

# Speaking of pregnant virgins, did you hear the one...

*A drama/sermon on Matthew 1:18-25 by Nathan Nettleton, 18 December 2016*

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## Message

In Joseph we see an impressive example of someone with the integrity and courage to embrace God's new directions despite considerable personal cost.

## Explanation

This sermon is intended to be presented as a one-person drama.

## Sermon

G'day. Joe's the name. Joseph Davidson on my birth certificate, but no one other than my mum's called me Joseph for years, so just stick with Joe and we'll get on fine.

Mum's always been in to names and stuff. Family trees that sort of thing. She reckons we're descended from King David himself, which would explain the family name I guess. Doesn't explain how come we're carpenters and we have been as long as anyone can work out. Certainly dad's old man was a chippy and I'm told by the wrinklies that so was his old man and his old man before him. Still, the name's Davidson, not Carpenter, so I suppose there might be something in it.

We might be working folks but I reckon we're a bit more straight down the line than half those toffs in the palace anyway. I might not have their fancy manners but I'm as honest as the day is long and that's the way my parents raised me. "Son, if you want to be able to stand with your head held high in the sight of God," my dad used to say, "you need A-grades for integrity, not for holding your little finger out while holding a tea cup."

So I guess that's me in a nut shell. A bit rough around the edges, but if I say so myself, a man who knows what it is to be a man. A hard day's work for a fair day's pay. Always there for my loved ones – do anything for them. Ready to fight for what's right if it's needed, but knowing that it's spineless to throw your weight round when it's not. Take each day as it comes. Drink to the joys. Roll with the punches. Call a spade a spade. Don't compromise on your God-given principles, but don't get too precious about yourself either. I'm no street corner preacher or nothing, but I'd back God any day, and I reckon if you believe something you've got to live it, aye?

Anyway, you lot want to know about what happened round the time our first little fella was born. It's funny talking about it actually, because people don't usually ask me. They all want to hear how it was for Mary, that's the wife, but as often as not they seem to forget that the whole thing upended my little world too. I guess that's life, aye? But like I said, it doesn't pay to get too precious about yourself.

I couldn't talk about the whole thing at all for a while, you know. It was a hell of a shock for a bloke. You know, one minute your life's going along, all beer and skittles, just like you planned. Working hard and loving it, to do up the house ready to carry the little woman across the threshold and live happily ever after. And the next minute you feel like you've been kicked in the guts by a brewery horse. Your world falls apart and you never saw it coming.

It all happened in the year we were betrothed. You folks don't do the betrothal thing these days. In our day it was not unusual to be engaged from when you were kids, because your oldies arranged it all for you. But then you had a year of betrothal before your wedding. That was when you really got to know each other, but you were still living with your families. Breaking off a betrothal was not like breaking off an engagement. You had to get a divorce to break off a betrothal. You could sort of get away with hopping in the sack together in that year, but it wasn't really the done thing. If you wanted to still hold your head up in the town you didn't. And if you were me you didn't because that was just me. Straight down the line. No shifty business.

I'm not pretending it never crossed my mind or anything. Mary was a pretty little thing and there were a fair few nights after an evening of sharing dreams together about the future that it was fair rampaging through my mind. Especially when she'd gaze at me with those big brown eyes looking all soft with longing, but a man's not a man if he's a slave to his hormones and I wasn't going to have the town folks looking down their noses at my Mary for the sake of a few month's head start. I'm no saint, but I'm a bigger man than that.

I think it was about ten months into our betrothal it happened. Mary hadn't been herself for over a week. A few days too long to be just a bad time of the month, and it was starting to worry me. She was all withdrawn and anxious looking and every time I asked she said it was nothing. I eventually got sick of that and told her that if we were going to be married she was going to have to be able to trust me with whatever it was. I was thinking that maybe she didn't like the colour I'd painted the kitchen or something, but nothing could have prepared me for what it was.

She just burst in to tears and blurted out, "I'm pregnant!" Geez, I can still remember the feeling in my guts. Like someone pulled a plug and all my innards fell into my boots. I felt like I was falling backwards into some horrible black hole.

I don't know how long it was before I said anything, but my head was awash with ugly visions and blurred emotions. Images of Mary uncovering her body for some other bloke. Of his big ugly hands roaming where mine hadn't yet gone. Of sweaty sheets strewn across heaving bodies. Images of me unable to look my mates in the eye. Of people sniggering behind their hands at what a sucker I was – being played for a fool by the town tart and I was the last one to know. I tell you, I still get all knotted up in the stomach just thinking about it. I think I must have punched the door frame. I don't remember doing it, but I still had a nasty bruise across my knuckles when I fixed the frame a week later. And I can tell you that when I build a door frame it takes some serious breaking.

I can't remember what I said first. "How could you do this?" or "Who is the mongrel?" or something like that. I wanted to kill him. It's funny isn't it? Everyone seems to react the same in that situation. You know really that the person who betrayed you is the one standing in front of you, but you want to kill the other one.

Well the first shock was bad enough, but her explanation was like salt in an open wound. She swore black and blue that she'd not been with any other man, that she was still a virgin and that she still wanted only me. Well I'm no obstetrician, but I do know how babies are made, and I was angry enough already without copping this sort of rubbish. She must have seen the black look on my face because she started blubbering desperately about dreams and angels

and God being the father of the baby in her womb. Well that was too much for me, bedding some other bloke was bad enough, but now she was insulting God. This was blasphemy. I think I just screamed at her to get out and she fled.

