

WHAT IF JOSEPH HAD STAYED HOME?**Luke 2:1-7****(Read Luke 2:1-7)**

INTRO: What if Joseph had stayed home? What if he had decided he didn't have the money for a road trip? What if he had pulled the plug on his marriage plans?

They might be "What ifs?" but they are all legitimate questions. Even so, it turns out they're only distractions. We are introduced to Joseph in Matthew 1, and even though it's just a few verses, we learn a lot about this man of God. Listen to that passage, (Read Matthew 1:18-25)

Verse 19 says that Mary's husband Joseph *was faithful to the law*. That means that if a decree came down the pike like the one we read about in Luke 2, Joseph was one to follow the rules rather than be a scofflaw or a rebel. This grates at a lot of us Americans who are often an oppositionally defiant people. If you say one thing, they'll do the opposite – just because. Sometimes it's because they need to – they just don't see the evidence of the good in what they're being ordered to do. Other times it is just because they never grew up and you can see it when they stomp their feet, fold their arms to their chest, stick out their lower lip in their best 3 year old pout and say "No! I won't!" – no matter what it is. That's just it. They never grew up. The best way to get Fiona to do something is to tell her the opposite of what you actually want her to do.

But Joseph's parents never had to use reverse psychology on their little Joe. He was, no doubt, the kind of kid who did as he was told and when he was told. The decree said return to your ancestral home for a census, so Joseph and his pregnant wife packed up and left.

It may also have been convenient for him to do it that way, we really don't know the circumstances, but since he was an intelligent man, Joseph knew the scandal of Mary's pregnancy would not be easy. Its conjecture, but it's not a remote to think that Mary was only showing a little as they departed for Bethlehem 90 miles to the south. She had just returned from that area where she had been visiting her cousin Elizabeth in the hill country of Judea. Mary and Joseph obviously had family in the area since it was their ancestral region. So it isn't a stretch to think that Joseph used the census as a reason to get outta Dodge for a while before too many rumors could start in the little town of Nazareth.

The truth is the Census Edict was a longstanding proclamation. Like a census in the province of Gaul at roughly the same time which went on for 40 some years, this survey of the population had been underway for some time. And since it was long before a family could hop on the web and fill out their family info, and even centuries before the advent of door to door canvassers, you had to go where the count was being tabulated. In those days when the rule went out and families needed to go be counted, the responsibility was on them, and they had better do it.

This we do know, Joseph was a very good man. Just the little we see of him in scripture shows that he was a kind man who thought of others first – especially his wife to be. We see this in the fact that he . . . *did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.* (19). We are talking about a good man who listened to his God and promptly obeyed, we see that in Matthew 1:24, where it says *When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.* So to ask what if Joseph had stayed home is a really a moot point. Joseph was a man of God who obeyed without hesitation.

Here is what we know from the fact that Joseph DID NOT stay home . . .

There are no accidents

- Well, let me clarify. There are no accidents when it comes to God's plan for the salvation of Humanity. One commentator points out, "*There are NO "accidental events" in the history of the world, for as is often said "history" is "HIS STORY!" God through the edict caused Joseph to go from Nazareth to Bethlehem in order to fulfill Micah 5:2. So these were the days of the birth of the long expected Messiah. God is sovereign over everything, including the timing of events! You can stake your life on it!*"
- God was working in history. Joseph could not have stayed home, even if he would have been the rebellious type we have established he was not. God's plan was unfolding and Micah's prophesy which we just referenced, *But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.*" Micah 5:2, would be fulfilled. It is a tremendous understatement to say, this was all far too important to leave to chance.

- God doesn't work by accident – he's had a plan for us all along – and it would have come to fruition in Nazareth, or Ceasarea, or anywhere God planned it. But he planned it for Bethlehem – the City of David – a truly insignificant backwater by that time.
- That's how God works. He's simply . . .

