

Where do you hang your hope? If all we have is what we find in this world, we are sunk. There is plenty to hope for, but not a lot of good news to build hope on for the future. Jesus is a place to build your hope. Jesus is a solid rock. Jesus, born on Christmas Day, is our hope and our salvation.

MY HOPE IS BUILT • Matthew 1:18-25 • Tim McConnell • December 22, 2019

Focus has become more and more important to me this year. Some things need to be just the right distance for my eyes to read. Focus isn't always easy. For example, just randomly, maybe you're at a Christmas concert in the Pikes Peak Center. Maybe you have one program, and maybe you're sharing that program with someone else. They need the program to be at one distance; you need it at a different distance. It felt like I needed to call in a physicist from the Hubble Telescope team to run the calculations. Focus can be a challenge. This month, we have been working on tightening our focus. Of all the places we invest hope, we need to focus in on the right place. Our hope is built on nothing less than the solid rock of Jesus' birth, laid in a stone manger like this. The first week, we recognized that we are people of expectation and future longing, and hopefulness carries us through struggles. Then we saw John the Baptist declaring that hope was drawing near, but it would require repentance—a turning of our hearts. Last week, John the Baptist again was looking for glimmers of hope. It's hard to keep hope alive when you can't see anything happening, but there was a green shoot from the stump. Today we focus in even tighter. Hope has a name. Hope is a person. Hope is an infant—Joseph names him Jesus.

Pretty familiar Christmas passage this morning, isn't it? This one makes it into the Nativity plays and Christmas dramas. The drama of the birth of Jesus. In Luke, if you flipped over, you'd see the lineage is Mary's and it's Mary who names the baby Jesus. In Matthew, it's Joseph's lineage and it's Joseph who names Jesus. There's no contradiction. Father or mother could name a child, and they obviously agreed and did it together. But—and follow me now—naming Jesus is something we do together, and it is something we each must do alone. Naming Jesus. Can you name Jesus? Can you focus in and name Jesus, Jesus, as your hope and your salvation. There are lots of things that require our attention and a certain investment of hope, and I'm not calling all of those distractions. They may be worthy of our hope. You may be dealing with a sick child working and hoping for remedy. The marriage may need some attention and hope for next year. You might be in end-of-year reviews and planning at work, hoping for a turn in 2020. These aren't evil things. But for a minute, wouldn't it be a relief to get the energy and investment of your hope focused, if even just for an

instant, on one place where hope is sure and certain? Naming hope is naming Jesus.

Our passage takes Joseph's perspective. That's okay. Mary gets plenty of attention! So today we look at Joseph. One thing about Joseph is he doesn't talk a lot. Ever notice that? The church in history calls him Joseph the Silent. You see, with Joseph, his actions speak for him. His deeds are his statement of faith. Mary is associated with faith; Joseph with obedience. Faith and obedience. Good combination. Joseph, through the story, faced three moments of crisis, three crossroads where he could go this way or that. He could: (1) cut and run or stay in the game; (2) believe the dream or make his own, and; (3) name Jesus or make a name. At each juncture, each pivotal moment, it was his focus that made the difference.

(1) Cut and run or stay in the game. "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" (Matthew 1:18). What would you do, if you were Joseph? Mary and Joseph were pledged, betrothed, set to be married but not yet in the same house, not yet together as husband and wife. Still, at this stage infidelity was considered adultery and a breakup required divorce. Pregnancy is not part of this stage in the relationship, ordinarily. Joseph knows what he's done. Now he is forced to ask what she's done. The verse is a little comical saying Mary was "found to be pregnant." How did that conversation go? We have to guess here, but to me it doesn't sound like Mary went to Joseph right away. I don't know how this conversation went between them, but it sounds to me like someone could have counseled Mary, "Bad news doesn't get better with age." What would you do if you were Joseph? Cut and run? Or stay in the game?

It is a question of focus. Joseph could focus on the problem. "My fiancé is pregnant and it's not mine. I will never be able to lift my head with honor again in Nazareth. My hopes for engagement, marriage, a new life with the woman I love, those are all shattered." Joseph could lose hope. "My plans have been cut off; now all I see is a stump." Will Joseph focus on doubt, or can he focus on trust? "Mary says it's from the Holy Spirit. I've always trusted her. She is such a faithful woman. She's been so good to me

up to now. Holy Spirit? What does that mean? God is good. God has blessed me. I'll focus on trust. All I see is the stump, but I'll hope through the struggle; I will wait and watch for the green shoot to come." Joseph stays in the game. All I'm saying is, he didn't slam the door and pack his bags and bail. That's all. His plan, if anything, was to deal with this quietly and honorably with the best interests of all in mind. Joseph stayed in the game.

(2) Believe the dream or make his own. Then comes a dream. "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. 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'" (Matthew 1:20-21). When you are having trust issues, it's nice when an angel comes along and verifies what your fiancé has been saying. Again, we don't get any dialogue from Joseph the Silent. Nothing. Not even inner dialogue! He says nothing to the angel. He says nothing to Mary, not that gets recorded anyway. Joseph has to decide, "Do I believe the dream from God or go make my own dreams come true? The dream seems to indicate that God is at work, God has plans, God is writing a story bigger than I can understand. Can I believe that, or should I strike out on my own?" When you are at a point of desperation, can you believe that God has a story for you or do you change, turn away from God, and try to make your own dream, your own story? Joseph turns his focus to God. He believes the dream. Joseph's focus is on God's story.

