

A Call to Trust: Love That Believes
Matthew 1:18–25
Fourth Sunday of Advent December 21, 2025

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As we gather on this Fourth Sunday of Advent, Christmas feels very nearby. Many of us are busy preparing—decorating our homes, planning meals, buying gifts, rehearsing services, and imagining what we hope will be a *perfect Christmas*. Our culture helps shape that vision for us. It tells us Christmas should be peaceful, beautiful, joyful, and neatly wrapped, like something from a Hallmark card. Everything should fall into place. Nothing should feel awkward, uncertain, or broken.

Yet the world in which we prepare for Christmas tells a different story. We live in a time marked by violence, fear, and deep divisions. In some places, religion is tolerated; in others, it is mocked or treated as a threat. Christian faith itself—especially belief in the miraculous birth of Jesus—is increasingly questioned or ridiculed. What some call intellectual debate often becomes an attempt to diminish faith and wound believers.

On this Fourth Sunday of Advent, the church does not deny these realities. Instead, we proclaim hope. We respond not with fear or anger, but with trust—trust in God’s saving work and trust in a love that believes even when belief is costly.

At the heart of today's Gospel is a mystery that has challenged Christians from the very beginning: Who is Jesus? How can he be both fully divine and fully human? Matthew tells us that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. These words are not meant to satisfy curiosity or invite speculation. They proclaim that God has acted decisively in history.

The early church struggled deeply with this mystery. For the first several centuries after Christ's resurrection, believers wrestled with how to speak faithfully about Jesus' identity. Some emphasized his divinity so strongly that his humanity seemed unreal. Others emphasized his human nature in ways that diminished his divinity. These debates were not abstract or academic—they mattered because they touched the heart of salvation itself.

In the year 451 AD, the church gathered at the Council of Chalcedon to address these questions. There, the church confessed that Jesus Christ is *one person in two natures*, fully divine and fully human, “without confusion, without change, without division, and without separation.” As to his divinity, he is eternally begotten of the Father before all ages. As to his humanity, he was born in time from the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, for our sake and for our salvation.

This confession was not about biology or science. It was not an attempt to explain *how* God became human. It was a statement of faith: that in Jesus Christ, God truly

entered human life fully, completely, and without reserve. Jesus is not a hybrid, not a demigod, not a mythological figure. He is Emmanuel—God with us.

Matthew's Gospel emphasizes that this incarnation is the work of the Holy Spirit. When Scripture says that Mary's child is "from the Holy Spirit," it proclaims a radically new beginning. This birth is God's doing alone. Joseph's non-involvement in the conception underscores this truth: salvation is not something human beings achieve or control. It is grace.

And yet, this grace arrives in a way that looks far from perfect.

Joseph stands at the center of this story as a righteous man. When he learns of Mary's pregnancy, everything he knows about social convention, morality, and honor tells him that something has gone terribly wrong. A righteous man in his time would have every reason to end the engagement. Joseph even plans to do so quietly, hoping to protect Mary from public shame.

Joseph's plan is understandable. It is reasonable. It is responsible. It is, by human standards, the *perfect* response.

But God interrupts Joseph's vision of perfection. In a dream, an angel tells him not to be afraid—to take Mary as his wife, to trust that this child is from the Holy Spirit, and to name him Jesus. God asks Joseph to step into a situation that is socially awkward, morally confusing, and deeply risky.

The first Christmas was not perfect. It involved scandal, misunderstanding, fear, and uncertainty. It did not meet anyone's expectations—not Mary's, not Joseph's, and certainly not society's. And yet, it was precisely there, in that imperfection, that God's saving work took flesh.

Joseph teaches us that righteousness is not about rigidly following conventions. True righteousness listens for God's voice, even when that voice leads us beyond what feels safe or respectable. Joseph does not receive all the answers. He takes a small step of trust. He stays. He names the child Jesus. He allows love to overcome fear.

As we prepare for Christmas, many of us feel the pressure to make everything perfect. We want perfect gatherings, perfect worship, perfect joy. When life does not cooperate—when grief lingers, relationships remain strained, or faith feels fragile—we may feel disappointed or even ashamed.

But Advent reminds us that God does not wait for perfection. God enters brokenness. God works through uncertainty. God chooses what is unconventional and unexpected.

In a world that questions, mocks, or misunderstands the story of Jesus' birth, we are called to respond not with bitterness, but with grace. Like Joseph, we are invited to trust God's work and to love others—even those who challenge or oppose us. When

society asks the wrong questions, we listen for the right answer—the answer that comes not from argument, but from Emmanuel.

Rejoice, therefore. The God who comes is not distant or abstract. He is God with us—born into our imperfect world, bringing hope where there is despair and light where there is darkness.

May we, like Joseph, open our hearts to a love that believes and a trust that obeys, so that Christ may be born anew in us this Christmas.

Let Us Pray

God of everlasting love,

In this Advent season, give us a trusting love like Joseph's.

When life confuses us, help us trust your presence.

When you call us onto unfamiliar paths, give us the courage to walk forward.

When fear rises within us, let your love cast it out.

May Emmanuel—God with us—strengthen our faith and deepen our trust as we prepare our hearts for the birth of Christ.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.