

December 23, 2012  
*It's a Wonderful Life*

Trust It!  
Matthew 1:18-25

**Opening words:**

During this season of Advent I have been using the classic Christmas movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*, as a backdrop for my sermon series. The question is not if you have seen the movie. The question is how many times you have seen the movie? Frank Capra released it in 1946. However, it speaks to ever generation because everyone can relate to Jimmy Stewart's character, George Bailey. How many of your dreams have been crushed by responsibilities? This morning I want to look at the scene that includes George and Mary's wedding. They are just about to leave on their honeymoon when they pass the Bailey Building and Loan. There is a crowd trying to get in and George stops to deal with the crisis. You know the scene. May God give you ears to hear this morning's Gospel lesson, Matthew 1:18-25. Let me call this message *It's a Wonderful Life: Trust It!*

---

**Matthew 1:18-25**

18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. 19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. 20 But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). 24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25 But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

---

How many times have you seen the movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*? Then, you know the storyline. George Bailey is a young man with big dreams. He wants to see the world. However, he has a hard time getting out of Bedford Falls. He falls in love and marries a local girl, Mary. Everyone is happy. They do not know they picked the worst possible wedding day, October 29, 1929. It was remembered as "Black Tuesday." The stock markets were losing money and everyone was panicking. There were runs on every financial institution, including the Bailey Building and Loan. George used his honeymoon money to save the family business. Mary trusts George because he knows what is best. Does any of this sound familiar? I told you to watch the movie. This is my question for you this morning.

What kind of relationship do you have with God? Earlier this week I punched that question into the search engine. It took me to "Yahoo Answers" and got many wide ranging answers. I didn't read them all but I did find people fall into three different camps. The first camp is "angry with God". Do you know anyone who is angry with God? This is one example:

**Do you mean the god that said he would return and didn't? Or the one who killed almost everyone on Earth because he couldn't control them? Or the one that terrorists pray to as they suicide bomb themselves and innocent people?**

The second camp tries to ignore the existence of God. For them, a divine being is nothing more than a fable for the uneducated or unenlightened. Do you know anyone who tries to ignore God? This is one example:

**When I was a kid I talked to an imaginary friend, but when I grow up, I forgot about him. I am now an atheist.**

The third camp wants God to be part of their lives. This is my camp and I hope this is your camp. This is one example:

**He is my Lord & Savior, & lives in my heart. I choose to give my life to Him!**

What kind of relationship do you have with God? This is a more probing question.

What kind of relationship does God want to have with you? This is the fourth Sunday of Advent and the text gives us that answer. Let us look at those words. Today, you heard Matthew's version of the birth of Christ. His report is different from Luke and John. Matthew does not mention the shepherds. He is only concerned with Mary and Joseph. He tells us about Joseph's dream. He, like Mary, would have a part in God plan for the salvation of the world. We remember him as one of the hand tools of God. Like Mary, God would place him into an incredibly difficult situation. He would be forced to disgrace his reputation and be forced to raise someone else's child. Yet, that child was the long awaited Messiah. Jesus was the incarnation of God. That theological point reveals to us the kind of relationship God wants with us.

There is no easy way to say it. God wants a complex relationship with us. First, God wants to have a **human relationship** with us. In other words, God wants to know you personally. Second, God wants to have a **holy relationship** with us. In other words, God wants to be the top priority in your life. Third and finally, God wants to have a **holistic relationship** with us. In other words, God wants to affect the way you live daily. So if you are ready to begin say, "**Amen!**"

### **Human Relationship**

Napoleon is considered one of the great figures in the history of Western Civilization. He knew he was dependent on his troops for any success. He motivated them in many ways. Obviously, he could not personally know each soldier in his vast army, so he devised a simple plan. Before visiting a regiment he would call the colonel aside and ask

for the name of a soldier who had served well in previous campaigns, but who had not been given the credit he deserved. The colonel would indicate such a man. Napoleon would then learn everything about him, where he was born, the names of his family, his exploits in battle, etc. Later, upon passing this man while reviewing the troops, and at a signal from the colonel, Napoleon would stop, single out the man, greet him warmly, ask about his family, compliment him on his bravery and loyalty, reminisce about old campaigns, then pin a medal on the grateful soldier. The gesture worked. After the review, the other soldiers would remark, "You see, he knows us--he remembers. He knows our families. He knows we have served." That is all part of the Christmas message.

What kind of relationship does God want to have with you? First, God wants to have a human relationship with you. That is part of the miracle of Christmas. The God of the universe left the perfection of heaven to enter this imperfect world. God didn't just send the annual Christmas card to say he was thinking of us. There are no tricks. God knows you personally. God came into this world to become one of us. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

### **Holy Relationship**

One of the great hymns of the season is *We Three Kings*. It was written in the year 1857 by Rev. John Henry Hopkins. Many churches sing it during Advent or Christmastide. That is not exactly correct. It is really a hymn for the next season of the Christian calendar, Epiphany. That word means manifestation. It is during that season we celebrate the divine truth that Jesus came for all people, not just the Jews. The three kings in the song symbolize the Gentile world that come to worship Jesus. Musically it is a great song but Biblically it has some problems. Two things always jump out at me. First, the Bible does not call them kings. The Bible calls them Magi. Kings are interested in worldly things. Magi are interested in spiritual things. Second, the Bible does not tell us there were three. The Bible only says there were three gifts, gold, incense and myrrh. (We are going to look at the meaning of those gifts on Epiphany Sunday, January 6) The Bible actually says they came about two years after the birth of Jesus. Herod ordered the death of baby boys two years old and younger. With all the flaws that come along with the song I must admit something. I love it. Matthew 2:11 says, *"On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him."* When was the last time you humbled yourself and worshipped God?

What kind of relationship does God want to have with you? Second, God wants to have a holy relationship with you. In other words, God wants to be respected. I have never met a parent who didn't want to be respected. How much time do you spend complaining about God? How much time do you spend questioning God? How much time do you spend demanding something from God? How much time do you spend worshipping God? God wants a holy relationship with you. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

## **Holistic Relationship**

D. L. Moody once said, *"A holy life will make the deepest impression. Lighthouses blow no horns, they just shine."* That is the story of the Christian life. What difference has God made in your life? I put that question into my search engine and it took me to "Yahoo! Answers." Someone self-named "Dead Man Chill" answered:

**Which One? Actually none of them have....in any way!**

That is the wrong answer. Christianity was never designed to be a Sunday morning experience. Christianity was designed to be a life altering experience. The faith should be altering every corner of your life. Is Jesus reshaping your attitudes or your opinions? Is Jesus reshaping your agenda? Is Jesus reshaping the way you handle your money and treat your neighbors? If God isn't altering the way you live then we are going to start calling you Dead man Chill!

What kind of relationship does God want to have with you? Third and finally, God wants to have a holistic relationship with you. In other words, God wants to see the difference He has had in your life. How is Jesus altering your life? If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**

Mary Bailey was a good wife. She loved George and their children. She cooked the meals and worked on the house. She accepted his family and came to George's rescue. This is the best: you never saw her spending money! They had the perfect relationship. Are all the relationships in your life perfect? How is your relationship with God? Abraham Lincoln once said, *"My concern is not whether God is on our side; my greatest concern is to be on God's side, for God is always right."* And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**