

## Joseph - The news that changed the world and the hope of things to come from” Matthew 2:2

This week our theme is unity

Again, we are using the material written by Spurgeons Child Care Charity and it begins with: 'I can't breathe.' Three words that became an iconic statement of solidarity for anti-racism protestors around the world this year. They were three of the final words 46-year-old George Floyd uttered before he was killed. Calls of 'say his name!' echoed across the world as communities banded together in unity to bring his murderer to justice and to shed light on racism and injustice that has gone unheard and ignored for generations.

In the week that followed, George's daughter, 6-year-old Gianni Floyd was seen sitting on top of the shoulders of an NBA player saying, 'Daddy changed the world.' And he has. As the story of his death spread worldwide people took to the streets to protest the systematic racism against black people and other minorities. Stories that had been overlooked suddenly flooded social media as grief, anger, and hope of change sparked within people.

Over two thousand years ago, a similar iconic change rocked the world. Jesus, fully man and fully God was crucified, He was killed for the salvation of the world. The way He entered the world was fraught with things that could go wrong, but God's plan and timing were perfect. His intention? To bring unity to His people and allow all people to enter into relationship with Him.

Jesus, was born not into a royal family, or in a palace, but to a teenage girl, Mary, and her betrothed Joseph. Born at a time where the very community they belonged to could have cast out Mary and stoned her to death for being pregnant outside of marriage.

Joseph had decided in his mind to quietly divorce Mary on hearing the news of her pregnancy. We can imagine the heartbreak of his decision and also the pain of feeling he had been betrayed by her. It took an angel's explanation for Joseph to understand the unique story that was unfolding, so he didn't cast her off.

We know that Jesus came into an already broken world, He saw us, He loved us, and it would be His final breaths that would change our eternal destiny. Jesus came to restore, love and bring unity to His people and, with a little artistic license here, we can imagine Jesus sitting on His father's shoulders at a similar age to Gianni, saying 'My Father is about to change the world.'

The very essence of Christmas is a message of hope and love for all people, all generations and ethnicities; Jesus came for all people, commanding us to love one another as He Himself loves us. And the church is the chosen vessel to communicate that, this Christmas and beyond.

That said, I want to take us further into the mind and heart of Joseph. Imagine the disappointment of knowing your intended bride was pregnant. Imagine the pain, the distrust, the isolation - who could he talk to for counsel?

Maybe sleepless nights followed as he wrestled his options. But, worn out with anxiety, he dreamed a dream. An angel spoke to him and in the midst of all that was said were the words that are so often repeated "Do not be afraid." "Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife." Do we take to heart those words for our own situation? Do not be afraid - God is with us.

Now imagine Joseph's incredulity as the angel explains the manner of conception, the reason for the pregnancy, and the destiny of the child who would be called "God with us".

Then, very simply, Joseph woke up, did what the angel said, married Mary and took her home. Thus avoiding any further negative reaction from the community.

How does God speak to us? Through the Bible, through words of knowledge, through dreams, through others and through circumstances. Are we always as quick to obey as was Joseph?

And how does this all tie in with our theme of unity in Advent? Mary and Joseph were both obedient to God, they were in unity with him and each other. We, likewise, need to be in a place where we are walking together with God and each other. As Psalm 133 says How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you that because of you all people may have a personal relationship with our heavenly Father. Father, we lift to you the injustice in our world. Please help us Lord to stand up for those who need to be heard. Help us to seek justice, love mercy and walk humbly with you. Father, we pray that our church will be a place of safety and unity, that people would feel at home within the family of the church, that they may be uplifted and encouraged to share your love with others, without prejudice.

Lord God, help us to make our Christmas celebrations this year accessible to all, filled with love, joy and laughter, and help us to serve the needy where we can. Lord Jesus we thank you for the togetherness you bring when we follow your example by loving others the way you love us.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

## About Spurgeons Children's Charity



Through the delivery of support and intervention services, and by speaking up on behalf of those who need them most, Spurgeons give vulnerable children and families the chance for a better future.

In the year up to the end of March 2020, Spurgeons ran 50 projects and services which were delivered in 22 Local Authority areas across England.

This brought them into contact with 29,835 children and young people and 33,232 adult family members. Of these, they worked intensively with 3,095 children and young people to directly help them overcome the challenges they faced and reduced their vulnerability and disadvantage. **Children's Centres**

Our Children's Centres offer support to any parent with a young family, providing spaces where we can tailor training, support and play sessions for families to thrive. At the heart of the community, our centres are known for caring, non-judgmental and practical support that is open to all families regardless of their background situation.

Over the lockdown months our Children's Centres have been actively checking in on vulnerable families by phone, providing fun sessions for children online, and have provided practical support for the families that we serve. Staff have also done many socially distanced doorstep visits to support families.

Please pray for our Children's Centres this Christmas. Some of the children that would attend our groups will be from families that cannot afford to buy presents. Pray that we do our very best to make sure each child receives a gift this year, and that each family receives the love and support they need. **Together for Families**

Our Together for Families project aims to empower local churches to expand their services, to stand in the gap and support isolated and vulnerable families. We would value your partnership with us in prayer this Christmas, praying for our team that supports churches in making connections with vulnerable children. Please pray that we will have wisdom and that God will open doors for us to offer the best care we can.

## Young Carers

There are an estimated 800,000 young carers across the UK who take on extra responsibilities when caring for close relatives and loved ones. Dispensing medication, doing the weekly shop, taking care of the washing, ironing and childcare are just some of the tasks taken on by children. Imagine then, the added stress and isolation that Covid-19 has brought to many of their lives, as well as the worry of shielding their vulnerable loved ones from further sickness or injury. Many children have become even more overwhelmed as support groups and meeting with friends has been restricted during lockdown. Our Young Carer projects across the UK are providing services and support to some of these children, giving them the space they need to be a child. By providing whole family support, and space to listen, we are helping relieve the pressure felt by young carers across the country and letting them know they are not alone