

Carol and Jeff reflect on Matthew 1:18-25
November 29, 2020

Jeff: Today begins the strange and wondrous season the church calls Advent.

Carol: Today begins the strange and wondrous stories of the birth of a child, a saviour, a flesh and blood embodiment of 'God with us.'

Jeff: This Advent, we will be following the story of this birth as told in the Gospel of Matthew. We will follow that story in the same way as those in the story followed a star. We will follow until we are in the presence of the Christ child.

Carol: The story begins with a young woman named Mary. She was probably young, likely a teenager. Her family, like many, probably lived on the economic edge of poverty.

Jeff: Mary was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph. Before they were married, they learned that Mary was pregnant – at that moment the strange and wondrous enters the story, for we are told that this child is conceived out of Holiness; that this is a child of the Holy Spirit, a child of God's birthing.

Carol: Joseph, we are told, wanted to protect both his reputation and Mary's reputation, so he planned to quietly end the engagement. Perhaps he wrestled for days and nights to reach this decision, and then, after his praying and struggling, Joseph encountered the strange and the wondrous in the form of a messenger from God. Joseph had a dream...and in this dream...an angel visited Joseph.

Jeff: Where do dreams come from? From God? From some part of own psyche or soul claiming a voice amongst all the other voices in our heads. Perhaps dreams come from both God and from our own depths, from the depths of the image of God within each of us.

Carol: The angel knows Joseph. "Joseph, son of David," says the angel, and then the angel speaks THE ANGELIC opening line: "Do not be afraid."

Jeff: "Do not be afraid." Joseph may not have realized that what he had been wrestling with was fear – fear of public opinion, fear of a child who might not be his child, fear of his own anger and hurt.

Carol: "Do not be afraid" of your love for Mary or her love for you. Follow that shared love into marriage, and then follow that love into the love of God, for this child to be born is God's child.

Jeff: The angel tells Joseph, “Mary will bear a son. You will name the child Jesus. In Hebrew, the name ‘Jesus’ is the name ‘Joshua’ – the name of the one who historically led the once-enslaved people into a promised land. The name means ‘salvation.’ “You shall name the child ‘Salvation – Jesus.”

Carol: Joseph and Mary were wed, and Mary bore a child, a son, and they named their son Jesus. This is the beginning of a strange and wondrous story, a love story, a love story of Mary and Joseph and God.

Jeff: This strange and wondrous story is our story on this first Sunday of the season of Advent in the year 2020.

Carol: On this first Sunday of Advent, Christians light the first of the Advent candles, the candle of Hope. Jim Wallis of the Sojourners community, defines hope this way: “Hope is believing in spite of the evidence and then watching the evidence change.”

Jeff: Despite the evidence, Joseph believes in a dream, believes in an angel’s message to not be afraid; believes that salvation has been entrusted to Mary and Joseph; believes they have been entrusted with a child to parent, to love, and to dedicate to God.

Carol: When we believe in God-given dreams, then the evidence changes. When we believe that God’s love is present in strange and wondrous ways, then we do not have to be afraid. During this 2020 Advent, during this time of pandemic concern, we can still trust that God’s love is deeper than our fears, God’s dream is more real than our fears, and God’s love is again being born into our 2020 world this Advent.

Jeff: Today begins the strange and wondrous story of Advent, the story of God’s love, God’s offer of salvation in the birth of a child who is called Jesus. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Carol: And Amen.