

December 22, 2019
Grace Community Church, North Fork, CA
Advent 4, Year A
Romans 1:1-7 Matthew 1:18-25

So, I guess I couldn't exactly hide it anymore. I was so young, my body hadn't grown into the roundness of womanhood yet, the fullness that would have come with just a few more years. My frame was still so girlish. Nowhere to hide a developing child, not for very long, anyway. He had to find out sooner or later, and what started as a gentle swelling of my abdomen was fast becoming a round bump. Hiding who I was going to give birth to was never part of the plan, anyway. He would have to know, because he was just as handpicked as I was for the honor of bringing up the son of God. That's a lot to live up to. I had already decided I was all-in and I would see this through, it was an easy decision even though it would be more work and the risks were higher than saying "No." How often do we so clearly get to say yes to what God is asking of us? Of course, I knew I had little control over how he would react.

Matthew simply says I was, "...found to be with child from the Holy Spirit." But think of that, even in this present time with all the ways you've grown accustomed to things that would have shocked people from my time, even with the openness you have to so many different situations, the words, "found to be with child..." are often still heavy words today—especially when considering someone who is as young as I was when I was asked to fulfil a prophecy. The Gospel of Matthew oversimplifies what it was to be found with child in my day. It assumes that you would be as familiar as I was with the traditions that governed our actions and interactions. As familiar with the laws as my fiancée Joseph was.

Oh, Joseph.

It must have sounded as outlandish as it, well, as it was. Just picture me, twig legs supporting a swelling belly, trying to explain, “I’m pregnant, but it’s by the Holy Spirit. Yes, *that* Holy Spirit. No, I’m not ill. No, Joseph. I promise, there is no other man, please. The Holy Spirit is even grammatically feminine in Aramaic, so there is literally no other man. Please, hear me out. My part in this story is intertwined with your part. Please.

Joseph.

One can hardly blame him for not believing my story at first. News of that nature tends to be alarming. Heartbreaking. Infuriating. The law was on his side, and had he chosen to lash out at me he would have been considered in the right. In your pew bibles, you could look up Deuteronomy 22:22-27 and find out what the law would have allowed—even required him do.

I could have died, the tiny messiah still developing in my womb. I could have been dragged out into public and declared evil, and been stoned to death, even while incubating the most precious and perfect gift God has ever given the world. Two millennia later and that very real possibility still catches me off guard and makes my stomach flip.

But Joseph didn’t. Matthew calls him a righteous man, and he was. Not in the way the enforcers of the law would have considered righteous, of course. I don’t know how he did it, but he managed to be both subversive and righteous at once in his decision not to make a spectacle of the whole thing. He was planning to go against the law of our time and just quietly end our engagement, no rocks, no death. He would go his way, I would go mine. This alone would have been a truly radical expression of love—yes love—to subvert the law and spare me the disgrace.

But then he was visited by an angel in a dream. In the dream, the angel confirmed what I had told him. Matthew says the angel commanded him to marry me, but I want to make sure you

understand that even in being given a command from a heavenly apparition during one's REM cycle there is still a choice that must be made. Joseph could have said no. He could have shrugged it off as some bad lentils in last night's supper that gave him such bizarre dreams. Instead, he accepted his role as one of the Davidic line—the descendant of kings—to fulfil his destiny. His duty, which was to marry me and to give this child a name. To fully adopt him as his own, and to smash past what was culturally expected of him to do—you know, to stone me to death—in favor of a disruptively different family structure for our time.

And he did call him Emmanuel—which means God is with us, and he named him Jesus, which means God saves. Our son would one day grow to subvert authority—a bit like his father, right? and he would spend his time with the most marginalized of people and his compassion for the poor, and the meek, and those without a voice would become the stuff of legend. But before any of that could happen, we had to say yes to the scary and exciting prospect of raising a child whose very existence defied all Earthly reason. We had to take to heart the meaning of Emmanuel, knowing that no matter how difficult or unconventional our path was, God is with us and that would be enough. God be with you on your path, and God's grace shall forever be enough to carry you.