

Isaiah 7:10-14

¹⁰ Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, ¹¹ "Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights."

¹² But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test."

¹³ Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. (NIV)

Matthew 1:18-25

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

²⁰ But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.** ²¹ **She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.**"

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" -- which means, "God with us."

²⁴ **When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.** ²⁵ But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus. (NIV)

‘Believe’

TINA Young adult member of Redeemer Lutheran
SVEN Young adult member of Redeemer Lutheran

(Sven sitting in a chair with his head in his hands, slowly shaking his head back and forth. Tina walks in, see’s Sven, and sits by him.)

TINA: (Putting arm on Sven’s shoulder, pausing.) What’s wrong, Sven?

SVEN: (Not looking up, but loud enough for people to hear) You know.

TINA: I guess I do. . . But, Sven, it’s been 6 months, and you’ve been back to work.

SVEN: But, the wreck still happened, even 6 months later. She’s still dead, Tina. Ann is still dead.

TINA: I’m sorry, Sven.

SVEN: (Finally looking up at Tina) I know you are, and so are all my other friends at church and at work. But, sometimes I wonder why I keep going. I wonder why I keep working, why I keep going to church. Life feels empty. It feels like a big, burnt, empty chasm inside me.

TINA: Sven, don’t you remember the pastor’s sermon at Ann’s funeral? I know you two were going to be married. But, Sven, God. . .in Jesus . . . still has a plan for your life.

SVEN: I understand the words, Tina. But my heart *aches*, and feels *empty*. Ann was not just my fiancé. She and I met at church. We shared our faith, AND we believed God had a plan for *us* . . . **in Jesus**. We went on that mission trip together. Remember? I understand the words Tina, but everything hurts, and feels empty, and I just want to give up. My future is gone, at least my future with Ann.

TINA: God loves you, Sven. Even though you don’t *feel* it. He is there for you.

SVEN: I know the promises, Tina. But, I hurt so much . . . well, I wonder if it’s true. Is God really there? He’s supposed to be the God of eternity. Well, where is *my future*?? It is hard to believe in a God of love when life is so disappointing and hurts so much.

TINA: He is there Sven. He’s there for you now. He’s our ‘fortress and strength.’ He’s an ‘even present help in trouble.’

SVEN: That’s what *you say*, Tina. . . (pause) But it’s not what *I feel*.

INTRO - Have you ever been hurt so badly or been so disappointed in life that you doubted God's love? I'm not talking about wondering if God exists. I'm not talking about struggling to understand some fine theological point. Have you ever looked at the pain in the world, or maybe the pain in your own life and just wondered, God where ARE YOU in this? God, how can you let this happen?

I. That is probably the place where Joseph and Mary found themselves.

A. Their plans were broken.

1. Joseph was a believing Jew who made his life as a carpenter.
2. Mary was a believing young Jewish girl who was planning to live the life of a Jewish wife, and some day the mother of Joseph's children.
3. The Jewish people knew God's plan that people are to refrain from sexual relations until married, so that family is strengthened and so that children are cared for by the power of this gift.
4. They had plans, and hope, and a future as a faithful Jewish family.

B. But, now Mary was expecting, and they weren't married yet.

1. Now Mary was expecting, and the child wasn't Joseph's.
2. Does Joseph lie to protect Mary and say, 'Yeah, it's our baby?'
3. Does Joseph allow others to point at his future wife as someone who can't be trusted, who has sinned openly?
4. If they get married people will always talk.
5. If they don't get married, well, that's the end of Joseph's plans. And what does Mary do?

C. Christmas is often thought of as a quiet time of faith, and peace and love.

1. But, for Joseph and Mary, Christmas was a time of lost dreams.
2. For Joseph and Mary, Christmas was a time of trouble.
3. So, Joseph decided, he couldn't take Mary as a wife any longer, and, he still cared for her, the only thing he could do is try to gently separate from his fiancé and let her fend for herself.

II. That's where the angels comes in who speaks God's Words of hope and His Words of God's own acting in Joseph's life.

A. Do you hear the words of the angel, though?

1. **"Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."**
2. Joseph must have thought
 - A. Take her home as my wife?
 - B. Conceived from the Holy Spirit?
 - C. Sure.
3. You see, the troubles did not go away. God was just calling Joseph, and Mary, to believe that He had a plan, even though their plans did not work out.

