**Matthew 1:18-25**

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.

**“His Name Is Jesus”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. The common greeting heard for sermons originates from how St. Paul opened his letters to Christians. When we consider the tradition of sending cards as a greeting at Christmas time to friends and family, those origins are not as scriptural. Matter a fact, the first Christmas cards made by Sir Henry Cole from England in 1843 had no religious theme to them. It simply showed family generations gathered for a festive meal. On either side of this main picture were also depictions of charitable acts toward the poor. Even if Christmas cards do not have such “holy” origins, sending greetings are hopeful and Christians value this most of all by how God greets us in His Son.

Of course, when God came brining His greeting of good news. The mighty house of David had dwindled down to nothing. As the saying goes, “Here today and go tomorrow” went the line of David and its glory. Joseph was no king, but a carpenter on the outskirts of Israel. What God had promised as His sign of the Messiah to faithless King Ahaz and all the house of David was hundreds of years later under mounds of hopelessness. Yet, this was not terrifying to God for His salvation never becomes void, weary, or faint like man. Since St. Matthew has Jewish origins, the first story has quite the greeting for the house of Israel. We head, “Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way.” The sign that many had waited to see has become our hope fulfilled for God is with us.

1. **Hope turned upside down is no sign of hope.**
2. When God decided to fulfill His promise to the line of David, Joseph saw it only as a problem.

* How he found out about this pregnancy of Mary is a mystery.
* Maybe she told him outright. Maybe she started to show signs. Maybe it came to him another way.
* Whatever case, Joseph was not looking to be the police or make a public spectacle of it all.
* He was a just man having a right relationship with God by faith and with that came compassion toward what seemed to be Mary’s infidelity.

1. We have the same problem, since our thoughts, words, and deeds turn the hope of God upside down.

* How situations come upon us in life always runs head on into what we make of them.
* God is always at work for good, but most often all kinds of doubt deny such thinking.
* God’s Word quickly gets pushed out of the way by our words that want to take control.
* The deeds of the Law are a conveyor belt leading at last to despair for sinners.

1. **Hope comes from how God sustains His sign of hope.**
2. Joseph received a new perspective that could not come from his own efforts.

* In his hour of need and sorrow, the Lord shared what He alone can give to banish the darkness.
* An angel came preaching what God thought of the whole matter saying, “Son of David, do not fear…”
* God’s word to Joseph directed to the long awaited promise of Immanuel and calling God, “Jesus” meant forgiveness for a shipped wreck Israel.
* Rather than defeat, the virgin conception of Mary was the sign of life worked by the Holy Spirit.

1. God sustains his sign of hope to us by the promise of His Word.

* The Word confronts us with the virgin conception (life) and the resurrection (death) proving Jesus is more than a man, but God with us for all good!
* The Word shows His perfect coming in the flesh, how the One in the midst of humanity is God for us able to save us from our sin.
* The Word guarantees the perfect sacrifice has been made and His people are any who trust Him, since, “… there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12)
* The Word gives comfort for the signs of the Last Day are many, but like Joseph, we have this promise not from an angel, but Jesus, “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20).

1. **Hope leads to where the sign of hope is alive.**
2. Rather than death, Joseph saw life by faith in the Gospel truly at work in the Virgin Mary.

* When he awoke from sleep, his thoughts, words, and deeds aligned to what he hoped in from God.
* Unlike King Ahaz, Joseph was a true son of David, thinking not of himself or allowing doubt to win the day, but let God’s salvation be at the center.
* If actions speak louder than words, than that is the case for Joseph since marriage to Mary both protected and gave a birthright to her child.
* Yet, there is one confession we know Joseph did make for He called his adopted son, “Jesus".

1. Humanity tries to create hopefulness, but hope is already alive leading the way for sinners.

* Jesus tells us by His coming there is only one Spirit of Christmas.
* The Spirit that brought forth His virgin birth also has made baptism a miracle for we, “were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13).
* Forgiveness changes how we think about life for the hope we have in Christ is at the center not doubt and fear.
* The Lord’s Supper keeps hope alive to call upon Christ and confess His Name for God is with us under this bread and wine.
* Since Jesus is both God and man, our acts of love and bearing crosses honor how God is not far from us.

Christmas cards are wonderful greetings this time of the year. Family generations on a card are glorious to see, but God also gathers His own kind of family by the Spirit. He has greeted humanity with a personalized message. The Word became flesh to be born in the manger and make His way the cross. The virgin birth is a stumbling block to some, foolishness to others, but to those that believe in His Name. We have the promise that Jesus saves His people from their sins. This is what we see as the sign of Him now at work by Word and Sacraments, but soon He comes in glory. The sign that many had waited to see has become our hope fulfilled for God is with us. Amen. The peace of Christ, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.