

“A grade school class was putting on a **Christmas play which included the story of Mary and Joseph coming to the inn.** In that class was one little boy who wanted very much to be Joseph. But when the parts were handed out, his biggest rival was given that part, and he was assigned to be the inn keeper instead. **He was really bitter about this.**

So during all the rehearsals he kept plotting in his mind what he might do the night of performance to get even with his rival who was Joseph. Finally, the night of the performance, Mary and Joseph came walking across the stage. They knocked on the door of the inn, and the inn-keeper opened the door and asked them gruffly what they wanted.

Joseph answered, ‘We’d like to have a room for the night.’ Suddenly the inn-keeper threw the door open wide and said, ‘**Great, come on in and I’ll give you the best room in the house.**’”

“For a few seconds poor little Joseph didn’t know what to do, and a long silence ensued. Finally though, thinking quickly on his feet, Joseph looked in past the inn-keeper, first to the left and then to the right and said, ‘**No wife of mine is going to stay in a dump like this. Come on, Mary, let’s go to the barn.**’ And once again the play was back on course.”

After sharing that story, Brett Blair concluded, “**It is obvious that Joseph cared deeply for Mary. He would not have risked his own reputation and protected hers if he did not.**” (Brett Blair, www.eSermons.com. Adapted from a Story by John Simmons.)

Joseph “risked his own reputation and protected” Mary’s, not only because he “cared deeply for Mary” but **because of what our Divine Parent did.** To understand how God moved Joseph to act as he did, we need to take more fully into account the situation in which Joseph found himself. Joseph knew he was not the father of Mary’s soon to be born baby. He also knew that if he did not make a public declaration about the paternity of Mary’s unborn child, he might have been declared guilty of breaking the religious laws of the Jews. Furthermore, Joseph surely struggled with Mary’s story of having been visited by an angel, and then, being pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit, since he did not share that experience with her. **Clearly, Joseph was not at peace with the situation in which he and Mary found themselves.** Because of that situation our Gospel Reading explained, “*Joseph was a man who always did what was right, but he did not want to disgrace Mary publicly; so he made plans to break the engagement privately.*”

The Scripture went on to reveal what God did to enable Joseph to do what he did for Mary, instead of privately breaking off the engagement. Matthew reported, “*While he was thinking about this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary to be your wife. For it is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived. She will have a son, and you will name him Jesus — because he will save his people from their sins.’*”

Now, it may seem Joseph decided to stay with Mary because God ordered him to do so through the angel but, instead, I suggest we recognize God calmed Joseph’s fears through that angel visitation. **Joseph was transformed from a fearful and troubled person into one with “Peaceful Joy”** because he also received an angel announcement of the Good News of what God was doing through the Birth of Mary’s son. The Divine Parent’s words of comfort through the angel led Joseph to experience the peace and courage he needed to fulfill his role in God’s plan of the Birth of the Son of God. Through this and many other Scriptures, **God has provided us and All People the words of comfort and peace, which we need to be at “Peace” and to celebrate – have “Peaceful Joy”, so we can fulfill our calling to be the Almighty’s Messengers to others, so they, too, have “Peaceful Joy”.**

Joseph Pennel Jr. wrote, “the answer to ‘What makes a real Christmas?’ must be found in human history. That is what Joseph did. And, in a very real sense, it was the theology of Joseph which made possible the first Christmas. If Joseph had not cooperated with God’s action in human history, the birth of Jesus would have been quite different.”

Pennel concluded, **“The witness of Joseph calls us to cooperate with God’s work in today’s world. It calls us to respond to God’s action among us.”** (Joseph Pennel Jr., from *Anticipation to Transfiguration*, CSS Publishing Company, p. 34.)

There is a second reason for **“Peaceful Joy”** in our Scriptures in addition to Joseph’s experience of being comforted through his angel visitation. Both Scriptures quoted the same reason for this second **“Peaceful Joy”**. Indeed, the angel of Joseph’s visitation reported a portion of the Reading from Isaiah, **“Now all this happened in order to make come true what the Lord had said through the prophet, ‘A virgin will become pregnant and have a son, and he will be called ‘Immanuel’ (which means, ‘God is with us’).”**

The Staff of Sermons.com reminds us, **“Our God is a good God. He does not desert us in our hour of need. He hears the cries of Israel. He hears the cries of the church. He hears the cries of His children.” “Christmas is about God’s eternal identification with the human dilemma.”**

Sermons.com also shared, **“In Tom Brokaw’s book *The Greatest Generation*, a story is told of Mary Wilson, presently of Dallas, Texas.”** “You would never know by looking at this modest woman that she was the recipient of the Silver Star and she bore the nickname **‘The Angel of Anzio’**. You will recall that when the Allies got bogged down in the boot of Italy during World War II, they attempted a daring breakout by launching an amphibious landing on the Anzio Beach. Unfortunately, the Allies got pinned down at the landing site and came dangerously close to being driven back into the ocean. It looked like another Dunkirk was in the making.

Mary Wilson was the head of the fifty-one army nurses who went ashore at Anzio. Things got so bad that bullets zipped through her tent as she assisted the surgeon in surgery. When the situation continued to deteriorate arrangements were made to get all of the nurses out. But Mary Wilson would have none of it. She refused to leave at the gravest hour. As she related her story years later, she said: **‘How could I possibly leave them. I was a part of them.’** (Staff, www.Sermons.com)

Through the Isaiah Scripture, God promised to be with us – to be part of us! God’s People’s fears are comforted and our minds and spirits are at **“Peace”** with **“Peaceful Joy”** because of the promise of God to be with us always, which was revealed in the Birth of Jesus. The Prophet said, **“the Lord will give you a sign. The young woman is pregnant and is about to give birth to a son, and she will name him Immanuel.”** The name **“Immanuel”** means, **“God is with us”**.

Bill Bouknight wrote, **“The great writer Max Lucado tells about his neighbor who was trying to teach his six-year-old son how to shoot a basketball. They were out in the backyard. The father shot a couple of times, saying, ‘Do it just like that, son; it’s real easy.’ The little boy tried very hard but he couldn’t get the ball ten feet into the air. The little fellow got more and more frustrated. Finally, after hearing his father talk about how easy it was for the tenth time, the boy said, ‘It’s easy for you up there. You don’t know how hard it is from down here.’”**

Bouknight wrote, **“You and I can never say that about God.” “When Jesus became man and lived among us, he walked where we walked, he suffered what we suffer, he was tempted as we are tempted.”** “He was Emmanuel which means **‘God is with us.’**” (Bill Bouknight, *Collected Sermons*, www.Sermons.com)

As we conclude our preparations for our Celebrations of Christmas, it is important for us to remember today’s Readings provided us valuable insight into how God enabled Joseph and all of us, as individuals, to have **“Peaceful Joy”** through the True Messages from God. Remember also, God enabled All People to have **“Peaceful Joy”** together through the fulfillment of the Promises of God Constant Presence in the Birth of God’s Son, Jesus the Christ! Be at **“Peace”** when you face fear and distress because God’s Truth in Jesus Christ has set us free. Yes, may all the world – **“may the nations prove”** - celebrate **“Peaceful Joy”** because God has broken down all which has divided us from our Divine Parent and one another and has demonstrated it by sending God’s Own Dear Son to be the ultimate expression of the **Divine’s Constant Presence and Agape Love**. Amen.