

St. Mark's Episcopal Church  
The Reverend Rick Veit  
121816

### Marriage in Heaven

On their way to get married, a young couple is involved in a fatal car accident. They find themselves sitting outside the Pearly Gates waiting for St. Peter to process them into Heaven.

While waiting, they start to wonder: Could they still get married in Heaven? When St. Peter shows up, they immediately ask him.

He replies, "I don't know. This is the first time anyone has asked. Let me go find out." He leaves. And they wait and wait.

Six months pass, and St. Peter finally returns, looking somewhat bedraggled. He says, "Yes, you *can* get married in Heaven."

The couple asks, "Well, as we have spent so much time together waiting for your answer, we were just wondering that if things didn't work out, is there a possibility that we could get a divorce in Heaven?"

St. Peter answers, "It took me six months to find a priest up here - how long do you think it will take me to find a lawyer?"

Priests and Lawyers – we never get a break, do we? Getting into heaven – being saved, not being saved.

People of the Old Testament, it seems they either did things right and were in God's favor, heaven-bound, or they did things wrong and were wiped out, possibly to the place that is Sheol, or Hell.

Clearly, in the Psalms, restoration is needed for the people. Restoration has always been needed..for them, for us. Just like today, we are all in need of saving. God was angered at the unfaithfulness of his people, despite their prayers. God had "fed them with the bread of tears;...the bowl of tears to drink." (The vine is being cut. It is being burned with fire. God is rebuking his people, and they will perish.) ("We want to call upon you Lord. We will never turn away. Restore us, O God of hosts; show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.")

The Old Testament: A faithful God, but a furious God. --You better do what is right, or else. (Help. Save us God!) These are people, just like us, who get it sometimes and who don't get it sometimes.

In Isaiah, the Lord is speaking to King Ahaz of Judah. He says, ("Ask me for a sign." And King Ahaz says, "I will not, God. I will not put you to the test.")

--- (Wait, King Ahaz, haven't you heard what happens when you don't follow God? Bad things happen. Maybe you don't get to go to heaven. Maybe you get wiped out. God just told you to do something. God spoke to you directly, and you heard it. The message was clear. Do it.) The prophet Isaiah says, ("Do not try the patience of my God. Don't do it, Ahaz.).

Then Isaiah begins to talk about a sign that God will give. ("There will be a young woman with child. It will be a boy, and she shall name him Immanuel – 'God is with us'). (It is going to get ugly soon. Foreign invaders, Assyria, will attack. Aram and Israel will be wiped out. There are consequences that will occur, but our God is with us!") Of course, this was foreshadowing what would take place many years later, over 700 years later. God would send a Messiah, a Savior.

In the past weeks of Advent, we have learned that God will send back the Messiah a second time, for us. It would be in the end times. It will be bad, but Jesus will come back for those who are left. We also read from the Bible about John who was preparing the way for the original coming, the first coming of Jesus. John was preparing the way, getting people ready for the Messiah. We learned that, while in prison, John was affirmed that the Messiah, the Savior was alive and walking on the earth, performing miracles, saving people.

This week, the fourth Sunday of Advent, we backtrack. We get the story of the birth of Jesus from Matthew's perspective. Matthew is one of the four gospel accounts of Jesus' life.

Mary was engaged to Joseph. She got pregnant, but it wasn't his child. This one came directly from the Holy Spirit. Joseph didn't want to disgrace Mary and was going to separate from her quietly. But then, in a dream, an angel of the Lord appears to him and says, "Joseph, son of David."

We are reminded of the lineage from which the Savior will come. The prophets had said hundreds of years earlier that the Savior will come from the house of David. Matthew reminds us of this.

"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid." "Do not be afraid (DAVID)." (It is going to be okay. Do *not* fear.)

This is a slightly different message than what we heard from God earlier. God almost seemed vengeful in past years. Now we seem to have a caring God. -- Can't you just hear Him?

(I get it Joseph. This will seem very shameful, not to mention that people will think that Mary slept with another man. The baby is from the Holy Spirit though. It is. It is a gift to Mary and a gift to you, and a gift to the whole world. And Mary will give birth. It will be a son. Call him Jesus.)

Jesus is the Greek form of the name Joshua, which means "the Lord saves."

(The angel instructs them, "Call him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins). God will save his people. God will forgive them, not wipe them out. They messed up. But God still

loves them and wants them. And God wants them for eternity. This is a radical shift from the God who wanted to destroy his people when they were unfaithful, saving only the good ones.

Then, Joseph woke up from the dream. God had spoken, this forgiving God. And Joseph did as the angel had commanded him. He and Mary were married. She had a son, and they named him Jesus, Joshua, God saves.

So, who gets into heaven and who doesn't? Yes, God saves priests and lawyers, when they are good, and especially when they are not so good. God saves liars and thieves, successful people and failures. God saves men and women, children and adults. God saves people of all races and colors. He saves straight and gay people, bisexual and transgendered folks. He saves refugees and citizens. God does not discriminate when dealing with care and love and hope and saving. God sent the Savior to save his people, his whole family. And the world is God's family.

As we approach Christmas, approach the reading of Christ's birth from Luke's perspective on Christmas Eve, (yes, the one from Charlie Brown Christmas), as we prepare and anticipate Christmas, focus on the promise of God in the Savior. Simplify your life with the simplicity of Jesus as your center. Make Jesus the center of everything you do. When you speak, pray for Jesus to speak through you. When you act, may your acts be Jesus-focused. When you think, think Jesus. Live in the hope of the Savior.

Our God saves, and it is because of Jesus that we can all be with God in Heaven. But we need not wait for the future. The future is now. According to Matthew, Heaven begins at this time, on earth, in our lives. The Savior is in us, God with us – just as Isaiah had heard 700 years before the original time of Christ.

What is God saying to you through the Savior? And are you willing to follow?

Be ready, you, you priests and lawyers and homemakers and accountants and engineers and retirees, you, everyone.