

*“A Child is born”  
Isaiah 9:2-9 Matthew 1:18-25  
December 23, 2007*

*Do you have hope for the future?  
Someone asked Robert Frost, toward the end.  
Yes, and even for the past, he replied,  
That it will turn out to have been all right.*

These lines by the poet David Ray focus our hearts and mind on the coming of the Christ Child as Hope for our future and our past.

Christmas comes and provides for us a renewed Hope in God.

Today, we hear the old story, hopefully anew.

*Look, the Virgin shall conceive  
And bear a son,  
And they shall name him  
Emmanuel*

You may recall that in Luke's birth narrative, the angel speaks to Mary, rather than Joseph. In Luke, Joseph is mentioned in passing as one who is engaged to the virgin. In Matthew's story, Joseph plays a larger role and has several dreams, one of which we will hear about next week, to take Mary and the babe into Egypt to avoid the threat of Herod.

If you watched the recent film *The Nativity Story*, you saw Oscar Jacob playing the role of Joseph. He said that all he knew of Joseph was that he was a 'righteous man' and asked himself how do you play the role of a righteous man? Do you stand up straighter? The OT is filled with pictures of the 'righteous' man.

*They are like trees  
planted by streams of water,  
which yield their fruit in its season,  
and their leaves do not wither.  
In all that they do, they prosper.  
(Psalm 1)*

*Their descendants will be mighty in  
the land;  
Wealth and riches are in their houses.  
They rise in the darkness as a light  
for the upright  
(Psalm 112)*

*For the righteous are taken away  
from calamity,  
and they enter into peace.  
(Isaiah 57)*

When Mary is found to be with child, Joseph, being a righteous man, is unwilling to expose her to public disgrace and plans to dismiss her quietly.

*“A Child is born”*  
*Isaiah 9:2-9 Matthew 1:18-25*  
*December 23, 2007*

There is nothing quiet about what happens next. An Angel of the Lord comes to him in a dream and his world, and ours, is turned upside down.

What would have been the ‘deceitful and respectful’ thing to do quietly is now broadcast to shepherds and kings.

Before the dream, Joseph is a righteous man, after the dream he is a righteous man and a faithful man.

A righteous man and faithful man is blessed with both a good past and hope for the future.

What separates the righteous man and the faithful man is a dream, an awakening from a dream that literally sends this man in another direction.

Joseph is told to ‘be not afraid.’

Today, I believe there are many people who are afraid of the future.

Listening to news reports of shootings in shopping malls, and in church halls, makes us question our safety and security in the most safe and secure of places.

A great preacher said long ago;

***“It is almost impossible to be sane and Christian at the same time.”***

(Reinhold Niebuhr, *Notebook of a Tamed Cynic*, p.151)

To believe in a dream from the Lord, in a virgin birth, in choirs of angels, in a baby that will save the world, this is the insanity of people like us, who gather in houses of worship like this, and hope for a future.

Society and culture was brutal on the day that Jesus was born and is brutal today.

This darkness did not frighten righteous and faithful people then and it does not frighten righteous and faithful people today.

We are the leaven in the world; we are the salt of the earth.

Like Joseph, let us listen for the voice of the Lord. Like the Shepherds, let us seek out the manager. Like the Wise Men let us follow a star.

*Edgell Franklin Pyles, Ph..D.*