

“The Wait is Over”
December 18, 2016
Fourth Sunday in Advent
Text Matthew 1:18-25

Island Heights UMC, Island Heights, NJ

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly.

But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.”

When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

The wait is over. The time has arrived. We are in the extraordinary week that leads up to Christmas Day. We have just heard and seen the story of the ages from our youngest. The story we wait all year to hear again; and the time is now! In just a few more days Christmas Eve will come and we will celebrate with candlelight and “Silent Night.” And then, like the miracle it always is, Christmas day will come. Christmas is next Sunday! Can you believe it? We can scarcely take it in. The wait is over.

Waiting. It’s never easy. It causes anxiety. What a challenging wait it was for Mary and Joseph for Jesus to arrive. And in the story of the Christmas pageant we just watched, while waiting, Mary and Joseph hear from angels. Mary’s fear is calmed with the message from the angel Gabriel that God is with her and that she would conceive a child by the Holy Spirit and he would be the Son of God. Then, in a disturbing but life changing dream, Joseph encounters an angel and is told to take Mary as his wife, even though she is pregnant, and that, yes, she is going to have a child, and that it will be Emmanuel, which means “God is with us;” and that Joseph is to name the child Yeshua, or the more familiar Greek name Jesus, which means “God saves.”

A few weeks ago we heard that scripture from the Gospel of Matthew regarding this. It bears repeating today. Matthew writes,

An angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream and says, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

All this is taking place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us."

When Joseph awakes from sleep, he does as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he takes her as his wife, but has no marital relations with her until she delivers a son; and he names him Jesus.

Joseph names him; it's what a father does. He may waited all his life to be a father, but now the wait is over. Joseph is a father; and with a baby in a manger, it's just not the way he thought it was going to happen.

The wait is over. It's the fulfillment of ancient prophecy; the long awaited Messiah has come. There is now a savior who saves us from our sins. It's just not the way we thought it was going to happen.

On the first Sunday in Advent we sang, "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus." Through Advent we have been waiting. Just as for so long the world has been waiting for the coming of the Savior. But with the announcement of the Angels we hear the wait is over. We go to the nativity, and when we look into the manger we see the wait is over. We see the look on Joseph's and Mary's faces and we know the wait is over. It has happened. He is born.

We wait for many things. Sometimes we wait for years for our lives to improve, and one day the wait is over, and things begin to turn around. Sometimes we pray for years for loved ones to recover from addictions, and one day God makes a move and the wait is over. Sometimes we lift up in constant, fervant prayer those close to us who suffer from illness, and one day the wait is over. And then there are the deeper, more intense experiences of life, the places where you ask the hard questions that go unanswered for a long time; existential questions about the meaning of life, and what our purpose in this life may be. These are seemingly endless periods of darkness and confusion that St. John of the Cross would call the *long, dark night of the soul*. That's the journey that takes us down and puts us to the test. It's the time in our life we wonder if we will make it out alive. But then, one day, the light begins to dawn, and the answers start to come, and the wait is finally over, and we make it through to the other side.

How dark and cold the world must have been before the birth of Jesus. How lonely and incomplete. But then, on one mysterious night, this baby is born, this one named Jesus, and the wait is over.

What is it you are waiting for? How long have you been waiting? What part of your life is God moving into to complete the story? The good news is that in Jesus the Christ, God is completing the stories of people's lives. This is why we look to the manger every year to see if the baby is there yet, because the manger is where our deepest need is met with its only answer. The time has come; there is only one thing left to do. So, listen to the angels. Do not miss it. Go to the manger and see. The wait is over. God is with us. Amen.