

Week 3 — Get Up and Go: Risky Faith and Costly Obedience

Core Reading: Matthew 1:18–25 — The angel and Joseph

Optional Readings: Luke 1:39–45; Exodus 3:1–12; Philippians 2:5–11

Reflection

Joseph does not speak a single word in Matthew's Gospel, yet his obedience shapes the beginning of the story of Jesus. When we meet him, he is already in the middle of a personal crisis. His fiancée Mary is pregnant, and Joseph must decide how to respond.

He is described as "a righteous man." That means he is trying to do the right thing. His initial plan, to dismiss Mary quietly, suggests compassion as well as integrity. He is not seeking revenge or public shame, but is simply attempting to act justly within painful circumstances. So it is into that already-formed decision that the angel speaks.

"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife..."

Again we find the messenger of God meeting humanity in their emotions. Here the angel acknowledges and names Joseph's fear, before going on to reveal that what appears scandalous is, in fact, sacred. The child is "from the Holy Spirit." The story Joseph thinks he understands is larger than he can see.

Despite this, there is still a potential cost for Joseph here. If he does indeed take Mary as his wife, he faces misunderstanding. He risks reputation and security. A messenger from God may have alleviated his sense of betrayal, but the angel does not promise an easier path. Instead, the angel gives Joseph a deeper understanding and a clear step forward.

"Take Mary as your wife."

"You are to name him Jesus."

Obedience, in this moment, is not abstract, but is concrete and public. Joseph must align his actions with what he has heard in this night-time visitation. And to his credit, that is exactly what he does: "When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him." There is no hesitation (that we know of!). Joseph gets up and steps into a future he did not choose.

Faith often looks similar to that. It is not loud. It is not dramatic. It is the decision to move forward even when questions remain. Faith may involve surrendering control, seeing past misunderstandings, or being willing to give up a version of our life that we have carefully constructed.

While a visitation from an angel is never humdrum, this particular encounter is very quiet. The angel gives God's message in a dream, in the middle of the night, while everyone is asleep. When Joseph wakes in the morning, nothing outward has changed. The circumstances are the same, and yet everything is different because Joseph has chosen to trust what he heard.

Angels often appear at precisely this threshold: the quiet space between deliberation and decision. They do not force obedience. They illuminate it. These messengers of God give just enough light for a step to be taken. Joseph still has to get up and make a choice. He still has to act, and go forward in faith and courage. But it is courage shaped by revelation.

In our own lives, moments of obedience rarely feel dramatic. They often look like a conversation we finally have, a responsibility we accept, a commitment we keep, a risk we take quietly. The question is not always whether we can see the whole path ahead, but whether we have heard enough to take the next faithful step.

Perhaps part of our Lenten attentiveness is listening for those clarifying moments, when fear is named, when our perspective shifts, when something within us settles into resolve. The angel speaks. Joseph rises. And God's story moves forward.

Discussion Questions

- 1. When have you been called to step into a difficult or risky situation?**
- 2. How does the angel's message change Joseph's understanding of his situation?**
- 3. What kinds of cost might Joseph have been facing in choosing obedience?**
- 4. What fears might hold us back from following God's call?**
- 5. Have you experienced a moment when new insight changed how you responded to something difficult?**

Closing Prayer

**God who calls us forward,
When we are weighing difficult choices,
speak clarity into our uncertainty.
Name our fears and steady our hearts.
Give us courage to act with integrity,
even when obedience feels costly.
May we rise, like Joseph,
and trust you with what unfolds next.
Amen.**