“Beyond Our Comfort Zone”
Matthew 1:18-25
12/18/2016
(Show Title slide)

Have you ever been stretched beyond your comfort zone?

This morning I invite you to put yourself in Joseph’s shoes –
Or at least his sandals

Imagine being in the excitement
and the uncertainty
and the compromises that comes
when two persons plan to begin a new life together.

You with me?

And then on top of that add, (Show Joseph and Mary slide)

Joseph, I don’t know how to say this,
but I’m expecting a baby son.

And knowing that this baby on the way
Was not yours

We are told by Matthew that
Joseph her husband was a righteous man.

What does it mean to be righteous?

It means being faithful to God and faithful to others,
And to following the commandments of God (Show Deuteronomy 22:24 slide)

If a young woman who is a virgin is engaged to one man and another man meets up with her in a town and has sex with her,
You must bring both of them to the city gates there and stone them until they die...
Remove such evil from your community! – Deuteronomy 22:23-24

But on the other hand,

If he does that
Joseph is going against the commandments
That he has followed his entire life
And if he does not charge her
Does that make him dishonest in God’s sight?

There is a lot of deliberation going on here for Joseph.

And then to really push the edges of his comfort zone,
This angel from the Lord comes a calling in a dream

"Joseph son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife,
because the child she carries was conceived by the Holy Spirit.
She will give birth to a son, and you will call him Jesus,
because he will save his people from their sins."
– Matthew 1:20-21

There is a lot packed in this birth announcement.

First, (show “Joseph son of David” slide)

Joseph son of David...

And if it turns out that a woman is not a virgin
when she and her husband get married,
(Show Deuteronomy 22:21 slide)

21 then the city's elders will bring the young woman to the door of her father's house. The citizens of that city must stone her until she dies because she acted so sinfully in Israel by having extramarital sex while still in her father's house. Remove such evil from your community!
– Deuteronomy 22:21

(Show Joseph and Mary slide)

So when we hear,
Because he didn't want to humiliate her, he decided to call off their engagement quietly.

There is a whole lot at stake

Joseph on one hand wants to hush it up
To save Mary not just her humiliation,
But also her life

But on the other hand,

If he does that
Joseph is going against the commandments
That he has followed his entire life
And if he does not charge her
Does that make him dishonest in God’s sight?

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Joseph son of David...

If you remember, the Gospel of Matthew begins
by going through the genealogy of Jesus
From Abraham, Isaac and Jacob
All the way to Joseph’s father
Who was Matthan

But wait,
Didn’t the angel just say
Joseph son of David

With this salutation,
The angel is stating that Joseph is a descendant
In the family line of King David of Israel
And reminds us that any son born to Joseph
Is in the royal line of King David
David the son of Jesse

So this son could end up being
The king, or Messiah, or Christ of Israel – God’s people

Then the angel says (show “don’t be afraid to…” slide)
...don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the child she carries was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

This thing that is happening is not hidden from God,
God, through the Holy Spirit
Is a part of this divine plan

Joseph does not need to feel as though
he is hiding Mary’s pregnancy from God

And then, (show “She will give birth…” slide)

She will give birth to a son...

Here is a test condition so that Joseph will know
Whether or not these words from the angel are true
Kind of like what we hear in Luke’s version

When the angel said to the shepherds.
12 This is a sign for you: you will find a newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger.”
– Luke 2:12

Remember that this is in the day before ultrasounds.
Back when we’d have to wait until the baby was born
To find out whether the newborn was a boy or a girl
If Mary’s firstborn was a daughter,  
It would be a whole ‘nother story
But that child was a son.  
And we even know his name and his destiny
The angel said,  
(show “And you will call him…” slide)  
and you will call him Jesus, because he will save his people  
from their sins.”
“Jesus” means “God will save us” or “Jehovah will deliver us”
What a dream, huh?  
(Show Joseph and angel slide)
Enough to move any of us to the edge of our comfort zone.
And try to imagine how the history of the world would be different  
If Joseph went through with his plan of quietly divorcing Mary  
Or if he faithfully followed the Law of God in this matter
Thank goodness Joseph moved into this place  
Beyond the edge of his comfort zone
Friends, whenever God calls us to do a new thing  
Or to act in a way that is different  
than how we have always acted  
does that move us away from our comfort zone?
As our congregation looks for ways in which we can  
Be in ministry in ways that prepares us to be vital  
For another generation to come  
There will be times when our comfort zone will be approached
For that matter,  
Anytime we act in a way that is different from how the world acts  
It pushes against the warm confines of our comfort zone
This morning we celebrate some persons  
Who will say out loud that Jesus is their Savior and Lord
Those of us who have lived a lifetime of following Jesus  
Know firsthand the implications of such a profession
So, dear friends, I dare you.
Make some space in your life  
to listen for those messengers and messages of God
Listen to what they tell you.  
Look for ways to test its divine authenticity
And then do as you are told.  
accept the freedom and power God gives you  
To resist evil, injustice, and oppression  
In whatever forms they present themselves
Especially if it moves you out of your comfort zone
(Hymn “In the Bleak Midwinter” # 221)