

Victory of the Lamb – Matthew 1:18-25 – Joseph The Carpenter – The Door is Open

Christmas Day 2016 – Bill Limmer

Oh hi, Merry Christmas. I was just finishing a project. I have made a lot of things in my life. Doors, tables, chairs, all kinds of furniture, and home editions. Yep, I made a lot but one thing I never ever thought I would make, is being foster Father to God's Son. Let me tell you about.

I was engaged to be married to a young girl by the name of Mary. The custom in my day was the groom to be would build on to his father's house so that when the new couple got married they had a place to stay. I was building away with faithfulness, dedication, measuring, sawing, piecing together. Hard work and long hours - just getting ready to get married. It was a great time in my life but . . . that all changed. Here is what happened. Matthew 1:18 **she (Mary) was found to be pregnant.** We were pledged to be married, she was my fiancée, she was mine and then, then, she was found to be pregnant. And I knew the baby wasn't mine. Emotions filled my workshop, filled my heart. Anger, betrayal, confusion, disappointment, embarrassment, frustration, rage, shame. I was shaken down to my very core. She said what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit – yeah right. Born at night but not last night. The door to my dreams and home was slammed shut.

The Old Testament Law said in Deuteronomy 20, if a woman was found to be pregnant during the engagement, that could only mean she had been unfaithful, in which case, she was to be stoned to death. But as I thought about all these things, as I pumped the saw back and forth, as I measured, pieced together, prayed, ate and at night because I could not sleep. I concluded, I didn't want her punished to the full extent of the law because I believed that one day God would send a Savior he would be punished to the full extent of the law in my place, and in the place of all people. I decided I would divorce her. There were two options for divorce: 1) I could go before the judge located at the city gate and make this public. That would mean the whole town would know about Mary's shame. Or 2) I could get a divorce by giving her the papers in the presence of two witnesses. And this would spare Mary the humiliation of a public divorce. Matthew wrote about this time in my life this way: Matthew 1:19 **Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.** So, that is what was going to happen.

One night while she was away from me: Matthew 1:20 **an angel of the Lord appeared to him (me) 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 . . . 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 I felt terrible for not believing Mary's story. I thought she had broken a trust with me, but I broke a trust with her not listening to her. Welcome to my sinful world. So, I broke Jewish custom and protected Mary's reputation and took her home to be my wife. God gave me the grace to be tender when I could have been harsh. Thoughtful when I could have been hasty. You know we all have those opportunities in life, which are you choosing.

To say we were off to an unusual start would be big understatement. And into this mix of emotions and real life came this: Luke 2:1ff **Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.)³ And everyone went to their own town to register. ⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and**

line of David. ⁵ **He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.** You have got to be kidding me. I can't catch a break. From Nazareth to Bethlehem, if we took the shortest route it was about 70 miles but then we would have to go through Samaria, and that my friends wasn't happening. I had Mary and the baby to protect. We packed up and headed for Bethlehem, where all the descendants of David had to register. It took us days to get there through horrible terrain. I can only imagine what Mary was thinking as we made our way. After what seemed an eternity we arrived in Bethlehem. What a relief! But one inn after another was occupied. No vacancy. The door was shut.

I wondered did God really care about me. Does God love me? Do I matter to God? I wondered had God forgotten about me. Maybe you have felt that way before too? You have followed his way and wondered why are things turning out this way. Maybe you were searching for light in the darkness of a hospitable room, in the devastating blow of betrayal, broken relationship, or financial ruin. You felt all alone. Maybe you feel that way now for whatever reason. I wished God would have sent an angel again, or maybe just another person to assure me that this was the right path, the right plan – that I hadn't messed up somewhere along the way

I was angry, tired, scared. Just when I thought all was lost, an innkeeper to pity on us and offered us his stable. I wasn't too excited about that but when I asked my dear bride, Mary said it was ok. At least we could be where we were safe. This was so surreal. As a carpenter, I have a plan but now I understand this is not my plan. It is the plan of God. I kept thinking But this is such a strange way to save the world

In midst of the mystery there was crying. During the mystery, there was a miracle. Luke talked shared that miracle when he wrote: **While they were there the time came for the baby to be born. And she gave birth to her firstborn, a son . . .** (Matthew 1) **And (I) gave him the name Jesus.** Mary's baby, God's baby, was born. I was the foster Father to God's Son. And I whispered Go to sleep my Son This manger for your bed You have a long road before You Rest Your little head . . . and in my head I am thinking I believe the glory of Heaven Is lying in my arms tonight But Lord, I ask that He for just this moment Simply be my child. The son of my love. And the angel said: Luke 2 **I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.** God cares for me. God cares for you! I matter to God. You matter to God! God loves me. God loves you! God has not forgotten me. God has not forgotten you!

So humbled so proud. As a carpenter, I taught Jesus to make a lot of things, doors, tables, chairs, and all kinds of furniture, home editions. But my son built something I never could. He built a bridge between fallen mankind and God. I didn't give him the tools to do this but his heavenly father did. Here were the tools he gave him – one hammer, three nails. One hammer and three nails, that equals your forgiveness. Your sin is defeated, your name is written in heaven, your death has been defeated. The door to heaven is not shut. It is wide open. Come on in faith. Jesus is preparing a place for you there right now. Merry Christmas from me and Mary, and God's Son, Jesus, the Savior of the whole world! Amen.