

"THE UN-CHRISTMAS #4: THE 'UNEASY' ANTIDOTE"

(Psalm 80:1-7; Matthew 1:18-25)

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**[PROP NEEDED: ShiftWorship Video]**

[Cornerstone U.M.C.; 12-18-22]

--I--

1. **[BOTH Services (CEB)]** [Advent Candle Reading: Psalm 80:1-7]  
[11am ONLY...] Read Main Scripture Text: Matthew 1:18-25
2. **[WATCH VIDEO "*It's The Most Wonderful Time*"**(from ShiftWorship.com --Time: 2:26)]

A--I won't ask how many of you feel this way each December, but I can tell you that it's sometimes been this at this time of year at least at *my* house!

1--We all tend to get so wrapped up in all our holiday parties, preparations, and activities that it makes our heads spin, leaving many of us sick (literally!) with feelings of anxiety, worry and uneasiness.

2--Sure, it might be "*the most wonderful time of the year*" for a lot of people. But for others (or even some of the *same* ones), it's also the most stressful, anxious and nerve-racking time!

B--And in many cases, it's not just the *time* of year (i.e., the holidays) that make us nervous and anxious, but also what's *happening* in the world around us:...

1--...Mass shootings and gun violence in our schools, local stores, clubs and places of worship, war in Ukraine and other places, rumors of economic recession, political divisions, and much more!

2--There are, you see, many reasons to be fearful and apprehensive about life in today's world, so that what we're in need of is an *antidote* to those things.

C--Well, today as we conclude our Advent series the "UN-Christmas" (exploring some of the unexpected *gifts* God wants to give us), I want to suggest that Christmas (properly understood) offers us that antidote -- that the true meaning of Christmas is, in fact, the *Antidote [to the] Uneasiness* of our world.

--II--

3. We see an example of this in today's Matthew 1:18-25 story of the birth of Jesus, told from the point of view of *Joseph* (versus the more-familiar story from the gospel of Luke, told from *Mary's* perspective).

A--[9am ONLY... Listen to its words: "18 *This is how the birth of Jesus Christ took place. When Mary his mother was engaged to Joseph, before they were married, she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. 19 Joseph her husband was a righteous man. Because he didn't want to humiliate her, he decided to call off their engagement quietly. 20 As he was thinking about this, an angel from the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the child she carries was conceived by the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you will call him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."* 22 Now all of this took place so that what the Lord had spoken through the prophet would be fulfilled: 23 Look! A virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, And they will call him, Emmanuel. (Emmanuel means "God with us.") 24 When Joseph woke up, he did just as an angel from God commanded and took Mary as his wife. 25 But he didn't have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son. Joseph called him Jesus."]

B--Now, we don't really know all that much about Joseph except what we read about him in Jesus' birth narratives.

1--His name only appears fourteen times in the entire Bible, with seven of those being right here in these first two chapters of Matthew. <sup>1</sup>

2--But even from these verses, we know that he was a teenager (probably no more than 14-15 years old <sup>2</sup>), and that he was (in the words of Verse 19) a "just/righteous" man -- meaning that he was faithful in following the teachings and practices of the Jewish Torah, especially the ways of mercy found there.

C--So when he finds out that his fiancé Mary is pregnant, his first thought was probably NOT that it was *GOD'S* child.

D--Instead, Joseph had basically three options:

1--First, following Jewish law, <sup>3</sup> he could accuse her of adultery and demand a public trial, taking a chance that she might be stoned to death if found guilty.

2--Second, he could marry her quickly and hope that people wouldn't count the months too closely when the child came.

3--Or Third, he could quietly issue her a certificate of divorce -- back then, you could "divorce" a fiancé, hopefully sparing both her life and his honor.

4. So, there were a lot of reasons for Joseph to be apprehensive and *uneasy* in the face of Mary's pregnancy.

A--It was, by all outward appearances, *a disgrace* upon both *her* household & *his* -- an affront to God, and a humiliation both to his reputation & character in the community.

B--And though *any* option he chose would be filled with great hardship and risk, being a faithful Jew, it was the *third* option (divorcing Mary quietly) that he was planning.

5. But in the midst of Joseph's fear and un-easiness, an angel appeared to him in a dream.

A--We don't really know if this was the *same* angel (Gabriel) who appeared to Mary in Luke 1, or a *different* angel -- this one's *not* named.

