



December 18, 2011
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The Creep that Stole Christmas: Pride Matthew 1:18-25

[Presentation by the Kids' Drama Club: *The Christmas Lamp*]

Wow! Wasn't that great? Thanks to Ane and all the kids and adults who put that together for us. We are so proud of you.

Who do you think changed the most during that story? Yes, it was the boy named Jack. Did you notice that he was kind of grumpy? Why do you think he was so grumpy? Yeah ... he was lonely; he was sad that he didn't have a dad to take care of him; he was deeply wounded, but he didn't really want anybody to know. There was something inside him that led him to put on his grumpy face. And once he did, that same thing led him to keep up his grumpy and tough reputation. Do you think he was feeling the joy of Christmas? Nope, there was something beyond his circumstances that was stealing the joy and hope and love and peace of Christmas. Do you know what it was?

In the Christmas story from Matthew's gospel, the same thing that was at work in little Jack's heart has the potential to ruin the first Christmas. And I think it has the potential to ruin your Christmas too. If we don't call it out today, and take care of it with God, it will ruin a lot more than Christmas.

Let's look at the scripture together and pray that God makes it clear to us.

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.

In the first century Jewish world, if you were pledged to be married to someone it was a commitment; it was a really big deal. Your family, friends—the whole community would have known about this arrangement. And Joseph and Mary made a fine couple. It was as

precious as a Hallmark movie; it was just like the little song—Joseph and Mary sitting in a tree, k-i-s-s-i-n-g, first comes love, then comes marriage, then comes a baby in a ... Wait a minute! That's not how it went. Before they were officially husband and wife, Mary "was found to be pregnant"! Okay, it's like we just changed the from the Hallmark channel to the Lifetime channel. Do you know how serious that was? According to Jewish law, a woman pledged to be married and found pregnant from another man was to be publically executed for her crime. Mary's life was in danger. Yet, the pregnancy came from the Holy Spirit ... would anyone believe her?

Then there's Joseph, the innocent groom. What's he supposed to do? How should he respond? According to the scripture he was "faithful to the law"; can you, then, imagine how he was feeling? Do you think he was upset? Do you think he was angry? I do. Think about it. He was an upstanding young man in the community—of humble means, but faithful to the law. And now, at no fault of his own, he had to deal with this mess. His fiancé was pregnant, and he was not the father. And even if he somehow believed Mary that the baby was from God... well, so what ...now his whole life was messed up. Now, his reputation was on the line; everyone was looking to him to see what he was going to do. How would you have responded?

I imagine that it would have been easy for Joseph to allow his pride—that selfish awareness of his reputation—to take over. Even if he relented from the full punishment prescribed by the law, he would cut all ties with Mary; he'd have nothing to do with her. He wasn't going to let this scandal tarnish his reputation. But do you see how that course of action, based mostly on his pride—his worry about his reputation, would have stolen his opportunity to participate in the most important moment in all of human history?

I wonder how your pride might be stealing the joy of Christmas from you this season. Is your pride keeping you at arm's length from the very thing that God wants to do in you and in the world?

You know, pride is both thinking to highly of yourself and thinking too lowly of yourself. It's an obsession with one's own value; it simply means that you think you matter more than anyone else. None of us like to admit to that, but the simple fact is that every one of us suffers from it. And the effects are devastating. A very wise man once said, "Pride goes before destruction" (Proverbs 16:18). In other words, your pride can ruin your relationships; it can ruin your job performance; it can ruin your marriage; and it can definitely ruin your Christmas.

Joseph was gracious. First, his plan was to try to walk away from Mary quietly so that she wouldn't face public disgrace or punishment. But after the angel appeared to him in a dream saying, "do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife," Joseph chose to put his pride aside, throw his reputation to the wind, and do what the messenger from God commanded him to do. As a result of that decision of obedience and humility, Joseph was given the opportunity to be the earthly father to the son he named Jesus—the one to be called Immanuel, God with us—the one who came to save us from our sins—even our pride.

The joy that little Jack, from the story so wonderfully acted out for us today, experienced at Christmas was because he set his pride aside and opened his heart to Jesus. Is your pride keeping you from experiencing the truth of Christmas? Are you afraid to put your

reputation on the line for Jesus? Is your pride keeping you from obedience to God? Or maybe your pride is causing you to think that God isn't powerful enough to make a difference in your life. But the fact is, today, if you invite the Holy Spirit to take away your pride—your selfish anxiety about your reputation—you will be freed up to participate more fully in the work of God this Christmas. What's more valuable to you—your reputation or being a part of what God is doing? What's more important to you—maintaining your self-centered resentment and bitterness or living in the reality that God the Son took on flesh—came from the glory of heaven to the grime of earth—so that you might be saved from your sins? Beloved, with the help of the Holy Spirit, don't let pride be the creep that steals your Christmas. Instead, open your heart to Jesus. Set aside your insecurities that come as a result of your pride by confessing them to the Lord. All this, so that you may know this Jesus—God with us—who came to save you.

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **READ** the passage out loud.
- **REFLECT & APPLY INDIVIDUALLY:** Each person take 5-7 minutes to circle words or phrases that jumped out at them; jot down your reflections; check the notes in your Study Bible for insight or help. Grapple with what the Spirit is saying to you, your group, the church—write down some applications.
- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **DIG DEEPER**
 1. What's one thing that really sticks out to you about the kids' play, The Christmas Lamp?
 2. In Matthew 1:18-25, what's on the line for Joseph in his decision about Mary?
 3. What's on the line for you in your decision about Jesus?
 4. What do the names given for this child to be born teach us about him?
 5. How does this scripture passage direct us as a church? How does it direct your life?
 6. What is it that holds you back in your relationship with Jesus? Why? What are you going to do about it?