

**BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI**  
**THE WORSHIP OF GOD • DECEMBER 8, 2019**  
**THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT**  
**“SAY YES” SERIES**

**The Psalm Litany**  
**Based on Psalm 72**

We ask for justice and righteousness so that we can distribute it ourselves.

**In our defense of the poor, needy and oppressed,  
and the migrant, we reflect divine justice.**

As long as the sun burns and the moon glows;  
as long as the rain falls and showers the earth,  
**may God’s justice emerge from our faith as no one is forgotten.**

Let us pray:

**Give us hearts that love as you love,  
that seek justice because it is right and good. Amen.**

**The Scripture**  
Matthew 1:18-25

*Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do 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 as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.” When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.*

**The Message**  
**Joseph’s Yes**  
**Mark Briley**

**Synopsis:** Joseph’s “Yes” is different than most. While visited by an angel in a dream, Joseph’s “Yes” is best noted in four simple words: “Then Joe woke up.” He was

hesitant before, perhaps understandably so. He learned of Mary's pregnancy and had all but decided to part ways and not enter the complicated fray of cultural norms, expectations, and relational mess. But the dream found him... and he woke up with a "Yes" on his heart. He would let love rule. He would let dignity rise. He would stand in faith with one who was soon to face ridicule. Joseph's "Yes" was one of a partnered ally. That God he said "Yes."



Sometimes, things just don't go as planned. "*Like what?*" Thank you for asking. Oh, one that comes to mind this time of year... hold your breath... family pictures. Family pictures are supposed to depict the easy, relaxed, peaceful nature of your family. Why is the experience of *taking* family pictures the exact opposite of easy, relaxed, and peaceful?

We were racing against the clock last week to get to Kansas City before sundown so that my sister, who dabbles in photography, could take our family pictures. We strategized on the ride over as we were pressing the time, and there was still hair to curl (*not mine if you were wondering*), clothes to change into, back-up plans if the leggings didn't match and the hope that our dog, Taylor, could settle enough to get even a half-smile in one of the pictures. And so, arrive and bounce out of the car like a SWAT team, everyone with their job, and my sister starts snapping shots and moving us into the light and out of the light and around the shadows and standing with that awkward head tilt and then sitting on the ground in the way you never naturally sit but, "*Trust me, will totally look natural in*

*the photos,*” she says. And the boys are poking each other with sticks and Taylor breaks free, runs into the busy street, and stops traffic in two directions as every member of the family bolts out after her. But... you capture even one pic where everyone is at least looking in the same direction and present it to the world as reality when, in actuality, most of the time, brother’s in a chokehold, hair’s blown into the mouth, dad’s knee is giving out, and the dog has rushed into oncoming traffic.

But there’s the Christmas card to think about, you know?

Sometimes we get fun Christmas letters from people whose kids all got into Harvard, and whose dogs went on short-term mission trips. The pictures show great tans produced by exotic travels and notes that everybody got along, and they even squeezed a sentimental note about Jesus into letter and you’re thinking, “*Who lives that life?*”

Nobody lives that life, I’m pretty sure. At least not without a lot of stuff that gets lived between those lines that are not as Abercrombie-advertisement as it first appears. Our lives are more complex than that...and... more mundane than that... and... more messy than that.

It’s like marriage isn’t all Christmas-cardy either. Someone said, “*Being married is mostly pointing out that the other person is always using their phone during the small window where you’re not using yours.*” Or 90% of being married is just shouting “*What?!?*” from other rooms of the house. You say, “Yes!” on that wedding day, but we know the “Yes!” that really matters is the one you offer on a random Thursday afternoon when you’re busy and stressed and uncertain about what’s happening next. Will you say “Yes” then? That’s what Joseph is mulling over as we find him in our text from Matthew’s Gospel today.

