacon, elder or pastor in God's Church around the world. We are saved only through faith and none of us can claim to be righteous. This assured hope applies equally to the homosexual believer as it does to you and me. The parable of the weeds shows us that we can't pull weeds out of the wheat without pulling up some of the good wheat. That means that we can't tell what God is doing in someone else's life. So, we are to leave the pulling to God and go on with our common ministry.

Jesus said, “ I have come that they might have life and have it to the full.” This is the **Hope He brings. It is one reason He came.**