Fulfilling Promises

- The angel who came to Joseph in Matthew 1 referring to Isaiah 7:15, "*The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel*" (which means "God with us"). Matthew 1:22. Hundreds of years had passed but God keeps his word. It was no longer some hopeful date off in the future – it was imminent – God with us in the present tense and God with us in the future tense. God. Immanuel means God WITH us. He's not distant. He's not uninvolved. He's with us and he is keeping his promises. Immanuel is such a promise, but so is the name Jesus, . . . *you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.*" Matthew 1:21. He will save his people. It's a promise. Bank on it. So, Quirinius may have been governor of the province and he may have been carrying out an edict, but this was certain then and it is now...

Augustus was ruling, but God was in charge

- That's how Warren Wiersbe puts it and then he goes on to point out how God used Caesar's edict to move Mary and Joseph eighty miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem to fulfill His Word. That's how God works. He uses his creation to carry out his plan.
- If we have learned anything in this crazy year of 2020 it is that Humanity does NOT have the world by the tail. We have ruled by fear and panic. There have been little proaction and a lot of reaction. We don't have the answers to this crazy virus. We can't push a button or open a cash drawer and solve things. We have realized our limitations and we are terrified by how powerless we are.
- But when we are weak, He is strong. And it's not because we are weak that he is strong – it's just a fact – God is God and there is nothing beyond his scope or power. Caesar might be the ruler, but God is in charge and always has been.
- That is . . .

Good News

- We will talk about the angels' . . . *good news that will cause great joy for all the people.* Luke 21:0b next week. But it doesn't change the fact that at this season we REALLY need a dose of GOOD NEWS!
- We've gotten some about a vaccine that several companies have been working on, but the news is still full of sadness. It's true that if it bleeds it leads. Commentator Steven Cole shared this.

Andy Rooney responded to the charge that his profession only covered the negative side of everything. He imagined a newscast in which it was reported that planes took off and landed safely. In Florida, the orange crop was hit by another night of average weather. The oranges just hung in there and grew. In Detroit, General Motors announced that 174,000 Chevrolets would not be recalled because they were all perfect. Rooney's point was that good news isn't always appreciated unless it's against the backdrop of bad news. Our text tells us the best news in the world, but two factors make it difficult for people to appreciate it. First, the Christmas story is perhaps the most widely known story in history. As a result, many people, even Christians, shrug it off as not being especially exciting or relevant to the problems they are facing. Second, many people do not realize what dire straits they are in regarding their standing before God and their eternal destiny. So when they read the familiar story that a Savior has been born in the city of Bethlehem, they yawn and say, "That's nice. What's for dinner?" (End Quote)

- Let me say, we're partially cured. Good news doesn't produce the yawns it used to. People are thinking a lot more about their need for a Savior too.

Conclusion: Joseph and Mary weren't an accident. Jesus wasn't a "Whoops!" baby. Joseph couldn't have stayed in Nazareth even if he wanted to. It was the unfolding of the most perfect plan. Richard Swanson writes this of our text and the previous chapter: *Luke's story starts, not in Caesar's palace screaming with military trumpets, but in the Temple, in the Holy of Holies, that quiet, dark, Jewish place at the symbolic center of the Jerusalem Temple (and thus the center of the entire universe). It starts, not with the Governor of Syria, but with an old priest who is married to an old woman of the priestly tribe of Aaron, an old priest who encounters*

an angel while carrying out his part in bringing the world into balance by performing Temple service. From the start of Luke's story, one thing is clear: it may be a Roman world, but it is a Jewish universe, no matter what Caesar Augustus thinks. . . . to help the Jewish people and to remember promises made all the way back to Abraham. Caesar may be issuing orders, but God is keeping promises. That is more important. . . . And when Caesar seeks to demonstrate his power and dominate his world, all he actually does is reunite families in their home territory. When Mary and Joseph, along with the rest of the world, are ordered back to their towns, they are linked with family and sheltered. That's what family always does, at least when it works the way it should. (End Quote).

What if Joseph had stayed home? It's a moot point. He never wanted to. He only ever wanted to carry out God's plan. We'd do well to follow his example. Amen.