

(Joseph is told of the coming birth of Jesus.)

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.

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY Stir up your power, O Lord, and come. Take away the hindrance of our sins and make us ready for the celebration of your birth, that we may receive you in joy and serve you always, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

INTRO - Do you recognize these words? Bah humbug! Who said them? The character Ebenezer Scrooge in the Dickens story, a Christmas carol. Old Scrooge is usually considered a villain, or at the least, a person with a bad attitude in a happy time.

I. Today is December 23. In two days - Tuesday - it will be Christmas Day! Tomorrow night is Christmas Eve and we'll be having 3 Services. And everyone knows we'll be singing 'Joy to the World.'

A. Christmas really is a happy time, a joyful time, especially for children. There are gifts, decorations, wonderful food. For many this celebration of God's gift of His son is truly a wonderful time. . . BUT, NOT FOR EVERYONE.

1. When a special holiday comes around it can be tough on those who have lost a loved one, and won't have them at home this year.
2. Christmas can be tough on the lonely.
3. It can be tough on those having troubles when everyone else is singing Joy to the World.
4. And, in a world where most people are already overly busy, the added busy-ness of the season can wear on everyone, not matter who they are. Over commitment can cause even happy people to be somewhat depressed.
5. So, when everyone is supposed to be joyful, life can be wearing, and difficult, and depressing. Maybe we can understand, at least a little, the Dickens character, Ebenezer Scrooge.

B. I want you to know that our description of a life of trouble somewhat reflects the lives of Joseph and Mary.

1. Being a Jew was not easy in these days.
 - A. For a people who knew themselves to be God's chosen people, it had been about a thousand years since the glory days of King David and Solomon.
 - B. The nation was still trying to overcome the deportation of its population

600 years earlier to Babylon, because of their idolotry.

C. Now, the country was occupied by Roman soldiers, and taxes were high.

2. So, when word came that Joseph and Mary, still only engaged, were going to be having a baby, well that just brought more trouble into lives with more troubles than Mary and Joseph wanted, or thought they needed.

C. God did not intend our world to be a world of pain, and depression, and death.

1. God created the world, and people in love, and power, and wisdom.

2. God create us to live in a relationship with Him that is one of love, and worship, and peace and joy.

3. The Words we are going to hear from the angels, 'Good News of Great Joy,' and 'peace on earth,' these are not a new idea.

4. People have brought this on themselves.

A. Our busyness can be traced, in many ways, to our greed, and our lack of priorities, or we might say idolotry.

B. Our troubles and pain are the result of our sin and our lack of faith and love. It's the same for the Jews, and for us.

II. Let me tell you about a problem I had, recently, a problem I didn't need in the busy Christmas season. I've been having trouble with the blower on my car heater. It's a used car, and I found if I can hit the dash it starts up again, so I've done that. This Thursday on the way to Anchorage to visit some people in the hospital, and pick up Kathy's brother from the airport, it stopped. Now, it was cold Thursday, and snowing. I got to the airport, and the plane was late. I was late to Stephen Ministry, and I was rushing and, I didn't see it before I did it, but I ran a stop sign going out of the parking lot. About 50 yards later, I saw a flashing light. I told my brother in law, I haven't had a ticket in about 10 years, but I'm about to get one now.

My plan to deal with this was to take the ar to the repair shop. I called the shop on Friday, but they were too busy. I took it in Saturday, and after waiting for most of the day, the wrong part was delivered. O well, more stress

A. Joseph had a plan. He didn't need more trouble, he didn't need a scandal in his life of having a child before he was married, even if he had done nothing wrong. But, God had a different idea. Listen to the help God gives in our Gospel lesson for today. I want you to focus on the names. Do you see them.

B. First, the angel Gabriel is talking to Joseph. He says to him at the end of the dream. **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."**

1. Yes, this world is a difficult place. Our troubles are the result of our sins.

2. But, God is sending Jesus, Savior. And Jesus will save us from sin.

3. So, in His life, in His birth, in His dying and rising, Jesus will save us from the cause of pain, and depression, and trouble, and death.

4. God has eternal life in heaven waiting for all who believe in Jesus as their Savior.

5. For those who are struggling with seemingly unending problems in this life, the knowledge of eternal life in heaven should be a source of peace and joy.

C. Then the writer of Matthew tells us another name. **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."**

1. When I am in this life, struggling with my busy schedule, my loneliness, my temptations, I have someone to help me.

2. And not just any someone, I have God Himself, with ME, and with us.

3. Do you need help, right now? God has a plan.

A. God will help you with the forgiveness of Jesus, found in faith, in His Word and Sacraments.

B. God will help you with the guidance of Jesus, found in His Word, and in His Church.

C. God is with us to help us with the strength of Jesus, found in His love.

CONCLUSION - Back to my ticket. The policeman approached, and I took out my driver's license, and held it out the window and the policeman said, 'Good evening, sir.' I waited and he didn't take my license and said it again, 'Good evening, sir.' I looked, and it was St. John member, David Schulling. He told me I had run a stop sign and said, 'I was just checking to see if your equipment worked. My brakes did work, and he let me go. I felt thankful. This was the right person for me as I was dealing with a few of life's stresses.

You and I are dealing with the stress of life. God has sent, just the right person, Himself. He came to save and to help. In a world where we all can understand, 'Bah, Humbug.' God has sent Jesus who takes away our sins, who is, God with us. He is the source of good news of great joy, and he is the source of peace on earth.