Jesu Juva

“Gabriel, We Have a Problem”
Text: Matthew 1:18-25; Isaiah 43:16-21

(Note: The biblical text does not name Gabriel as the angel who appeared to Joseph in the dream, but given Gabriel’s role in the story thus far, it is logical to think that he was the angel who was given this mission also. And so I have for the purposes of this story . . .)

Gabriel, we have a problem! No, it wasn’t our Father who said that to me. He wouldn’t say anything like that. It was one of my brother angels. One who had been sent to watch over Joseph - the man to whom Mary, the one our Father chose to be be the mother of the Saviour, was betrothed. I knew Joseph. He was a good man. A just man. He would do a good job of being the guardian and step-father of Jesus. So what could the problem be? Had my former-brother-turned-evil, satan, done something?

Gabriel, he’s going to divorce her! My heart stopped for a moment when I heard those words, and as I thought of poor Mary. She was such a faithful young lady. She had taken the news that God had chosen her so well! But she needed a husband. Being the mother of our Lord would be hard enough, but without a husband to help her? I couldn’t imagine.

So I did a little investigating . . . and it was true. When Mary came home from Elizabeth’s and Joseph saw the baby bump, of course he thought . . . And even when Mary told him about me, and what had happened that day and what happened when she went to see Elizabeth . . . well, it’s hard to blame Joseph for thinking the way he did. And I give Joseph credit for this: he didn’t want to make a scene. He didn’t want to hurt Mary, even though he was hurt. No trial, no stoning, no shaming, no publicity. He would keep it quiet. Try to protect Mary as best he could. They would go their own ways. He didn’t have to do that, but as I said, Joseph was a good man.

But even so, I couldn’t help thinking that my now-evil-former-brother had something to do with it. I knew he’d be after the baby. I knew he’d be after Mary. It hadn’t occurred to me that he would try to do it through Joseph. Even in a way that sounded good and merciful. I looked in on Joseph. He looked troubled. He hadn’t gone through with it yet - something was holding him back. He was still considering all this. Maybe how to do it with the least amount of attention. I could tell this wasn’t easy for him . . . And I heard him mumble, a question: Why would God do this to me? Well, because He loves you, silly! But I know you fallen humans don’t think right anymore. You often question our Father’s ways. You often question His love for you. Ah, sin has messed you up so badly! If only you knew how much He really does love you . . . that He’s doing all this because
of how much He loves you! Sending you a Saviour - and His own Son at that!

Just at that moment, our Father called me in again. I felt bad - not because our Father called me. I am always overjoyed at that and love hearing Him call my name! But I wanted to stay and help Joseph. I felt bad for the guy. But I went, of course, to hear what our Father wanted me to do.

*I want you to go to Joseph*, He said. Yes! Why was I surprised? Of course He knew I wanted to help Joseph. He knows all things. And He had gotten me pretty involved in this whole event pretty deeply so far, so it made sense that He would send me again.

*I want you to go to Joseph*, He said, but I don’t want you to appear to him as you did to Zechariah and Mary. I want you to appear to him in a dream. In a dream. OK. Got it. I wasn’t sure why a dream this time, but I knew not to question our Father. He always knows what He’s doing and always knows the best way. So if He says in a dream, in a dream it is!

And I want you to tell him it’s okay. It’s all okay. That Mary has been faithful to him. That Mary has been faithful to God. And that God has been faithful to him. He has not turned His back on you, Joseph. I know this is not what you expected, how you thought things would be. I know you think this is not good. But Joseph, it is! It is more good than you know! Oh, you humans think you know so much, when you really know so little!

Our Father gave me the exact words to speak, just like He had with Zechariah and Mary. There would be no questions, no back and forth this time, of course, since I was coming in a dream. I need only speak the words our Father had given me. He would do the rest. Just as His Word worked in Mary and did what it said, so I knew it would also work in Joseph. That it would change him.

So that night I did as our Father instructed. I went to Joseph and I spoke to him the Word of God: *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. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.*

I wanted to tell Joseph so much more! But I know only to speak what I am given to speak. No more and no less. But oh, how I wanted to tell Joseph how blessed he was, even though he didn’t feel very blessed. I wanted to remind him of the words of Isaiah the prophet, when our Father had said through him: *Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?*

Yes, a new thing! A making-new-thing! Because Jesus is going to make all things new again. New, like the first time you wear a new piece of clothing and it’s all beautiful and
perfect; no wrinkles or stains or frays or fading yet. Or new like the first time you open a book and the pages are all crisp and waiting for you to read them. Or new like a new car smell! That’s what our Father is doing now! That’s what this child Jesus is coming to do. He’s going to take all your wrinkles and stains and frays and fading, all your sin, and make you new again. And you, Joseph, are going to be a part of that.

That’s what I wanted to tell him, but I knew that our Father’s words were enough. But I hope you know that our Father is doing that for you, too. Oh, if only you could see what we see! That when you confess your sins and receive our Father’s forgiveness, _that’s what you look like!_ Beautiful, perfect, stain-free, new. That’s why we angels always rejoice in heaven whenever a sinners repents (Luke 15:10). That, and because it makes my turned-evil-former-brother so mad!

Well, sorry for the digression. But it really isn’t. It’s important that you know all that. That Christmas isn’t just a story about the birth of a son, but the birth of a Saviour, to make you all sons of God.

Well, again, back to the story. This visit was shorter than the others, but no less joyful! For I knew that Joseph would be a loving husband and step-father now. He would love and serve and give and care. He would be the kind of father that, well, our Father was to him! So I left . . . but not before I saw Joseph wake up a changed man. His mind was changed. His heart was changed. His face no longer looked anxious and worried but peaceful and, well, joyous! And just as I heard him mumble before, questioning our Father’s love and ways, I heard him again - but this time not grumbling-mumbling, but quoting Scripture. I guess he loved Isaiah as much as I do, for he remembered a verse from that prophet, though a different verse than I remembered. He said to himself: 

_Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel (which means, God with us)._ And he smiled. He got it.

The next six months flew by. Joseph was such a good husband, as I knew he would be. What care he took of Mary, even when they had to make the trek down to Bethlehem. And then Mary’s child was born. I wish you could have seen the look in Joseph’s eyes! I don’t think they could have been filled with more love if it had been his own son. And then I heard him speak to the baby. He called Him Jesus, and he told Him the whole story, all that had happened. Then he laid Him in the manger. And he looked like a new man . . . And I knew. He was.

I have more to tell you, but that’s all the time I have for now. So, in the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.