Now Matthew give us some color commentary, information Joseph himself may or may not have had, but that Matthew knows we need. It's a citation from Isaiah 7:14, "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' (which means 'God with us')" (Matthew 1:22–23). What would you give for that kind of commentary when you are in the crisis? See, it makes perfect sense, Joseph. What's your problem? What would you give to have the Word of God cut right into your mess and make it all clear? You know, it happens. Do you look to Scripture in your crisis? The Gideons devote themselves to putting Bibles in every hotel room and every hospital room.

They're zealous about it. Why? Because time and time again God uses His Word to cut through confusion, give direction, give hope to the hopeless, and save lives—literally save lives. If you heard half the stories I've heard about men and women in hotel rooms throwing that book open in desperation, then hearing from God just what they needed, you'd be zealous about it too. Joseph believed the dream.

(3) Name Jesus or make a name. Finally, will Joseph focus on God's name or his own name? "When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus" (Matthew 1:24–25). Jesus was born of a virgin. Is that hard to believe? For those who live in a sterile world of only three-dimensions and natural laws, it is outlandish. Mythical. And if you are here asking questions about faith and you find this hard to believe, I want you to know it isn't the first or most important thing for you to adopt about Jesus. But for those who have seen their own lives regenerated by the power of God, for those who have been reborn inside by the power of Jesus, a virgin birth is not so hard to fathom. Still, the point here is Joseph. Joseph has one more decision to make. "Will I name this child Jesus, or will I leave this to Mary and head off my own way to make my own name?" What does Joseph do? Joseph the Silent. Joseph the Obedient. Joseph the Faithful. "And he gave him the name Jesus."

Anybody else wondering why the name wasn't Immanuel? I mean, I'm no genius, but Immanuel and Jesus are two different names, aren't they? Maybe Matthew got confused. Matthew gave us Isaiah 7:14, probably mostly to point out the prophecy about a miraculous birth, but he didn't cut the verse off without the Immanuel part, did he? What does Immanuel mean? "God with us." The angel tells Joseph to name the child Jesus. It means "God saves us." Isaiah said they would call the child born of the virgin "God with us," not necessarily name him that. So he's named "Jesus" and called "Immanuel." Okay. That solves it. It's a nickname. Fine. But there's a lot more. Isaiah could never have guessed what "God with us" truly meant. Matthew could never have guessed, or Joseph, or, for my money, the angel! "God with us" meant that God would stoop down to take on flesh. God, the Lord God Almighty, would

become a cell, a zygote, a helpless infant. God would draw to Himself all the weakness and vulnerability of humanity. God with us. God one with us. God would make Himself, in all His power, he would make Himself weak. Weak enough to suffer. Weak enough to die. So that He could suffer and die on our behalf. Jesus. God saves. Jesus, our Immanuel. God with us to save. This is the focus of hope. Our hope is built on nothing less.

Where is your focus? I was on the beach once with my family and everyone was watching dolphins rise out on the ocean. They said, "Look there! Look there!" I looked there. Everyone around me went, "Oooh! Aaaah!" I saw nothing. My focus was wrong. I missed it. On a whistle-stop tour of Europe with my grandmother when I was 16, the bus was screaming by a sign to Wurzburg, the town where I was born when my parents were in Germany for the Army. I quickly pulled out my disposable camera and cranked off a shot. When I got the pictures back from the developer, I had a very clear picture of the droplets and dirt on the bus window. My focus was wrong. I missed it. What I want for you today, and tomorrow and through Christmas, is for your focus to be right. Don't miss it. Your hope is right here. Our hope has a name. Its name is Jesus.

Joseph could never have guessed the full meaning of that name, Jesus. God saves. He trusted enough to stay in the game. He believed enough to honor the dream. He was faithful enough to give the name to the infant instead of chasing his own name. See him there, Joseph the Silent, holding the infant in his arms. Joseph adopted the child. That's what it's called when you name a child your son who wasn't yours to begin with. Adoption. Joseph adopted Jesus and so was adopted by Jesus into God's eternal household. By adopting Jesus, he was adopted by Jesus. In naming Jesus, he was being named. In accepting and loving Jesus, he was being accepted and loved. In this miracle birth is the miracle of being born again. He focused on Jesus. The same can be true for you. Where is your hope? Where is your faith? Name Jesus.

STUDY GUIDE MY HOPE IS BUILT • "Naming Hope" Matthew 1:18–25

UP: Connect with God through Spending Time in His Word

Read aloud the passage for the week:

Matthew 1:18–25. Allow a few moments to silently reflect on what you heard. Underline or note any words or phrases that seem meaningful.

- 1) Reread verses 18–21. Imagine you were in Joseph's place. What would be going through your mind? How would you explain this situation to your friends and family?
- 2) The angel appears to Joseph in a dream and he trusts that God is speaking to him. How do you typically hear from the Lord?
- 3) Reread verse 22. How has God shown up as "Immanuel" in your life recently?
- 4) Reread verses 24–25. What lessons can we learn from Joseph's response in these verses?
- 5) How might this passage encourage you to live more fully into the reality that Jesus is your hope and salvation?

Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)

First Pres has Christmas worship services on Monday the 23rd as well as Tuesday the 24th. If you haven't already, extend an invitation to someone in your life who needs to hear about how Jesus is their hope and salvation.

IN: Connect with Each Other

Our church will host more than 6,000 people for our Christmas Eve services this week. Spend time praying for the church as we have a unique opportunity to introduce people to Jesus, possibly for the first time!