

Watchnight Service 2018

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[0 : 00] Well, thank you to everybody who has participated so far in our service. Folks, I just want to, for 10, 15 minutes tonight, help us think about that reading that we just read from Matthew's Gospel, to help us think about everything that Christmas is to us.

So, to begin with, I want to tell you a true story that I read this week. Now, I need you to use your imaginations here, okay? Picture the scene. It's the annual school nativity play.

And Mary and Joseph have made it to Bethlehem. Baby Jesus has been born. Silent night has been sung. The shepherds, well, they have been and they've gone.

And it's the wise men who are up next. And wise man number one, he declares boldly, he says, Baby Jesus, I have come to bring you some gold.

Wise man number two pipes up. Baby Jesus, I have come to give you some myrrh. And all eyes in the room go to wise man number three. And he pauses nervously.

[1 : 10] And it's every parent's nativity nightmare as you look on your child and it dawns on you that they've forgotten their line. But this little boy, he can remember something of his line.

And so he thinks, I'll just give it a go. And he declares sheepishly yet boldly in front of the whole crowd. He says, Baby Jesus, I think Frank sent this.

Well, just for the next 10 minutes or so tonight, as we prepare our hearts for the arrival of another Christmas day, I want to take you from thinking about a boy in a Christmas nativity who fluffed his lines to a man in the original Christmas drama who absolutely nailed his lines.

Let me take you back just to those verses we read just a few moments ago from Matthew. You see, Matthew, the gospel writer, as he tells his readers the Christmas story, he focuses in on this man called Joseph.

This man called Joseph, the young village carpenter who we learn has pledged his heart to marry his bride-to-be sweetheart.

[2 : 23] And so here we have a very young couple with their whole lives ahead of them and who I'm sure have, like any young couple, who have dreams and they have aspirations for their married life together.

But the thing is, life as they know it is about to change forever. You see, we pick up Joseph's story at verse 18 and here's the scene in front of him.

To his shock, Mary's pregnant and he's not the father. That's absolutely crushing news for our Joe. Just imagine the shattered dreams, the mental anguish and the emotional turmoil that he would have gone through as he processes that one in his mind.

Now the obvious path ahead of him is to just call the marriage off and to save his own reputation, his own standing, by exposing Mary to public disgrace.

But Matthew tells us that, and I'm assuming purely because of the kind of man that Joseph is, that Joseph chose not to go down that route, but instead he decided to call off the marriage behind the scenes.

[3 : 43] You see, that's the scene in front of Joseph. And then all of a sudden, out of nowhere, verse 20, there's a choice before him. The angel brings him a message from God.

And it's a quite simple message, really. Do you see how there's two instructions followed by two explanations? Do you see it? Two instructions followed by two explanations. The two instructions. The two instructions. Firstly, Joseph, be the husband that Mary needs you to be to her. And secondly, Joseph, be the father that the boy needs you to be to him.

And the two explanations, well, they're both indicated there by the word because. In other words, here's why, Joseph. Here's why you should do these things.

Firstly, because, verse 20, the life in Mary's womb, the boy in her belly, this is God's doing, not man's. You see, Joseph, God is graciously and wonderfully doing something well beyond your human capacity to fathom.

[4 : 50] And he's doing it gloriously in this moment. And secondly, verse 21, because in the sending of this child, God is fulfilling his merciful and powerful promise to send a savior.

Who will do what? Save his people from their sins. And in so doing, deliver his people from slavery. And in so doing, rescue his people from their greatest and their deadliest enemy, death itself. That's the child in Mary's womb. That is the savior of the world.

And Matthew, you see, he adds his own comment to help his readers join the dots to see that this child is not some kind of bolt from the blue.

This child is not an idea that's come from left field. That this child is the fulfillment of everything. That God said he would do centuries before when he promised to act to rescue his people.

[6 : 04] Because God said that he himself would come mightily to save his people. He was going to be mighty God to them. And God said that he himself would come gloriously to dwell with his people.

That he was going to be God with them. And so both of these mind-blowing truths so wonderfully converge in this baby.

Truly, Bethlehem, the hopes and the fears of all the years are met in thee tonight. And Joseph's role, do you see it?

Well, he's to call the child Jesus. You see, that's his one line. That's his one line in the original Christmas drama. His name is Jesus.

That's his line. His name is Jesus. But if he's to deliver that line, he's got to be in it with more than just his lips. He's got to deliver that line from his heart.

[7 : 09] For, and remember, he's still in that place of raw pain and real questions. There's a big choice facing Joseph.

And the choice is this. Will he stand and will he embrace the message from God? Will he lean the whole weight of his life on the word of the Lord?

Will he associate himself absorbing every ounce of shame and slander that will come his way because of his association with Mary?

And most of all, I think, will he place the entirety of his hope and trust in the truth of who this Jesus is?

Or will he just stick with his plan? So what will Joseph choose? Will he be a man who walks by faith? Or will he be a man who walks by sight?

[8 : 11] Well, if that's the choice before him, see it at verse 24. Joseph embraced the path ahead of him. What does Matthew tell us that Joseph does? He did what the angel of the Lord commanded him.

