

Our theme for today: Fear.

Fear is something we've all experienced. In Joseph's case he faced the fear of rejection of friends, family, of community. There were the fears of what could potentially happen to Mary. There would be fears, fears, and yet more fears. Even in his resolved plan – there were probably yet still more fears.

Scripture

²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³ "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." ²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

Matthew 1:20-25

Thought provokers

- Joseph is told "don't fear". He is given a different plan – one contrary to what he, as a man, thought to do. The different plan: "take her as your wife."
 - What would you have done if you were in Joseph's situation? Think it through deeply and not lightly – what exactly would you have done? Then, once you've come to a conclusion, now think through a current situation you are going through – a situation that has some fears. What plans do you have? What conclusions have you made?
- The reason Joseph is told "don't fear" is because what is conceived in Mary is from the Holy Spirit – it is God's Son. As conceived by the Holy Spirit we have this meaning that this babe's nature means He is God; this child does not have the same nature as you and me. In God's plan, His Son comes to us as God, though clothed in flesh. We know Him – it is Jesus.
 - Why did God send His Son to you and me? Share amongst each other reflections, of what you know of the reasons God sent His Son.
- Now that you've shared some reasons why God sent His son, now think back to Joseph. All your reasons, indeed, all your hopes and dreams of why Jesus was sent now need to be seen at this point in time. Joseph, full of fear, resolved to enact a plan is

encountered by God. God's plan comes to him: "*don't fear... take her as your wife.*" Joseph is reminded – not that he is a son of Jacob (which he was of course) but that he was a son of David. Joseph is reminded of his heritage – a heritage that is royal for David was a King of Israel. The decision Joseph has to make is not an isolated decision – he is a part of an heritage both in the past, and to the future. Joseph is not alone in this moment of time. None of us is truly alone.

Reflections

As you consider Joseph, does his situation have any bearing on what you are going through? Will the decisions you are about to make affect your family and your family in the future? Will the decisions you make improve and add to the decisions your own family made in the past? Are you willing to let go of your plans and lay hold of, and follow through on, God's plans? God doesn't want you to fear, God has a plan for you.

Prayer and Song

Take time to pray and sing praises to Him. Here is a well-known carol by Nahum Tate.

While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks

*While shepherds watched their flocks by night,
all seated on the ground,
an angel of the Lord came down,
and glory shone around.*

*"Fear not," said he for mighty dread
had seized their troubled mind
"glad tidings of great joy I bring
to you and all mankind.*

*"To you, in David's town, this day
is born of David's line
a Savior, who is Christ the Lord;
and this shall be the sign:*

*"The heavenly babe you there shall find
to human view displayed,
all simply wrapped in swaddling clothes
and in a manger laid."*

*Thus spoke the angel. Suddenly
appeared a shining throng
of angels praising God, who thus
addressed their joyful song:*

*"All glory be to God on high,
and to the earth be peace;
to those on whom his favor rests
goodwill shall never cease."*