Series: It’s a Wonderful Life

Message: “Trust It”

Text: Isaiah 7:10-16 and Matthew 1:18-25

Theme: 4th Sunday of Advent

Date: December 20, 2015

Location: Christ Community EFC

During this season of Advent we’ve been using scenes from the classic Christmas movie, “It’s a Wonderful Life”, as a backdrop.

The main character in the movie is George Bailey. He is a young man with big dreams. He wants to see the world.

As the movie unfolds you are introduced to George as you watch him grow up in the small town of Bedford Falls.

We watch as life, circumstances, and responsibilities all seem to get in the way of his dreams.

Then as a result of someone else’s actions George finds himself in trouble, facing bankruptcy and even prison.

He has given up all his dreams and hope for others only to come to a point in his life where it all seems like a waste.

He begins to think it would have been better if he had never been born.

George is given a rare opportunity. He is given and chance to see what the lives of his friends and family would be like if he had never lived.

The clip we watched this morning was from the part of the movie where we were being introduce to George, as his life was.

He falls in love and marries a local girl, Mary. Everyone is happy.

They don’t know it but they’ve picked the worst possible day to get married, 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.

As you saw, George and Mary were just about to leave on their honeymoon when they pass the Bailey Building and Loan.

George uses their honeymoon money, $2,000, to save the family business.

George and Marry set out that day with plans and hopes. They had a vision of what their lives would be like.

In a moment, events and circumstances outside of their control changed everything.

**If you would turn in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 1, Matthew Chapter 1 and we will pick up in verse 18.**

Ah, the best laid plans! We love to make them.

Plans help us organize our lives, determine our path to the future, and provide an illusion of control over our destiny.

What happens, then, when we experience a change of plans? How is our story revised, edited, rewritten?

Here we find Joseph. He had plans and dreams. He dreamed of marring Mary, taking over the family business, the carpentry shop.

He had probably already made the wedding bed in his shop. And then he heard news that would change everything.

Matthew 1:18-25 “**Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.**

Mary and Joseph were “betrothed”. Their betrothal was more than an engagement and less than a marriage.

It was a binding contract lasting a year or even more.

Although the couple lived separately, betrothal couldn’t be terminated except by divorce.

If infidelity or adultery occurred the penalty was death for both of the guilty parties.

When he hears of Mary’s pregnancy, Joseph has a decision to make. He can publicly denounce and divorce her leaving her open to humiliation and even death.

He can set aside the contract privately; risking his own name and honor.

Joseph takes the second option.

**19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.**

Deciding to show mercy rather than demand justice, Joseph puts what’s best for Mary ahead of his pride.

He’s indeed a “just (or good) man”. That night Joseph has a dream. An angel comes to him.

**20 But as he considered these things,** **behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.**

**21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”**

Joseph does as the angle says. He takes Mary as his wife and when the time comes he names the child, “Jesus”.

It’s an act of deep love both for Mary and for God. Without a word, silently and faithfully Joseph takes his place in the story of God’s plan of redemption.

**22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 23 “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).**

This is a quote from Isaiah 7:14. That was part of the Advent reading this morning.

The context of that verse is important.

After King Solomon died, Israel was divided into two kingdoms. The 10 tribes in North we called Israel, sometime referred to as Ephraim.

Isaiah is prophesying to the king of the southern tribe. The king of Northern Israel is joining forces with the king of Damascus (Syria) to come against the southern tribe.

This was a time of great unrest and fear. Isaiah starts out in Isaiah chapter 7 by telling the king in the south to not be afraid.

God is going to deliver you from your enemies.

Then verse 10 God, speaking through Isaiah, told the king to ask for a sign as an assurance of the coming deliverance.

The king, not wanting to test God would not ask for a sign so God Himself says that He will give a sign.

Isaiah says in Isaiah 7:14: “**Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel**.”

“**He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. 16 For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted**.”

So what’s going on here?

Before a virgin, unmarried woman of marriageable age, could get married, conceive, have a child and that child get old enough to know right from wrong these two kings will be dealt with.

But Ahaz, the king of Judah doesn’t trust in God and make a alliance with Assyria, which will end up costing them more than they had ever expected.

But not so for Joseph. Look here at Matthew 1:24:

**24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, 25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus**.

Joseph believed and Joseph obeyed. He did it not once but three times.

Matthew records two other dreams of Joseph.

Just after Jesus’ birth an angel tells him to flee to escape Herod’s rage. “Go to Egypt”, the angel says.

Egypt is a foreign country; a strange place and a long way from home.

Going to Egypt means leaving behind all they know and all they have.

Yet, Joseph does as the angel commands.

Then in Egypt an angel again visits him. He’s told to leave his life there and return to Nazareth. And for a third time Joseph does as the angel tells him.

Notice. Matthew never records what Joseph says, only what he does.

Not one speech from Joseph is ever noted. His is a “**love without words**”.

Joseph trust God and takes Him at his Word and stakes his life on God’s promise. His life is a continual “yes” to God.

Joseph has the courage to do what God asks him to do.

Without songs, or speeches, without argument or debate, he simply and quietly does what God (and Mary and his Child) need him to do.

It was an act of faith for Joseph to choose to do what he did.

Each Advent as we prepare to receive that same blessed Child it’s an act of faith for us too.

We too know the aching uncertainty that comes with living in a world that’s not what God intends it to be.

We too know what it means to cling to a promise not yet realized but which we still believe.

We too know what it is to struggle with making right choices in a world where there are so many opportunities to choose wrongly.

We can identify with Joseph. We can identify with him in his times of confusion and his moments of doubt.

We can identify with him in the disruption of plans and possibilities that occur as he hears the angel’s announcements.

We know what it’s like to watch our world both personal and public come apart and to realize we can’t ever get it back together the same way again.

We too know how hard it can sometimes be to “do the right thing” when we’re not sure what that is.

We struggle with being obedient to God’s will for us.

We can identify with Joseph.

Can we also make Joseph’s choice?

When life turns upside down for us can we believe God’s word as he did?

Can we faithfully follow God’s leading even when we’re not sure what the outcome of our journey will be?

Can we let God intrude upon our carefully laid plans and take us in directions we’d never planned to go?

When nothing in our life “fits neatly” can we still have faith that God has a way to hold all the pieces, however broken, together?

When the announcement we hear (from a doctor, a spouse, a parent, a child, a friend or a colleague) isn’t “good news”—can we still trust that God is with us?

In the helplessness and despair of our own time can we work toward the vision of that alternative reality known as God’s kingdom?

When there seems to reason for it and little evidence to support it, can we still hope?

Wide-awake and in our dreams, like Joseph, can we listen for and obey the voice of God?

Joseph is a witness. He brings us the Christmas message and promise.

He shows us what it means to receive it. Christmas is about a God whose name is “Emmanuel”, “God with us”.

That’s the astounding and amazing implication of that theological doctrine we call “incarnation”.

God is with us: In our decisions and dilemmas, our uncertainty and fear, our regret and recriminations, our messes and our successes, the hard things and the good things, the problems we can fix and the ones we can’t—God is with us.

In Jesus, in a stable in Bethlehem, God took up residence in our midst.

God is still here. His love and presence changes everything.

It can “make all things possible”.

God continues to enter our world, disrupts our preconceived notions and bless us with opportunities to love and be loved that are both unexpected and divine.

It’s about God’s love for us and the love we share with one another.

That’s the gift and calling of Christmas. It’s love given away with and without words.

 “Joseph...made the choice to as the angel of the Lord commanded him.”

This Christmas, in our best laid plans, may we found faithful too. Amen.