You could get stoned to death for that kind of blasphemy. You could for adultery too, but by our day they had toned that down a bit and although it wasn't unheard of they only went through with it if the aggrieved husband insisted on it. Well right at that moment I could understand how you might. But for blasphemy you could cop it for sure.

By the next morning after a pretty sleepless night, I had cooled down a bit. Fiery rage was now subsiding under a sort of dull numbness. I had to start thinking about what to do next. I knew I would never demand that she be stoned. She was such a delicate little thing. I know it was what the scriptures said, but the rabbis had become rather more liberal in their application of that one. The usual thing was public exposure. She'd be dragged before the townsfolk and her offence spelt out. She'd be jeered and spat on and although she wouldn't be physically run out of town, she'd probably have to leave because she'd never be welcome anywhere again. They'd turn their backs on her in the market and everything.

By evening I'd gone off that idea too. I'd just divorce her quietly. It'd still be pretty humiliating for me, but I couldn't do the whole public disgrace thing. Two mates to testify to my honesty and a rabbi – that was all it would take to divorce her quietly. Start life over again. I'd get over it. That's what I'd do. Divorce her quietly and get over it. Just work longer hours to stop myself from thinking about it too much. It was decided then. I'd send Mary my decision in the morning.

Well that night was bizarre. I fell asleep OK this time – clearer head after making my decision. But I was dreaming like nothing on earth. And in the middle of the dream suddenly I felt like I was wide awake. I don't suppose I was, but there was this huge bloke standing over me. Looked like nothing you've ever seen. And this overpowering sense of holiness that could consume you like a fire. And he spoke with a voice like a sword, "Joseph Davidson, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. The baby conceived in her womb is from the Holy Spirit. She'll give birth to a son, and you are to name him, to claim him as your own, as a Davidson. Call him Joshua, because he will save his people from their sins."

Joshua! I would never have thought of calling any son of mine Joshua. I mean it's a great honour and all, Joshua being the one who led us into the promised land after Moses kicked the bucket. But they were all learning Greek at school now and that'd mean he'd get Jesus and that always sounded to me more like something you said if you dropped a lump of 4x2 on your toe. Gee-zus!

By morning I'd convinced myself that I was losing my marbles and that the dream was just my subconscious trying to let Mary off the hook somehow. I mean hey, God doesn't do this sort of thing. God expects some standards of decency and righteousness. If God's going to take some new step into the world he's at least going to be consistent with the standards he's always set for us. No child of the Holy Spirit is going to be born in public disgrace is it? God is not going to grab a couple of basically good people, stuff up their lives, strip them of their reputations, expose them to ridicule and then say, "Here, look after my kid," is he?

But I didn't send the message down to Mary's place either. I decided to sleep on it again. And blow me down, exactly the same thing happened the next night. "Joe Davidson, swallow your pride and marry Mary. The baby boy in her womb is from the Holy Spirit. You are to raise him as your own and name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

I don't know why, but somehow this time I knew it was for real. Sometimes you just know these things. The next morning I went down to Mary's place and just held her as she cried. Actually I was pretty teary myself. I just kept saying to her, "I believe you. God spoke to me." And she just kept sobbing her eyes out.

We were married about six weeks later. We never made love till after the little fella was born, which was a bit hard on a bloke once we were actually sharing a bed. But somehow that was what seemed right. And if something seems right, that's what I do. It's just the way I am.

The hardest part, though, was coping with the small town attitudes. All my life I'd been seen as one of the fine upstanding young men. No calendar boy, but honest and reliable and principled. But Mary was looking obviously pregnant by the time we were married and the tongues were wagging. I still reckon I hear older women sneering behind their hands from time to time, "Can't trust a man with no control." Looking down their noses like I was just some worthless big lug with his brain in his underpants. And young blokes with a couple of beers under the belt, elbowing me in the ribs and leering, "So what was she like then? A bit of alright, aye? I might put it on my girl before we're married!"

Makes me sick. Still churns my guts. But I can't exactly say, "It wasn't me mate, it was the Holy Spirit," can I? "Yeah right. And I suppose little Jamie was conceived by the tooth fairy, aye?!"

I even had a few contracts that got cancelled. People reckoned I was a bad example to their sons and a danger to their daughters, and they didn't want me working on their houses. It wasn't an easy time, but we stuck together and got through it OK I guess.

Anyway, if there's one thing I learned from all this it's that you can't expect God to just keep on doing the same old things he's always done. Because the world changes, you see. And sometimes when the changes are big, God heads off on a new angle and if you agree to go with him, then you're going to have people looking down their noses at you and reckoning that you're a bad example to their kids and stuff like that. Don't go making the mistake I made of thinking that because you know what God's been expecting of us in the past you can just go on doing the same things and everything will be sweet. And definitely don't go thinking that if you're being faithful to God people will stand back and admire you for it and commend you as one of the fine upstanding pillars of the community. Sometimes when you do stuff God's way, there's just no way of explaining it that folks are going to understand. There might be a few who go with you, but most will think you've lost the plot. You've just got to cop it sweet, roll with the punches, and keep reminding yourself, "God is with us. God is with us. God is with us."

Anyway, I reckon I've said more than enough. I'll get out of your way now. I'll see y's later.