

## The Reverend Marjo Anderson

1-Narrative Lectionary 16  
Matthew 1:18-25; Psalm 23:1-4

23 December 2018  
Salem, Bridgeport

*(Later this morning we will see and hear “Breath of Heaven”,  
an artistic representation of what Mary thought and felt about her unintended pregnancy,  
so it seemed only fair to give some attention to Joseph’s thoughts and feelings!*

*There are times in life when bad things happen to us, things that we have no control over,  
and we are left totally devastated, feeling lost and alone.*

*No matter how we feel, however,  
the truth of the gospel is that we are never alone, as Joseph eventually discovered.*

*Let me tell you the first part of a story,  
then we’ll read the Gospel,  
and then I’ll tell you the end.)*

### “Joseph”

His heart felt like it had been ripped in two,  
and his stomach like a driving fist had knocked every last bit of breath from his body.  
Inside, his spirit had already disintegrated into a crumpled heap, and if he didn’t get home soon  
his knees would give way and his body might join his crumpled spirit in a heap on the ground.  
That thought provided enough momentum  
to turn his body around and start his feet moving as if of their own accord.

How could she have done such a thing? he wondered for the 100<sup>th</sup> time in the last 10 minutes.  
How could she, Mary, of all people, have done such a thing?  
From the time she had been a child,  
she had seemed more innocent, more perfect, more beautiful, than any other he had known –  
so innocent and so perfect and so beautiful, in fact,  
that it had never occurred to him that she could one day grow up and get married,  
least of all to him.

After all, what was he? an ordinary man to say the least.  
Yes, he came from a royal lineage. He was of the house of David.  
From this line someday would come the Messiah, the Savior,  
the new king who would return Israel to her former glory.  
But that was his only claim to fame – and it had nothing to do with him personally.

His own life had not been easy.

It had started out wonderfully, but no sooner had he reached the age when most of his friends were about to get married and embark on their careers, tragedy had struck.

When he was 15,  
his mother, who after his birth had never managed to carry another child to full term,  
had finally born him a sister,  
but his mother had died in childbirth and the child had died just 2 days later.

Soon after that his dad got injured, and the infected injury turned into illness,  
and the illness prevented him from working.

Joseph had done his best to care for his father and to keep the business running,  
but it hadn't been easy.

In the end his father had died, leaving Joseph nothing but the small house,  
the remains of a carpentry business, and a pile of debts that took Joseph years to pay off.

By the time he had gotten out from under his debt load and gotten the business back on its feet,  
he had become old - 32 years – and had long since given up on the dream of marriage,  
resigning himself to his lonely existence of a solitary, working man.

And then came that life-changing day when Mary's father had approached him  
and asked him if he would be interested in taking Mary as his wife!

He had been so shocked he had been speechless  
and it had taken him some time to see himself the way Mary's father did –  
as a successful businessman, as a faithful Jew,  
as the kind of solid, stable, loving man who would make a good husband for his daughter.

But the idea took hold until he could almost picture it,  
and then he began to absolutely delight in it.

And so he had told Mary's father, "Yes. If she will have me, I will marry her".

He could still remember Mary's father going out  
and bringing Mary back into the room with him  
and asking her right there in front of Joseph,  
"So, what would you think, my daughter, of having Joseph as your husband?"

And that sweet girl had looked up at him, smiling shyly,  
and said with what could only be love shining in her eyes,  
"Papa, you know he's the only man I want to marry!"

And at that Joseph's heart took flight!

He had been a new man! He had felt like a young man!

He had felt like he could do anything in the entire world!

He had spent the last year getting to know her, and getting to know exactly what she wanted,  
and fixing up their home to be absolutely perfect.

She had turned his drab, dull world into a sparkling rainbow.

And today every last bit of color had gone out and his world had collapsed.  
She had sent word for him to meet her at their favorite spot by the lake  
where they always met for their walks.  
He'd come propelled by joy at their upcoming wedding,  
but it was a different Mary who met him there that day – a serious, somber, older Mary.  
She had said she had something to tell him,  
something that might make him change his mind about her,  
and when he had tried to argue she had stopped him and told him he must listen.

All of the sudden his world had turned dark.  
It was as if a cloud had covered up the sun.  
Oh, no wonder it was dark.  
His feet had carried him home and into the darkness of the house.  
He dropped onto the edge of his mattress, and buried his head in his hands.

She was pregnant.  
His innocent, beautiful, lovely fiancé was pregnant and it wasn't by him.  
All of his dreams, all of his hopes, all of his desires, had come to an end.  
It had all been for naught.  
He wasn't angry.  
He didn't have the energy to be angry.  
Depression and despair would come, he knew,  
but all he felt now was a profound loneliness, an utter emptiness,  
and a complete hollowness in his soul.  
He made his decision.  
He would divorce her quietly.  
And with that decided, he curled up in a fetal position and wept until sleep claimed him.

**GOSPEL: Matthew 1:18-25**

*The Holy Gospel, according to St. Matthew!*

**Glory to you, O God!**

<sup>18</sup> *This is how the birth of Jesus came about. When Jesus' mother, Mary, was engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Joseph, her husband, an upright person unwilling to disgrace her, decided to dismiss her quietly. <sup>20</sup> This was Joseph's intention when suddenly the angel of God appeared in a dream and said, "Joseph, heir to the House of David, don't be afraid to wed Mary; it is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived this child. <sup>21</sup> She is to have a son, and you are to name him Jesus – 'Salvation' – because he will save the people from their sins." <sup>22</sup> All this happened to fulfill what God has said through the prophet:*

<sup>23</sup> *"The virgin will be with child and give birth, and the child will be named Immanuel" – a name that means "God is with us". <sup>24</sup> When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of God had directed. <sup>25</sup> He did not have intercourse with her until she had given birth; she had a son, and they named him Jesus.*

*The Gospel of the Lord!*

**Praise to you, O Christ!**

His eyes opened and he was wide awake –  
more awake than he had thought it possible to be!

That dream! It had been so REAL!  
Yes, it had not only felt real, it was real!

There was not one shred of doubt in his mind.  
OK, maybe a small shred, but he had no use for doubt.

That dream had been God's gift to him. He knew that.  
That dream had given him back his hope and his faith and his joy.

He could put his faith in the dream.  
He WOULD put his faith in the dream.

The child Mary was carrying was a child of God,  
and Mary, being of the same tribe as Joseph, tracing her lineage from David, too,  
could also bring forth the promised Messiah, the Savior,  
the one he had been told to name "Jesus".

He would go tell Mary right away.

He would run.

In fact, his feet were already running, carrying him out the door and down the road.

The worst day of his life had been redeemed.

It was as if yesterday the beautiful jar of his dreams had been smashed into many pieces,  
but today he had woken to find it repaired.

The cracks were still there,  
but they had been filled with gold and now possessed a beauty all their own.

Life was not always easy. He knew that.

But the angel of his dreams had reminded him that no matter how smashed one's life,  
the master potter can always put it back together.

For even when life is at its very worst, there is one thing that will always be true:  
God is with us.

Whether we know it or not, God is with us.

And there she was, the love of his life, walking all alone.

"Mary!" he called. "Mary!" he called again as he swept her up in his arms.

"I love you, Mary", he said, "and everything is going to be alright. God is with us!" **Amen**