

November 29, 2015

## SILENCE

Matthew 1:18-19

The news must have shocked Joseph. It was a surprise that made his heart sink, his face flush, his jaw tighten, his knees weaken, and his hands tremble. He would never have expected Mary, as sweet as she was, as favored by God as she was (though without anyone being aware of it, yet), as full of grace as she was, to become pregnant before their wedding, before their “coming together.” It seems that Joseph’s first reaction was disbelief. How did he hear it? Did Mary, herself, go to Joseph and tell him, “I am with child! ...by the Holy Spirit!” Did he only hear the first part of that? Did he stop listening in his shock and embarrassment? If he heard the second part of her news, did he scoff, question, doubt, disregard it? Did the conversation end right there? Did he have no questions to ask, or, was he just angry, hurt, ashamed?

The Scripture tells us Joseph “*was a righteous man.*” Sometimes that can mean gracious and benevolent, good and kind. Sometimes it can mean self-righteous and fixated on the letter of the law, like the Pharisees – they were supposedly “righteous,” quote-end quote. I prefer to believe the former – Joseph was good and kind. And in that goodness, he did not want Mary to suffer public disgrace. He was more willing to guard her honor. He would fade away into the woodwork (literally – since he was a carpenter), and Mary and he would just go their separate ways.

I see Joseph walking away from the news more broken-hearted and confused than seething with anger. His eyes were downcast but welling up with tears when he thought about his personal misfortune. His fiancée was pregnant... but not by him. All his hopes and dreams for his future with Mary had suddenly disappeared. It’s like the young man who had saved aside hundreds of dollars to buy his girlfriend an engagement ring who suddenly finds out that she likes someone else better. Every time he’d put away a little extra money for the ring he’d imagine his words as he offered his proposal. All of those thoughts, dreams, hopes, and expectations seem to just rinse away in a moment, wasted, like chalk art on the sidewalk in the rain. And Joseph was left to himself, wishing it was all just a bad dream... Wanting answers and all he gets is silence.

We don’t really know how many hours it was before he finally fell asleep and had the dream that would make everything okay (Matthew 1:20-21), but they were filled with anguish. If Mary told him she was pregnant in the morning, Joseph had all day to dwell, to stew on the news. I picture Mary watching Joseph walk away in shame and sadness, thinking quite a bit more positively though. She would have believed that God knew that she was intended to marry Joseph. Joseph would be worked into God’s plan somehow. Her thoughts were not filled with anguish. Sadness, perhaps, for the fact that her news had hurt Joseph at all, but, thinking calmly that he would come around. He was faithful. He would pray about this, let him absorb the blow, catch his breath. She’d talk to him again... tomorrow.

For Joseph, however, Mary’s news made him sweat. And for however long it was, all he got was silence.

Sometimes, God is silent.

But with Isaiah, we might say,

*Oh, that You would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you! As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down to make Your Name known to Your enemies and cause the nations to quake before You! For when You did awesome things that we did not expect, You came down, and the mountains trembled before You. Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides You, who acts on behalf of those who wait for Him. (Isaiah 64:1-4) Wait for Him...*

When God is silent... we wait!

But waiting is never easy.  
And silence isn't easy either.

There is a special power in silence, though. Think about the silent pause of a strong man before he lifts a heavy object. That silence is a part of his preparation, but the action that follows it is very powerful. Think about a rest-note in music. Usually, the music that follows takes you somewhere new, somewhere special. That silence can build an intensity. The word *Oh* in Isaiah 64:1 is like that. *Oh... if only You would tear open the sky and come down!"*

Matthew 1:19 is like that rest-note, that *Oh* in the story of Christmas. Joseph would not disgrace Mary. He would divorce her quietly. The other option is disgrace for Mary, humiliation, public stoning, and death. Joseph was too good to allow that... for anyone. This moment of silence for Joseph was the moment before the heavens were opened for him, and, for the world, because God *was* about to come down!

Christmas is coming. It's not here, yet. We must wait. There is silence now, but the music is about to change. Something powerful is about to happen. It may be hard to wait patiently, but, while we do, we will be searching. And, we'll learn that it will be okay!

A SERVICE TO THE GLORY OF SILENCE

Christ has come!

***Christ shall come again! Hallelujah!***

MEDITATION

*Oh, that You would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you! As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down to make Your Name known to Your enemies and cause the nations to quake before You! For when You did awesome things that we did not expect, You came down, and the mountains trembled before You. Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides You, who acts on behalf of those who wait for Him. (Isaiah 64:1-4)*

Hymn of praise – 626 Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

Hymn – Of The Father's Love Begotten 184