Mary has already said “Yes” to the angel’s ask for her to carry the Christ child in her body. Her “Yes” while bold and confident would not come without ridicule and pain and challenge. The first, perhaps, would be a tough convo with Joseph, her betrothed. Now, culturally, betrothal was as solid as the real-deal marriage. It wasn’t a holding period or a “*We can still bail on this if we want*” sort of situation. Ending a relationship during this engagement held all the same ramifications of divorce. High stakes!

Mary sharing the news of her expectancy with Joseph could be startling and potentially devastating. She sends him a text message: “*Joe, we need to talk,*” followed by concerned face emoji, praying hands emoji, and the **#havingGodsbabyitsaboy**. Peace isn’t exactly the first emotion that’s likely coming to their minds.

This is not how things were supposed to go for them. They were going to get married. Honeymoon cruise down the Jordan River. Work the carpentry shop. Raise a family. There were going to be piano lessons and playing catch in the backyard. They’d have family dinner together every night – it would be a priority – and it would be a tech-free zone. There would be a box on the table where everyone put their phones into when it was time for dinner. They’d go to temple regularly and say the daily prayers. But this one text... just like that... has changed everything. And Joseph just isn’t sure.

Have your life plans ever been derailed? I’m sure they have. Things are cruising along and just when you think you’re winning at life, there’s a text, or a conversation, or an MRI, or a chat with the boss or a ... You’ve been there.

Advent, this season of expectant waiting that we’re living in as Christians finding our way back to Christmas always forces us to

face our limitations, our challenges, and every sense that peace was going to come easy. My friend and colleague, Reverend McKinna Daugherty says, *“Advent asks us to believe that all this waiting [and all of this uncertainty] will lead us to God’s imagination of what’s possible.”* But it’s not an idle waiting. She says, *“Advent still asks us to get ready.”* Soon we’re going to be asked to do the hard work of bringing Christ into the world, and we’ve got work to do to ready ourselves. Advent says, *“Change is coming... but not quite yet.”* McKinna writes, *“As much as I want to turn the clock faster, to skip a few painful chapters to get to the good stuff, I’m not in charge. We’re not in charge. (And doesn’t that chafe?). When Christ FINALLY comes it’s typically to disorder our lives, dump out our kitchen drawers and start banging pots and pans, asking us to play along. When Christ comes, it’s often to throw us what looks like a wrench but ends up becoming a lifeline. When Christ comes, he’ll bring you an apron instead of the entree you ordered and tell you to get to work in the kitchen. Are we sick of waiting? Yep. Are we ready for what’s on the way? Probably not. Is Jesus coming anyway? Yes. Hallelujah. Come and reimagine this world. Come reimagine this life. We need some change up in here.”*<sup>1</sup>

Joseph is in that struggle. We like to think he managed the news well, but don’t you think he had some tough moments? Maybe he went out and chopped some wood. Maybe he threw himself into a whittling project at the shop. Maybe he went out with his buddy and poured out his frustration and confusion. Maybe he went for a long run. We don’t really know what he did after Mary broke the news. What we know is that he had decided to dismiss her... not make a scene, not to complain to Mary’s parents about what was transpiring, not to post something defamatory on social media. He loved her and didn’t want her to be disgraced but, he wasn’t going

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.altoonachristianchurch.org/people/pastor-mckinna-daugherty/>. Rev. Daugherty wrote this piece and shared via Social Media.

to stick it out. His first instinct was not 'yes.' It was polite "No." This wasn't his vision of marriage or family or life in general.

And an angel? *"Really, Mary? You just expect me to believe you had some revelation from some angel, and I'm just supposed to get on board? Hard pass."* We don't always do so great with the calling on other people's lives. As one of our staff said this week as we discussed this passage: *"Another's angel visit is not always that compelling."* Mind made up. Joe was out.