In other words, he fulfilled this down to a T, didn't he? He did it. He took Mary to be his wife and he named the child Jesus.

Do you see? Joseph was given his line in the original Christmas drama and he absolutely nailed it. He chose to take God at his word.

He chose to stake it all on the identity of this child. Now, we can so easily get a bit sentimental at this point in the story, like this was some kind of first century love, actually.

Like it ended happily ever after. But let's be under no illusions here that the reality of life from this moment on would have been anything but rainbows and smiley unicorns for this young couple.

[9 : 12] Anything but. I mean, Nazareth, that is not a big place. And people being people, being people, being people. A big bit of juicy news like that in a town like this.

Well, that news is going to get around pretty quickly. And I'm certain that this family, this young family would have had to endure years of looks and of questions and of sneers and of mocking. But, as for them and their house, they're going to serve the Lord. And right there is the life of faith, isn't it?

Right there is the life of faith. Trusting in and standing on, walking with and basing your life upon the word of God.

Staking it all on the promises of God. And having absolute certainty about and placing your entire confidence in who this Jesus truly is.

[10:17] No matter what it costs us. And as I was thinking about it this week, here's what I was really struck by. You see, Joseph, the last time that we see him mentioned in the Bible is when Luke, in his gospel, tells us about the 12-year-old Jesus in the temple in Luke chapter 2.

That's the last time we read about Joseph. He doesn't feature at any point after that. Which means, I think we can safely assume that Joseph died before Jesus began his public ministry.

So he never got to see Jesus perform miracles. He never got to hear Jesus' son teach. He never got to see Jesus heal the sick.

And I think most importantly of all, he never saw Jesus fulfill everything that his name suggested. As he saved his people from their sin.

As he died on the cross. And there's a wonderful parallel there, isn't there, between, as it were, father and son. Here is Joseph, in this scene, courageously willing to embrace the shame that would come his way.

[11:35] Because he chose to associate himself with his bride. And years later, Jesus, he would not just embrace the shame.

But he would absorb the shame. Because he chose to associate himself with his bride. As he died for her sin on the cross.

The sin of his people. Joseph never saw Jesus die on the cross. And Joseph never saw Jesus rise from the grave. And Joseph never saw Jesus ascend to his father's right hand in heaven.

And yet, that was no barrier to him placing his faith in the identity of this child. Why? Because Joseph's God, he knew, was good for his word.

And so, to us sitting here tonight, do you see how the call and the invitation to faith is exactly the same? The only difference is that the facts are fuller.

[12:39] It's the only difference. The facts are fuller. Because sitting where we do in history, what a glorious privilege, friends, that you and I have. That we have the Bible. We have the entirety of it.

We have it in our language. We have it in different translations. We have a plethora of commentaries. We know everything that happened. And how much more reason do we have to stake it all on this child born in Bethlehem.

The man born in the crib who would grow up to be the man on the cross. The man who defeated death. The man who reigns and is seated at God's right hand.

And the man who gloriously will one day return. How much more reason do we have to stake it all on this child Jesus? We were thinking a few weeks back as a church about how that word Advent, it just means coming.

That's all it means. It just means coming. That's what we're doing, isn't it? As we open the doors of our little Advent calendars, we're counting down the days to the first coming of Jesus. That's what we're doing.

[13:46] And as once again we step into another December the 25th, as we celebrate Christmas together, let's remember that as much as we're celebrating the arrival of Jesus, his first coming, standing where we do in history, we're anticipating gloriously his second coming.

When this Jesus won't come as humble baby Jesus, he'll come as victorious King Jesus. And all wrongs will be put to right with the reign of this King.

Every tear will be wiped away. And sin and death will be banished forever. And here it is, God's glorious rescue plan.

Here it is, the gospel kicking off right here in Bethlehem. Isn't it glorious? Here it is. And as we close, we started by thinking about that boy in the Christmas nativity scene.

Do you remember him? He got his lines wrong. I hope he's not listening. This hasn't done damage to his confidence. There he is. He's fluffing his lines. And we thought about Joseph, the man in the original Christmas drama, who absolutely, by faith, because of his faith, he nailed his line.

[14:59] Well, let me just read you another line that we get at the end of the Bible, the end of the Bible story. We read this line, and it's the final line from the risen and reigning Jesus.

And it's a word to his waiting people, his hurting people, his anticipating people. And it's simply this. Yes. Or behold.

Get your heads around this. Know it. That I am coming soon. I am coming soon. And so we sing, don't we, at Christmas time. Born thy people to deliver.

Born a child and yet a king. Born to reign in us forever. Now thy gracious kingdom bring. By thine own eternal spirit, rule in all our hearts alone.

By thine all sufficient merit, raise us to thy glorious glory. Friends, just before we move on in our service, why don't we just pause for a second and maybe just reflect on everything that we've thought about this evening.

[16 : 07] And then I'll close and I'll lead us in prayer. Heavenly Father, thank you so much for sending your son Jesus Christ.

The light of the world who stepped down into our darkness. And he stepped down, humbled himself to save us.

And so we ask, glorious and gracious God, that you would help us to be people who base our lives on your every word.

And who find our identity in the person and the work of your son, Jesus Christ. In whose name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.