

“Remember, and then . . . .”  
Isaiah 7:10-16; Matthew 1:18-25

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When we meet Joseph in our Scripture lesson today, he is in a pickle. He is in a bind. Joseph is on the horns of a dilemma.

Joseph is engaged to a woman named Mary. Mary is pregnant. At this time, an engagement was as legally binding as a marriage. You lived separately, but you were expected to be true to each other. Not being faithful, even though you were not married, was as serious as actual adultery.

What’s Joseph going to do? How’s he going to respond? We know Mary is pregnant by the Holy Spirit, but Joseph doesn’t. What’s Joseph going to do? How is he going to respond?

Joseph is a righteous man. He is legally and morally upright. He knows the law and what it expects of him. OK then, Joseph. Get on with it. Break off the engagement.

But even though Joseph knows the legally correct thing to do, he is also compassionate. He’s not a hard man. He’s not a cruel man. He knows what’s expected of him, but he also cares about Mary. He knows everyone will laugh at him. The community will berate him. His standing in his personal and professional circles will never recover. But at the same time, he cares about Mary.

And so, he decides to do what he must, but as quietly and with as little fuss as possible. Regardless of the harm to his own reputation, Joseph wants to do as little harm to Mary’s as possible.

Joseph is righteous. He is also caring and compassionate.

Is Joseph doing the right thing? He can't be sure. He doesn't know this child is the work of God. All he knows is his fiancé is pregnant and the child is for sure and for certain not his.

Have you ever been in this kind of situation? Someone you trusted wounded your pride, your dignity? Left you feeling hurt and angry? Made you a public laughing stock? Trashed your reputation? Used you so bad you wanted to leave town? Maybe you did leave town? Have you ever been in this kind of situation?

Just as Joseph has decided to act, an angel speaks up. "Joseph! It's OK. Go ahead. Make Mary your wife. This child will be salvation. And you are to name him Jesus."

Our word *Jesus* is the English version of the Hebrew word *Joshua*. Joshua, in Hebrew it sounds more like Yu-shuwa, means "YHWH is Salvation." The Lord is Salvation.

Pay close attention here because this is what Matthew is driving at. Jesus is Yu-shuwa. Jesus is The Lord who is our Salvation.

This is important. This is key. Write this down. Remember it today and every day. *Jesus* is not just a name like *Ken* or *Bill* or *Larry*. It means something. It means The Lord is Salvation. Jesus is The Lord who is our Salvation.

But wait. It gets better. Jesus, Yu-Shuwa, is more than just our salvation. Matthew goes on, drawing from Isaiah. Jesus is Immanuel. Jesus is God with Us. Immanu-el. The With Us God.

Matthew's point is in Jesus, God will save us. In Jesus, God is with us. Jesus, the God who saves us, is always with us.

This is why Christmas matters. Christmas celebrates the birth of our Savior. Christmas celebrates the human birth of the God who is always with us.

Jesus is Yu-shuwa, the Lord who is our Salvation. Jesus is Immanuel, the God who is With Us.

When everyone and everything we've trusted turns against us, we know God is with us. When everyone and everything we've trusted leaves us high and dry, flapping in the breeze, we know Jesus is our Savior who is always, always With Us.

We are not alone. The Lord is our Salvation. Our God is not distant, far away in our time of need. Our God is always, always With Us. Maybe that's what Joseph thought. You reckon? Maybe, when he heard the angel, that's what Joseph thought. God is my salvation. God is with me. I can do this. I can do this.

And so, he does. Joseph takes Mary as his wife. When the child is born, he does what he was told to do. He names the child "The Lord Saves." Because this baby is "God With Us."

Personally, until this week, I had never thought much about Joseph as a role-model. But now I do. For those times we feel betrayed. Those times we struggle between righteous anger and compassion. Those times we struggle between caring for someone else's reputation and caring for our own. Those times we struggle between protecting someone else and protecting ourselves. Those times we look back in anger at those who trashed us in public and made us a laughingstock.

When those times come, and they surely will, we know in Jesus the Lord is our Salvation. We know in Jesus, God is with Us in every hurt and pain and moral conundrum in which we find ourselves. In the excruciatingly hard decisions of life, we know our Savior is with us.

The good news of God is God has sent us a savior and this savior is always with us. When we find ourselves standing in Joseph's shoes, and when we do not, Immanuel – our 'with us God' – is with us.

At the very first Christmas, Joseph made an important decision. He stepped out in faith. Joseph knew Yu-shuwa, The Lord Saves, is also Immanuel, the God who is with us. Joseph knew God was with him in this very important decision.

This Christmas, do you have a decision to make? Are you in a pickle, in a bind, on the horns of a dilemma? Are you torn between the right thing and the compassionate thing? Between revenge and mercy? Between public humiliation and doing the will of God?

This Christmas and every Christmas, remember Jesus is Yu-shuwa, The Lord who Saves. Remember Jesus is Immanuel, God with Us. Remember Jesus is the God who saves us and is with us every, every day.

May we remember, and then step out in faith.

Amen.