Until... Joseph gets his *own* angel visit. A reminder to us to listen in the hard spaces. We can get consumed with the struggle and the hardship and someone else's "Yes" that we tune out anything or anyone who might be trying to speak into our own soul. Whatever was revealed in his dream opened him to another way. *He woke up.* He awoke ready to get married. He awoke with a name for the baby – *Jesus* which means, *God Saves*; in Hebrew, Emmanuel – *"God is with us."* Joseph's "Yes" is different from most. His "Yes" is best noted in four simple words: *"Then Joe woke up."* He was hesitant before, understandably so. But the dream found him... and he woke up with a "Yes" on his heart. He would let love rule. He would let dignity rise. He would stand in faith with one who was soon to face ridicule. Joseph's "Yes" was one of a partnered ally.

Thank God he said, "Yes." Are things going to be different than he imagined? Yes. Is he 100%? Probably not. There's doubt and uncertainty and anxiety in any "Yes" ... especially when the stakes are as high as they are here. But he's going for it. Mary's already said, "Yes." His is a supportive "Yes." Maybe the question revealed for us in Joe's account is simply, *"Who's 'Yes' can you support?"*

*"Someone, somewhere, is depending on you to do what God has called you to do."* (source unknown). Someone needs your

supportive “Yes.” Can you give it? Can you come alongside? Can you affirm another’s dream by saying, *“I’m with you.”*

Maybe what is yours to do in whatever current situation you’re navigating is to be a stable presence so that the mission at hand doesn’t fail, so that it may actually flourish forward. We talk about this in the church sometimes. You may see a role as insignificant or not essential to the goal of moving the meter of the mission forward, but don’t underestimate each gift, each effort, each “Yes.” You may be holding the whole movement together in ways you can’t fully see ... but the result? A new birth is coming. And you’ve given that baby a nest in which to grow and flourish.

There’s a Buddhist thought that says, *“Praise and blame, gain and loss, pleasure and sorrow – come and go like the wind. To be happy, rest like a giant tree in the midst of it all.”*

Joe’s “Yes” is one that says, *“I’m with you. I see the vision. You’ve got my full support. I’ll be a tree.”* And he may think he’s doing it for Mary. But he will learn along the way that his “Yes” was transforming his own heart, too.

Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Spanish priest and theologian, founder of the Jesuits in the 1500s said it this way: *“Don’t fix your desires on health or sickness, wealth or poverty, success or failure, a long life or a short one. Set your life only to whatever leads to God’s deepening life in you.”*

And that’s some discipline, right? Because it’s not always the easy “Yes.” Ignatius next-leveled this reality, in my estimation, when he reversed the saying, *“Seeing is believing.”* He said, *“When I believe it, I’ll see it.”* Our vision largely controls our perception. If we look at the world and only see evil and greed and people, who are only out for themselves, that’s what we’ll see when we look around. If we believe our world is full of goodness and opportunity, a place that

God created and loves and sustains, that's what we'll find. Ignatius thought that the right vision lies at the heart of our relationship with God.<sup>2</sup>

Joseph's supportive "Yes" opened him to the transformational relationship he would have with Mary and, yes, Jesus. Sometimes, our willingness to support or show up or engage another... unexpectedly opens us to a relationship with Jesus. Joseph had to accept that peace wasn't going to come to him the way he would have designed. What he surely came to know, however, was to trust in God and in his life's calling. That's where he would find contentment. *"If you're not content where you are, you won't be content when you get what you want."* It's a strange, internal, spiritual reality.

The Apostle Paul found his way to this peace even as he wrote to the Philippian Christians from a jail cell. He said, *"I have learned to be content in all circumstances."*

I don't know if this is how Joseph came to approach things, but I wonder if that was his spirit about it. Once you've been through some stuff... like Joseph... like Paul... like so many of us... you do have a sense of letting perfection exit stage right. You embrace the notion that it doesn't have to be perfect to have peace.