B--But the angel appeared, nevertheless, and began to speak (Verses 20-21), "*Joseph, son of David,*" it said, "***don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the child she carries was conceived by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you will call him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.***"

C--"*Don't be afraid...*" -- In other words, "*Don't be anxious, apprehensive, intimidated, or un-easy about this situation. It's all part of God's strategic plan for the world!*"

D--And just a few verses later (in Verse 24), we're told that Joseph woke from that dream and did just as the angel told him.

--III--

6. Joseph's story, you see, illustrates the power of the *real* Christmas message in dispelling anxiety and un-easiness in our lives.

A--Again, *that's* not something that can be delivered by the watered-down version of Christmas sold in stores, on TV, or on Amazon.com.

B--And neither is it something that can be accomplished through an endless parade of Christmas parties, carols, or festivities (as fun as they are).

C--No. The only thing powerful enough to be an antidote to the fear, apprehension and unrest of *our* world is a message of hope & peace from *outside* our world -- a message from *God*, delivered (in this case) by an angel who says "*don't be afraid / fear not.*"

1--Now, some version of that phrase ("*don't be afraid/fear not*") appears over 150 times throughout the Bible, making it one of most repeated phrases in scripture.

2--Obviously, its repetition is meant to remind us of its importance in life & faith.

7. And most of us already know that, too many times, we allow fear to have great power in our world -- not only in Jesus' day and time, but in our own, as well.

A--If you think about it, most of our world's problems throughout history have been rooted in -- or have been motivated by -- some aspect of fear.

1--Fear, after all, breeds greed, jealousy, prejudice, and hatred, to the point where, in 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt famously said in his First Inaugural Address that "*The only thing we have to fear is fear itself -- nameless, unreasoning, unjustified, terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.*" <sup>4</sup>

2--Doesn't this describe *exactly* what is happening in much of our world today? ... with our racial, political, and theological divisions, the war and violence that's so prevalent, and the general mistrust that people have for one another (and especially for those who think, believe, act, or look different than us)?

B--Well, that's why biblical "*peace*" doesn't necessarily mean a *lack* of fear, but simply a God-given *courage* to face our fears.

1--It's why -- when the angel told Joseph "*Don't be afraid*" -- it wasn't a subtle way to berate Joseph for his anxiety, stress, apprehension, or un-easiness.

2--Instead, he was simply saying, "*Joseph, you need to have courage and faith in God through all of your uncertainty! You need to persevere through the seeming chaos. Don't worry about the risk to your reputation or character, but instead go ahead to take Mary as your wife.*"

C--You see, the angel's message -- both to Joseph *and* to us -- is that God's peace can provide an *inward* calm, assurance, and confidence in the power and presence of God, even in the midst of potential *outward* turmoil and conflict -- ...

D--...A message which says that God's peace doesn't always *eliminate* the problems of this life, but *does* give courage & strength to *face* them & not be *controlled by* them!

--IV--

8. So, what is it that *you* are uneasy, anxious, fearful, or apprehensive about this Christmas?

A--Is it the lack of job? Or a broken relationship with your spouse or other family member? Is it the fear of living alone? Or anxiety about what the future will bring? Or apprehension about your ability to make a difference in your workplace or home?

B--Whatever it is, the story of Joseph teaches us that Christmas offers us the chance to confront our fears and let God give us courage to persevere through them.

C--It reminds us that Christmas (not the kind promoted by pop culture in retail stores, but *real* Christmas) offers us an *antidote* to the fear, anxiety, worry & un-easiness of life --

D--Christmas is literally the "*UnEasy Antidote*," in that *because* of it, every one of us can be UNafraid, UNintimidated, UNapprehensive and UNflinching in the face of the fears and challenges of life.

9. Whatever the fears and challenges of life are that you are facing this holiday, my prayer today is that you would open your heart to receive the angel's words to Joseph -- "*Do not be afraid!*" -- & that you (like him) will find and embrace the courage & peace of God!
10. [PRAY]

**ENDNOTES:**

<sup>1</sup> Joseph is mentioned seven times in Matthew, *none* in Mark, five times in Luke, and twice in John. Ten of the fourteen references appear in Jesus' infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke, and the other four times he's only mentioned in identifying Jesus as the "*son of Joseph.*"

<sup>2</sup> We know this from the fact that Matthew 1:16 describes him as the "*husband of Mary*", and that Mary was "*betrothed*" to Joseph (Matthew 1:18 and Luke 1:27 & 2:5). Jewish betrothals occurred for a young woman around the age of twelve, with the "*husband*" being slightly older, making Joseph probably between 13-15 years old.

<sup>3</sup> Read Deuteronomy 22:23-37.

<sup>4</sup> Franklin Delano Roosevelt's First Inaugural Address as U.S. President, March 4, 1933.