

King of Glory Lutheran
Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry
December 20-21, 2025
Year A: Advent 4: Matthew 1:18-25
Courageous Love Can't Wait

¹⁸ 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 pregnant from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

²³ "Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." ²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife ²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.

God inspires us to live with courageous love and follow God's ways, even when that comes at a cost to our own lives.

Elise Seyfried Was it the director of spiritual formation At a suburban Philadelphia LCA church. She LED mission trips organized vacation Bible school, confirmation classes and Bible studies. What the congregation didn't know was that she was experiencing wild mood swings of mania and then deep depression. When Elise was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, she still tried to hide the diagnosis. She feared the stigma of mental illness even within a community that ought to have been her strength. Ultimately, she wrote her church a letter, sharing what had been happening. They responded with overwhelming love and support; many also speaking out for the first time about their own struggles.

Finally, she co-produced a live show for a organization called This is my Brave. This is My Brave recruits ordinary people to tell their stories of mental illness. But her congregation came through for her. It was a huge crowd, and she stepped to the mic and shared. That took courage.ⁱ

The root of the word courage is *cor*; The Latin word for heart. Courage originally meant 'to speak one's mind by telling all one's heart.' That's what Elise did with her congregation. It is what Mary did when she told Joseph she was pregnant with God's Son. It is what you and I do when we simply have to share our feelings, and experiences with our loved ones. Sometimes we don't do it until the crock-pot has begun to boil over. Yet we carry our heart to our partner or friend, like a baby bird needing protection; and with courage and vulnerability, we begin to speak.

Brene Brown writes that, 'Ordinary courage is about putting our vulnerability on the line. In today's world, that's pretty extraordinary.'ⁱⁱ

Joseph, Mary's betrothed, was a good guy. He was righteousness: loving God and loving Mary. This led him to decide to divorce her without fanfare; lest she be hurt further.

But God had other plans. In Joseph's story, we have evidence that God is always at work, even if don't know it or can see it. Unbeknownst to Joseph, Mary is pregnant through the Holy Spirit. There wasn't another earthly father, only God the Father. God's angel, showed Joseph in a dream the truth of the matter, instructing him to proceed with the marriage.

Now in an honor/shame culture, where marriages were arranged, to go against societal norms must have taken some hutzpa! Surely, Joseph knew he would be talked about behind his back. People would never understand the truth, even if he did tell them. Yet, Joseph was faithful to God. He loved Mary. So he took courageous action and walked the road God put before him.

Ordinary courage, being courageous through vulnerability.

Just to be clear, the stakes were high! According to Deuteronomic Law, Mary could have been stoned to death so that 'the evil would be purged from them.' For Joseph to depend on his dream's truth was quite extraordinary. The next morning, you and I might wonder if the dream was from indigestion. Not Joseph. He heard it from God and followed right away.

Joseph did as God commanded and named the child Jesus, meaning 'save us.' It was a common name of the time as the Jewish people were indeed longing to be saved by God. Yet, by naming the child, Joseph is adopting Jesus as his own son. He is inserting Jesus in King David's lineage from whom a Savior would come.

Surely, Joseph had to wonder at times, “Do I spank the Son of God?” “Do I tell the Son of God to do this and this, when certainly God can do as God pleases?” Oh, the daily courage of raising any child, let alone this One named Jesus.

Are you and I like Joseph? Are we willing to follow God’s laws and traditions even when they might bring us confusion, or harm or inflict a cost to our own lives?

Certainly, if we are celebrating Christmas – as Christians – that is counter cultural. Our witness comes in the Christmas cards we choose, the gifts we buy or don’t buy, or as we head to church on Christmas Eve.

And if we could follow Joseph’s example, where else do we “stick our necks out” as it were? Do we bow our heads in prayer in public restaurants? Do we speak up for those who have no voice? When we disagree with things in our community, do we allow someone else to take action, thinking, oh well, they don’t need me. Or for the love of God and neighbor, do we take courageous action?

Listen to another courageous story coming from love of God. Exodus, Chapter 1 (15-21). The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, “When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.” The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, “Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?”

The midwives answered Pharaoh, “Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive.”

So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. ²¹ And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.

Shiphrah and Puah disobeyed the king...the ruling power...to do what they knew was right in God’s eyes. God protected them and blessed them because of it. Ordinary courage for the love of God, which is extraordinary.

We might not be called by God to go up against any systems or organizations. But I know your courage. And so does the Lord.

You have courageous love raising your children and grandchildren.
Courageous love sticking with your wedding vows when others call it quits.
Courageous love fighting disease and illness.
Courageous love grieving losses.
Courageous love writing letters of support or protest.
Courageous love in honesty.
Courageous love in loving yourself.
Courageous love, loving others, all of God's people.
Courageous love in God each and every day.

Thanks be to God for Joseph's example...and his courageous love.
Amen.

~~The Roar of the Silent Cub~~

ⁱ <https://www.livinglutheran.org/voices-of-faith/this-is-my-brave/>

ⁱⁱ http://www.bhevolution.org/public/gifts_of_imperfection.page