

Mary and Joseph – Rob Nicholls

Sermon Summary

This sermon kicks off Advent by diving into the story of Mary and Joseph and the birth of Jesus. I wanted to give you some historical context first—Advent originally started 40 days before Christmas back in the 5th century, kind of like Lent with fasting and prayer. The Catholic Church later shortened it to the four weeks we know today. But here's the thing: while it started as reflection on Jesus's journey toward baptism, it evolved into celebrating both his first coming and looking forward to his second coming. That's where we are today—celebrating the hope, peace, joy, and love of Christ's arrival and return.

Now let's talk about the real drama of the nativity story. Picture this: Mary gets visited by the Angel Gabriel and told she's going to have a baby—but she's engaged to Joseph and they haven't, you know, consummated anything yet. Imagine that conversation! "Joseph, sweetheart, I got something to tell you." Poor guy probably wasn't thinking "this is a God moment"—he was likely thinking his fiancée had been a bit naughty. Matthew tells us Joseph actually considered divorcing her quietly, but then an angel appeared to him in a dream and convinced him to stay. Through tremendous faith and obedience, both Mary and Joseph accepted this incredible challenge. And here's a marriage counselor's takeaway: it's never too late to create a fresh start.

Finally, let's rethink what we picture when we imagine Jesus's birth. Yeah, we all see that manger scene in our minds—the stable, the barnyard, Mary alone with Joseph scrambling for help. But here's some food for thought: the Greek word Luke uses isn't really "inn" like a hotel—it's more like "guest room." Joseph was a descendant of David returning to Bethlehem, so he would've had some status. They probably stayed in a simple private home where animals were brought inside at night to keep warm, and the manger was just a feeding trough right next to the living space. Mary likely had help from the women of the village—it would've been shameful for them not to help a young mother. This was a story of contrasts: the greatest message from heaven delivered to the most humble shepherds, a king born not in a palace but in the simplest circumstances, showing that Jesus came for all of us—Jewish and Gentile alike.

Discussion Questions

1. **What does Joseph's response to Mary's pregnancy teach us about faith and obedience, especially when God's plans don't make sense to us?** (Reference: Matthew 1:18-25, where Joseph considers divorcing Mary but obeys the angel's message in his dream)
2. **Why do you think God chose to announce Jesus's birth to shepherds—the lowest class in society—rather than to religious leaders or nobility?** (Reference: Luke 2:8-12, where the angel appears to shepherds in the fields)
3. **Jesus was born in the most humble circumstances, yet he was the King of Kings. How does this turn our ideas about greatness and power upside down?** (Reference: Luke 2:7 describing Jesus being laid in a manger, and Philippians 2:6-8 about Christ humbling himself)
4. **The Magi traveled for months to see Jesus, but most people nearby missed it completely. How can we make sure we don't miss what God is doing right in front of us?** (Reference: Matthew 2:1-12, where the Magi from the East come to worship Jesus)
5. **Mary immediately accepted her commission from Gabriel despite the personal cost and social shame she would face. What can we learn from her response: "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled"?** (Reference: Luke 1:26-38, particularly verse 38 showing Mary's acceptance)