I was listening to *Typology*<sup>3</sup> the other day, a podcast by Ian Morgan Cron built around understanding the Enneagram. If none of those words made sense just now, I totally get that. The stuff people are in to, you know? Somebody said to me the other day, *"Elementary kids have iPhones now. When I was a kid, I put glue on my hands just so I could peel it off when it dried."*

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<sup>2</sup> Excerpt from *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* by David L. Fleming, SJ.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.typologypodcast.com/>

Life before cellphones



14.5M Views

I had another friend who posted this picture with the caption: “*Life before cellphones.*” It was actually a video of the window being pushed up and down making his nose turn up and back down again... over and over again. Oh, the ways we were amused. When I saw it, it was up to 14.5 million views. What does that say about us?

But now we’re off track. The Enneagram podcast. The Enneagram is a personality typing

system with some rich, spiritual roots. I hope to offer some Enneagram classes at Broadway at some point if we have folks interested. It has done some amazing good for my own self-awareness and key relationships in my life. Ian was interviewing John Mark Comer<sup>4</sup>, author of “*The Elimination of Hurry*” who is a self-professed Type One on the Enneagram. You don’t need to know what that means other than Type One’s are perfectionists.

Comer told a story about his childhood and how, as a child, he couldn’t go to sleep at night until his mother had tucked him in bed in a very specific way. He couldn’t shut down his mind... so much to think through and fix for the next day. 6, 7, 8 years old... carrying weighty things in his mind that he didn’t need to at such an age. Comer would lie completely still on his back and his mom would smooth out the bed spread perfectly. Zero wrinkles. Tucked in tight on both sides just so. She would kiss him good night, and she’d leave the room. Comer so did not want to mess up the bed spread that he would lay perfectly still until he finally fell asleep. In his

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<sup>4</sup> <https://johnmarkcomer.com/>

reflection of that season and how he grew through it into adulthood, he came to a place of being able to say: *"It doesn't have to be perfect to have peace."* Ian, interviewing him says, *"The world is full of unmade beds."* and Comer responds, *"The world is an unmade bed!"*

Joseph very well thought idealistically about how life was going to go and yet, here, met with the unexpected, he must decide if he can say "Yes" to the imperfect reality. In a world full of unmade beds, can he be at peace with his "Yes" to offer himself to this big ask?

And what about you and me? Are we holding out for the perfect "Yes"? There's certainly value in that sometimes. But perfection is seldom our option. More than likely, we're going to have to trust our "Yes" to the less than perfect and give ourselves fully to it... that in so doing... God might deepen our life in some transformative way.

Joseph says "Yes" to this. His "Yes" joined Mary's, and we're all the better for it. Where's your "Yes?" We might not nail it the first time. We may live into it a bit as Joseph surely did. But... I ask you... Advent asks you... God asks you... don't shut it down. Don't write it all off. Try uttering a "Yes" even if the word trembles a little when you say it. Peace won't come with perfection but only in the living out of the imperfect "Yes" you offer to God. And once you've "yes-ed it," don't spend your days looking back.

I went to grab a bite for lunch one day last week and review some notes I was working on for something here at the church. I sat down and was waiting for my number to be called and was going over my notes. I looked up at one point and there was another woman waiting for her food, too. She had her back to me at first but was sort of bouncing around the condiment area, getting her drink together and some ketchup or something. At first impression, I'd

say she's lived a bit. Probably been through a few things, but she was dancing around, and when she spun in my direction, I could see she was singing along to the music playing in the restaurant – softly belting (*if that oxymoron is permissible*) every lyric as if, “Yes... *it's all going to be okay.*” The song was Grateful Dead's “*Touch of Grey.*” The chorus simply says in a very light melody, “*I will get by. I will get by-y-y. I will survive.*” Somehow, she made me believe she would. By the end of the song, the lyric changes to “*We will get by-y-y. We will survive.*” And I think that's making peace with imperfect yeses... moving from *me* to *we*.

I can actually hear that song playing over head as Mary, Joseph and Jesus took their first family Christmas picture. It was an imperfect journey to bring such a gift into the world. Their smiles in the photo don't tell the entire back story... but who knows where we'd be today if they hadn't said, “Yes.” And... who knows where we'll be moving forward if we don't offer our own?