

SERMON FOR DECEMBER 18, 2022

TEXT: MATTHEW 1: 18-25

THEME: GOD IS WITH YOU

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. **19** And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. **20** But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. **21** She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." **22** All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: **23** "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). **24** When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, **25** but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

In the name of Jesus:

Edward Murphy is a well known aerospace engineer, who worked on safety programs at Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton. He is well known not for any scientific discovery but for a saying that is attributed to him. While working on these safety systems, Murphy held to an adage that one should always assume the worst possible outcome in any scenario. It is on the basis of this assumption that Murphy's Law came into our popular culture, which states that anything that can go wrong will go wrong at the worst possible moment.

Of all of the people recorded in the Bible, the most likely person to have adopted Murphy's Law would be Joseph, the fiancée of Mary. Joseph had his life all together, but as we see in our text for today, not everything transpired in the way that he intended.

Matthew records that Joseph was engaged to be married to a young woman named Mary. Like any couple, they had their expectations and dreams. Preparations were underway for the wedding, a date was set, the place for the reception was reserved, the wedding dress fitted, and the bridesmaids and groomsmen were selected. All was pointing for it to be the day that Mary and Joseph had dreamed of.

But, not so fast. Before they were married, Mary found out that she was to become the mother of Jesus. This account is found in the Gospel of Luke where we read that the angel Gabriel was sent from God to the town of Nazareth. There he found Mary, and upon finding her proclaimed: "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" **29** But Mary was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to figure out what sort of greeting this might be. **30** So Gabriel explained, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. **31** And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. **32** He will be great and will be called the Son of

the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, **33** and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

Mary, though, didn't understand how this was possible, so she asked how this could have happened because she was still a virgin. Gabriel explained: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.” And with that, Mary responded: “I am your servant.”

But now she had to tell Joseph, and what in the world would he think? Joseph was a good man, he was a believer in the Lord, just like Mary. Surely he would understand. So when she went to tell him that she “was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit,” Joseph didn't know what to think! His world was turned upside down. Now certainly, Mary's world was rocked by this news, because she was carrying the baby in her womb! But Joseph, he was probably thinking, “look, I didn't sign up for this!” So, Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put Mary to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. In this way, Mary could get on with her life, he could get on with his, and he wouldn't be saddled with being the father of a child that was not his. Joseph had every

reason to think of Murphy's Law here in his situation, " what can go wrong will go wrong at the worst possible time".

But Matthew records that as Joseph was considering all of this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. **21** She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." . **24** When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, **25** but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus, which means Savior.

Joseph learned an important lesson, one that we would do well to apply to our lives as well. For we live in trying and challenging times. Many days it seems that what can go wrong will go wrong in our lives. An unexpected turn of events that causes us hardship and pain. What has gone wrong in your life: a lingering illness; problems with your hearing or eyesight; the news in your family of a fractured relationship; a pending divorce; loss of a job; loss of income? There are a host of things that take place in your life and mine that literally take our breath away, things that come into our lives and circumstances and situations that take place that we did not envision, did not

plan for, and pray that would go away. And the bad news keeps coming, like waves on the ocean shore, there is no let up, just pieces to try to pick up. And we are in a conundrum, just like Joseph. And like Joseph we mutter under our breath, “what did I do to deserve this?” What else can go wrong, what else will go wrong?” It seems as if Murphy’s Law hits home again. And again, and again. It hits you that you have no control of the situation, in fact, you have no control over many situations.

And so now next Sunday is Christmas. At this time of year you may feel like your life is spinning out of control. There is so much to do and so little time to do it. You are trying to juggle things to meet the needs of your family, your health, your job, among other things. Then throw in the responsibilities you have at Christmas, shopping, get togethers, and such, you don’t feel much like celebrating. It is just one thing after another. You try to find sometime for yourself. But things just keep coming at you and popping up. And it is then, at that time, when you realize that you, like Joseph, are not in control.

The Good News is that you never have been in control. God has been in control all along. This is the promise that the Lord gave to Joseph and to each of us. Matthew writes about it, quoting Isaiah the prophet where we hear:

“The virgin will conceive and bear a son, and you shall call His name Immanuel, which means God is with us.”

The unplanned pregnancy that rocked Joseph and turned his world upside down was God’s doing all along. Mary’s child was not Joseph’s, it was the Lord Himself in human flesh. God came down from heaven in the person of Jesus, to be with us to forgive us, to be with us to lead and guide us, to be with us during all those Murphy’s Law times when what could go wrong does go wrong.

Like Joseph you are a child of God, made so in the waters of Baptism. Jesus is your Savior and Lord. And He is at work in your life, blessing you so that your life can be a blessing to others. Jesus said that things will not always go according to plan. But in those times you can be of Good cheer. The Lord is on your side. The Lord is for you, working to work all things out to your good and His glory. For the bottom line is this: God is in control. God is with you. Jesus loves you. And nothing will separate you from His love.

To the glory of God and in Jesus’ name.

Amen