



## “Celebrate Messiah: Believe Confidently”

Fourth Sunday of Advent  
5:30 pm Saturday, December 17, 2016  
The Reverend John H. Brock  
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Romans 1:1-7; Matthew 1:18-25

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

We had our monthly Conference meeting of the area Lutheran Congregations, and this month we had our Bishop, Jim Dunlop, come visit with us. I serve as Dean of our conference and, sometimes, I have good ideas, because I asked *him* to preach at the opening worship. I did this for a couple of reasons: first, because I had round two of my chemo treatments this week, and knew I wouldn't be feeling all that great; but also, two, because I know he is a good preacher, and I could probably steal, I mean, “borrow,” some sermon ideas from him. So, a lot of what I have to say tonight is in thanks to Bishop Dunlop.

There's this really cool thing about being able to read ancient Greek: sometimes, it gives you insight into what the original writers had in mind when they put pen to paper. And sometimes, like tonight I think, it makes some word connections that may or may not have been intentional, but turn out to be really cool anyway. Case in point: the first half of verse 18:

*Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way.*

When we look at the Greek, and we take it rather a bit literally, it comes out like this:

*Now, of Jesus Christ, the genesis was thus:*

Maybe you're a Star Trek fan, and the first thing that came to mind when you heard *genesis* was the Genesis weapon from the movie “The Wrath of Kahn.” Perhaps you're a fan of 80's music, and Phil Collins and the group Genesis are what you thought of. It could be even that you went straight to *Terminator Genisys*, the latest in the *Terminator* franchise. Hopefully, though, there was at least one of you whose mind honestly went straight to the first book of our scripture.

The Book of Genesis is one of, I think, the best books in scripture. It brings us to the beginning; it helps us understand from where we came; and points to where we are going. Now, I must say, that while I said it tells us from where we came, I do not take the creation story in Genesis, or much of Genesis, for that matter, to be *literally* true. I think Genesis' greatest gift is to try to explain to our *limited, human*, minds, the vast scope of **everything** that is God. God is absolutely capable of creating everything that is in six twenty-four hour days; I simply believe that is way easier for us human beings to comprehend, than breaking things down into billions of years. But that's not what I want to talk about.

The book of Genesis talks about *beginning*, talks about the birth of all that is, the start of

human life and history. And when we read that opening chapter, we come across the reminder that the Trinity existed even then, for in Genesis 1:26, God says  
*Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness*

Christ was there, at the *genesis*, at the *beginning*, of everything.

In our gospel reading, we see then the faith of the man who was the human father to our Lord. This man, Joseph, we know so much, and yet, so little, of. In our lesson tonight from Matthew, we learn he was engaged to a woman named Mary; when she was found to be pregnant, **and** he knew the child was not his, he was within his right to call her out in public, and could have even demanded her death; instead, we are told, because he is a *righteous* man, he wants to simply divorce her quietly; he is unwilling to expose her to public disgrace.

But then . . . what happens next? Joseph has a dream. Joseph has a dream that an angel from the Lord God speaks to him, and tells him that the child **is** from the Lord God. The angel tells him that indeed, he, Joseph, is to raise this child, for this unborn child of his pregnant fiancé is to be the savior of the people.

Anyone here remember their dreams? I have to say, in my life, I have had some pretty bizarre dreams. Sometimes, I have had a difficult time distinguishing my dream from reality. A few months back I dreamed a couple of times that Marianne was divorcing me. I woke up trying to figure out what I was going to do now, without her in my life. It took me several moments to get fully awake and realize that, no, that was just borderline nightmare, **not** reality.

Is that how Joseph felt? Did he think he had a nightmare, that he dreamed Mary pregnant? Did he think,

*Is this real? Did an angel actually, honestly, truly visit me in a dream?*

All we know for certain are his actions: he woke up; took Mary as his wife, and had no “marital relations” with her (the literal Greek there is “he did not know her”) until **AFTER** his . . . wait for it . . . **Son** was born.

This is a man who believed. This is a man who believed what his Lord told him. This is a man who believed *confidently* in what his Lord told him.

We know so very little more about Joseph. In Matthew’s gospel, he will take his young family to Egypt to avoid the evil that King Herod will inflict upon infants and toddlers; and then Joseph returns his family to Israel. And after that, in Matthew, we hear of him no more. We get a little bit more information on him in Luke’s gospel. There, we see Jesus’ parents bring him to the temple as an infant, and again as a youth, at Passover, when Jesus stays behind and teaches the scholars at the temple. It’s in Luke as well that we learn Joseph was a carpenter. Yet by the time Jesus becomes an adult, in both gospels, Joseph appears to be out of Jesus’ life, and is therefore assumed to be dead.

This man, for whom we know so little, to whom we owe so much. This man, this Joseph, who believed strongly, who had the faith of conviction, who believed confidently; may we

have faith like his in the days that seem unreal, in the times that try our faith, in the good and in the bad.

May we be like Joseph, and *Believe Confidently*.

Amen.

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