

Blessed Advent and a Merry Christmas to you!

Christmas Eve is one week from today. Are you ready? The kids are probably saying, “Can’t Christmas come any faster?” and the adults are saying, “Can’t we have a little more time?” It’ll be here whether we are ready or not, and for many of us, it all feels like it’s out of control.

I imagine it felt like that for Joseph too. We can imagine Joseph planning out his life, having his own hopes and dreams. He would marry Mary without incident, they would settle down to a quiet life in Nazareth and have children. Hopefully one of them would go on to take over the family carpentry business.

But that carefully planned future was not to be. Maybe we should write a song: Joseph did you know? Did you know your fiancée is already pregnant? Did you know that the child is going to be a target for a jealous bloodthirsty king – Did you know you’re going to have to get out of the country for a while to protect the boy? Joseph did you know when he grows up you will face ridicule and persecution because of him. Did you know your own people will conspire with Rome to kill him? There’s so much Joseph didn’t know. So many questions he must have had. How could he possibly be ready for Christmas?

In our own out of control Christmas preparations, we are not as flexible or compassionate as Joseph. Sometimes this season brings out the best in people but it also brings out the worst: impatience, frustration, worshipping the god of commercialism. It’s the most wonderful time of the year but for many it is also the most difficult time of the year – How have our families changed from Advents and Christmases gone by? Maybe new children and grandchildren have been added – but maybe there’s been death, divorce, drug addiction, depression and all manner of brokenness – all of which is largely out of our control.

But as Christmas spins out of control, today we consider the hope God gave Joseph. As Joseph’s life was spinning out of control, God gave him something to hold onto. God gave him a name: “You shall call his name Jesus.” What goes into choosing a name? Does it have a nice ring to it? **Jesus** of Nazareth. **Jesus** the Christ. Will he be called by a nickname and is the nickname acceptable? Is it unique – maybe God didn’t want his Son to have the same name as all the other boys in Galilee. But also not too unique – we don’t want him to have to spell it out all the time! Those are things we might consider when we name our children but what was important to God? The most significant factor for the name of God’s Son was the meaning of the name. Jesus – in Hebrew Y’eshua, (or Joshua) – means “Yahweh saves.” *“You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”*

Joseph, did you know? There was so much Joseph didn’t know yet. But in all of his confusion, frustration, doubt, and lack of control over his own life, he *did* know this one thing: “the child born to my Mary is here to save me. He’s here to save **us** from **our** sins, from the guilt of the sins I commit, from the injustice of

sins committed against me. He's here to save us from our disordered desires for things that are far less than what God has prepared for us. He's here to save us from the results of sin- the rage, the fear, the sickness, and the dying – Jesus will save us from this!"

That was Joseph's hope and ours. In joy and in sorrow, we look to Jesus, who saves his people from their sins. And in this we can rejoice that we are not in control! It is entirely in God's hands. He carefully planned for Jesus to be born before we were born. He planned for Jesus to save us before the world was made. He planned for a young virgin named Mary to be Jesus' mother. He planned for a good man named Joseph to be the Jesus' guardian. And it was also his plan for this Jesus to suffer for Joseph's sake and ours. It was his plan for Jesus to conquer death and prepare a place for us in a new heaven and a new earth. It's all out of control – out of our control but completely in God's control. So whether we're ready for Christmas or not, let's take some time right now to tell and hear the story of the birth of Yeshua, who saves us from our sins.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
Amen.