

**“HOPE”**

**Pastor Mike Corwin**

**1<sup>ST</sup> SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

**TEXT: MATTHEW 1:18-25**

**GOD’S WORD: ISAIAH 9:1-7**

**I – HOPELESS:**

Have you ever felt hopeless? Have the circumstances of your life ever made you feel that life was just one disaster or problem after another? Do you sometimes throw your arms up in despair because of the situation you are in or the problems you hear about on the news?

Know that hopelessness wasn’t invented by us. It existed in Jesus’ day as well. Then and now life was messed up by broken relationships, corruption, brutality, greed, injustice, senseless death, inequality, taxes, and oppression. In Jesus’ day the biggest problem they saw was oppression by the Romans. This took away their freedoms, self-rule, and had socio-economic ramifications. Imagine if they would have realized the oppression they were practicing themselves when it came to slaves, religion, children, and especially women!

Today some, if not all, of these issues still exist and we have different names for them like self-esteem, body shaming, human trafficking, gender inequality, prejudices, bias, bigotry, and oooooh does greed and power still exist! Again....we sometimes just want to give up.

**II – TEXT:**

Today, as we begin our Advent journey together I want to look at a story of a man who was crushed by an unforeseen turn of events in his life. A man who had a plan, a man who thought he had it all together, a man who thought he had found

someone to spend the rest of his life with, a man who had found love. I want to look at the beginning of the Christmas narrative, not with Mary, but with Joseph.

### **Matthew 1:18-25 (NLT)**

<sup>18</sup> This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement<sup>1</sup> quietly.

<sup>20</sup> As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

<sup>22</sup> All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet:

<sup>23</sup> “Look! The virgin will conceive a child!

She will give birth to a son,  
and they will call him Immanuel,  
which means ‘God is with us.’”

<sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. <sup>25</sup> But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.

The virgin birth, or more accurately – the Immaculate Conception – is highlighted by both Matthew and Luke in their Gospels. They want us to realize that the circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus were very extraordinary and God was obviously involved in the birth of His Son into the world.

Joseph was engaged to Mary. The way this was done was that the parents agreed that their children should be married and they got engaged. You were pretty much considered to be married at that point as an engagement was a legally binding contract. It could only be broken by a writ of divorce. You did not consummate the marriage – have relations- until the wedding took place and you moved into your husband’s home.

Now, Joseph was not privy to the visitation of the angel to Mary at this point. He didn't know about the divine intervention of God into the story of human history through the work of the Holy Spirit. He sometime became aware though that his fiancée was obviously pregnant! Now let's talk about hopelessness. Imagine for a moment you had found the woman of your dreams. A woman who you looked forward to spending the rest of your life with. A woman who had evidently caught your eye and stolen your heart. I know this was more than an arranged marriage because of the love and compassion he was going to show her in breaking off the engagement. He wasn't going to drag her to the Temple and make his accusations and watch her be drug out and stoned, which was well within his right as her betrayal during the engagement was considered to be adultery. No he was going to quietly serve her with the divorce papers and go his own way to save her further trouble and embarrassment. But wouldn't your life be turned upside down and seem hopeless for a while? Wouldn't you be devastated?

But God had other plans. After Joseph had made his decision God again divinely intervened and sent his angel again. He filled Joseph in and his divine grace obtained Joseph's cooperation just as it had Mary's. His devastation must have been overcome, his hopelessness turned into hope as the angel informed him that the baby to be born to Mary and that he would care for was the one the prophets promised centuries before. That this baby would bring hope to the world once again.

### **III – HOPE RESTORED:**

The baby born in the manger that first Christmas brought the gift of hope. Hope that the powers of this world did not have the last say. That a power even greater was at work and this baby would bring that information and reality to the world.

Joseph went through the trying times. He endured the dirty looks the self-righteous religious folks threw his way. He fled his country and people when he needed to so that the baby would be protected. He did it because his hope had been restored. He understood what "Immanuel" meant in the prophecy. He understood that God was now with us. The Creator was with the creation and that he would make a way for all of us to be with him again in a sinless, and unbroken world.

We still have Immanuel. We still have God with us. Like Joseph we have to look beyond our earthly problems to our heavenly promises and realize God is still with us and walks with us. This world doesn't get the last Word – God does and he sent Jesus to give us the greatest of hope until all the promises of this book are fulfilled.

#### **IV – WORLD NEEDS HOPE:**

This world needs hope and it needs it now. If you have any doubts that the world is full of hopelessness, take a look at the suicide rate information that was just released a couple weeks ago. It told us these facts:

- In the last 11 years the suicide rate in Ohio had gone up 45%
- 5 people take their own lives every day in Ohio
- The rate in 10 to 24 year olds has increased 56%
- It's up 48% in those 65 and older
- The rate in veterans is rocketing
- It's the leading cause of death for 10-14 year olds
- It's the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause in 15-34 year olds

How hopeless must you be when this is your answer to life's issues or problems? When this is the only alternative you see. We must make sure they know about the other alternative. We call him Jesus. His church can surround people with love and understanding they get no place else. But they have to know about it.

We're going to sing the familiar carol "O Little Town of Bethlehem" in a few minutes. One of stanza's says "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight." We must tell the world of the hope which will dispel the fears of their lives and give them the alternative to live...instead of die. We must give them JESUS!

#### **V – TAKE THEM HOPE:**

Pastor Becky will then take over and explain the insert containing the straw and the manger on the altar. She will also give some examples of how we can take the gift of hope into the world.