B. You see, that is the way faith is.

1. Faith is easy when life is going well.
2. But when life hurts, when something you planned for in the future does not happen, when a loss occurs, that is when faith is hard.
3. But, that is when we really need to trust God.
4. In truth, our own power, and our own plans have not worked. Will God keep His word?

III. Do you see what Joseph did? Look at verse 24.

A. ²⁴**When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.**

1. Joseph did what the angel of the Lord commanded.
2. When Joseph hurt, when his plans were seemingly shattered, Joseph kept going.
3. The only reason Joseph did this is that, in his hurt, He trusted God to act.

B. We like to forget that life often hurts.

1. The reason for that hurt is that we live in a world of sin. Our sin, our rebellion against God and our lack of love for others, and the sin of others causes pain, and trouble, and hurt.

2. That, after all is why Joseph and Mary went through their disappointment.

A. Jesus came, as it says in verse 22, **to save His people from their sins.**

B. It was because of sin that Jesus came, and because of sin that Mary and Joseph's lives were changed.

C. Yet, living in a world of sin, Joseph faced his disappointment, he trusted the words of God through the angel and Joseph acted in faith, he obeyed, **he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him**

C. God has a plan for you in a world of sin and pain and disappointment. That is why Jesus came.

1. Knowing the trouble and pain we face in life, knowing our weakness and sin, Jesus came to this world, and took it on for himself. That was not just a cute baby being born, that was God taking on human pain, pain like you and I feel.

2. Knowing our guilt, Jesus suffered for us, in a way beyond anything you or I have ever felt. That was God dealing with our sin.

3. Knowing our weakness and defeat, Jesus rose again to win victory, not only over our sin, but also over the enemy we have no hope with - death. All who believe in Jesus as their Savior from sin receive eternal life in heaven as a gift.

4. You see, Christmas is not just about a gentle story of love, it is about God's plan to deal with our pain.

D. When you know that God has faced, not only your hurt today, but the cause of all the hurts of the world, you can go forward even when you don't feel like it.

1. When his plans were dashed we are told about Joseph **he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him.** But, if you think about it, if God has a plan even in times of pain, that gives real meaning to life.

2. How about you, can you keep going when life hurts?

3. God is not just there for you difficult times, he really has over come them.

SVEN: (Sitting in a chair, writing on a pad of paper. He sees Tina walk up and looks up at her and greets her.) Hi Tina.

TINA: (Looking surprised.) Hi, Sven. You sound different.

SVEN: What do you mean? (Goes back to writing)

TINA: Well, when I saw you last week, I was really worried. You were so down, so depressed, so hurting.

SVEN: (sighing) Well, I guess I still hurt, Tina. You know, a week from today Ann and I were going to be married.

TINA: I know, Sven. I was going to be one of the bridesmaids. . . I miss Ann too, you know.

SVEN: I'm sorry, Tina. You didn't need to worry about me along with *your own* hurt over Tina's death.

TINA: So, where's the change?

SVEN: I'm not sure it is much of a change, Tina. I still miss Ann. Life still feels painful and empty. But . . . something the pastor said the other day helped.

TINA: What was that?

SVEN: Remember when he was talking about Mary and Joseph, and the change of plans that happened for their life, and how they must have been disappointed? But, Joseph kept going. Pastor said, **he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him.**

TINA: Yeah?

SVEN: Well, I know I don't have the strength I need. I'm empty and drained. But, even though I feel hurt, I do know deep down that God can even work good from this loss and pain.

TINA: Wow.

SVEN: So, I'm filling out this application for a mission trip. I'm taking some vacation and I'm going to China to teach English as a second language. Maybe God can use me, even if I don't know where I'm going, right now.

TINA: Now, Sven, that takes faith. That takes believing God is there for you, even when you do hurt.

SVEN: I don't know, Tina. I just know that I'm not sure what I'm doing here. But, if anyone has an answer for my future, God does. I'll try to let him use me, and show me what He has in mind.

TINA: Guess what, Sven?

SVEN: What, Tina?

TINA: Pastor Bob gave me one of those applications too. I turned it in this morning.

SVEN: Maybe he'll show both of us what He has in mind. Anyway, I know I have no idea, so I have to trust Him.

TINA: Me too, Sven.