

Message: “Joseph: Song of Trust”

I have a confession to make: I don’t trust my smartphone.

I’m a map guy, so I’m suspicious of the directions the apps give me based on GPS. You know how it goes. You’re following directions to a destination. Then you’re directed to make a turn that doesn’t feel right or you know there’s an accident or slowdown coming up. The directions keep coming, but they don’t seem to be right. It’s hard to keep trusting the disembodied voice telling you how to get to your destination. You might want to give up. Or turn it off and “use the force, Luke,” which often means just do what feels right. And that’s a recipe for disaster more times than we’d like to admit.

Trust isn’t easily given and it’s hard to earn once it’s lost. In today’s world of relative truth and disinformation, it can be hard to know who or what we should place our trust in. Here’s the morale: trust God.

Today, we’re looking at the narrative of Joseph, Mary’s fiancé.

His song – his life story, is about trust. Trust in God. We know Joseph’s actions play a significant part in what happened. He is Mary’s partner in the salvation story. But Joseph’s trust had to grow. Matthew’s narrative shows us how Joseph’s trust progressed over time. Let’s examine it and learn what God reveals.

First, when he finds out she’s pregnant, Joseph attempts to quietly dismiss Mary. This probably reveals Joseph’s inability to trust what Mary told him. If your fiancée came to you and told you she was pregnant, it would be difficult to accept. Your trust in the other person would be broken. Matthew tells us Joseph is a righteous person (v. 19). Righteous is a churchy word. To me it means a person who is right with God, who has a relationship with God that’s more than casual.

Notice the next part. Matthew says that the lawful or “righteous” (meaning legal) action would have been to break the engagement. It would publicly shame Mary. Her family would receive the blame ... and the repercussions. Joseph could walk away, reputation intact. This seems more self-righteous than loving, though. And yet church law and public opinion would support Joseph. That’s true today, too.

Where do we place our trust? The second stanza of Joseph’s song of trust is his response to the angel’s message. It reveals the nature of Joseph’s relationship with God. Joseph believed the angel. Even though his experience was in a dream, it was real to him and he acted on it.

Dreams play an important part in life. Even though psychologists might disagree, I believe some dreams come from the Holy Spirit. That’s been my experience and the experience of others. There have been occasions where something is on my heart and mind. I’ve been anxious about it and spent a lot of time praying to God, begging for an answer. This may go on for a short time or a long time until, one day, I wake up with a vision of exactly what to do.

I think that’s what happened to Joseph. It’s not an isolated incident in scripture. God’s Spirit prompted the prophet Joel to write: “... *I will pour out my spirit upon everyone; your sons and your daughters will prophesy, [some] will dream dreams, and [some] will see visions.*” Joel 2:28 (CEB). God sent a messenger to show Joseph exactly what to do through his dreams.

Joseph’s response to the angel’s message reveals a lot about his character and a lot about trust. Joseph trusted God and so he heard and understood the message of the angel. Joseph changed his attitude and his course of action. He believed God and was willing to take on any shame that would come. Joseph was willing to follow, even at the cost of his reputation. He trusted God without question, even though he didn’t understand what it meant. Once he was sure in that relationship, Joseph could reassure Mary and their families and the trust that was broken through misunderstanding was restored.

Joseph’s actions reveal the role of trust in our journey of faith.

We all want safety and security in our lives. Yet the times we live in show us how fleeting these perceptions are. As those who follow Jesus, we learn our lives aren’t rooted in certainty, but in a trust-filled relationship with God. There will be times of uncertainty, impracticality, and even foolish actions. We will break trust and have our trust broken.

What can we do? I encourage to follow the example Joseph sets for us. Joseph was struggling with an inner conflict like many of us. Yet he trusted God. And, in time, the dream came and the angel spoke. God answered prayer. Suddenly Joseph knew what to do. He woke up and did it, without question or hesitation.

Did what? Joseph went against legalism in favor of love. Or maybe better, he went against a rigid interpretation of the law in favor of a covenant relationship between people and God. Joseph decided to trust in the leading of the Spirit, to trust in the journey of faith. Joseph trusted enough he named the child Jesus, claiming him as his own and giving him the name God revealed. By doing so, Joseph shows us trust is the eternal invitation to know God. We can trust and not be afraid. That’s very appealing.

I invite you to trust God. God will guide you, not matter how unsure you are or how little you understand about what’s going on. Jesus makes our lives together better. That’s the way of faith and trust.

Matthew 1:18-24 (CEB)

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ took place. When Mary his mother was engaged to Joseph, before they were married, she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband was a righteous man. Because he didn't want to humiliate her, he decided to call off their engagement quietly. As he was thinking about this, an angel from the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the child she carries was conceived by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you will call him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” Now all of this took place so that what the Lord had spoken through the prophet would be fulfilled:

Look! A virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son,

And they will call him, Emmanuel.

(Emmanuel means “God with us.”)

When Joseph woke up, he did just as an angel from God commanded and took Mary as his wife.

(2:13-23) – other instances of trust in God!

When the magi had departed, an angel from the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up. Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod will soon search for the child in order to kill him.” Joseph got up and, during the night, took the child and his mother to Egypt. He stayed there until Herod died. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: I have called my son out of Egypt.

When Herod knew the magi had fooled him, he grew very angry. He sent soldiers to kill all the children in Bethlehem and in all the surrounding territory who were two years old and younger, according to the time that he had learned from the magi. This fulfilled the word spoken through Jeremiah the prophet:

A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and much grieving.

Rachel weeping for her children,

and she did not want to be comforted,
because they were no more.

After King Herod died, an angel from the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. “Get up,” the angel said, “and take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel. Those who were trying to kill the child are dead.” Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus ruled over Judea in place of his father Herod, Joseph was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he went to the area of Galilee. He settled in a city called Nazareth so that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled: He will be called a Nazarene.