Sermon-based Small Groups

_____ of _____

1stPresDowntown

A Story Redeemed

Matthew 1:18-21

Week of September 20, 2026

This week's scripture:

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they came 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."

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

1. The Weight We Carry

The sermon opened with Joseph going to sleep "carrying everything he knows—and nothing of what God is about to say." We have all been in that position—holding the full weight of a situation before God has spoken into it. Can you describe a time when you were in that kind of in-between moment? What was it like to carry that weight in the dark?

2. The Fear Joseph Carried

The sermon described the fear Joseph carried: fear of what this story meant for his name, his future, his plans—"fear that the story he was living in had gone terribly wrong." How does that description resonate with fears you carry? What does your fear most often feel like—a loss of control, a shattered plan, a future foreclosed?

3. The Angel's First Word: Do Not Be Afraid
The sermon emphasized that the angel's first word to Joseph is not an explanation but a command: "Do not be afraid." Before circumstances are clarified, before theology is explained, God addresses the fear directly. What does that sequence—identity and reassurance before information—reveal about how God relates to us in our most frightened moments?

The angel addresses Joseph as "son of David"—reminding him of who he is before telling him what to do. The sermon suggested that this is how God often speaks into our fear: first with identity. "You are mine. You are known. You are held." Have you ever experienced God speaking to your identity in the middle of your fear—through Scripture, prayer, another person, or an unexpected moment? What was that like?

4. The Name That Answers Every Fear
The name Jesus—Yeshua, God saves—is the angel's answer to Joseph's fear. The sermon made a careful distinction: salvation is not from political oppression or circumstantial difficulty, but "from their sins"—the deepest problem, not the most obvious one. The illness illustration helped make this concrete: we want symptom relief, but God addresses the root cause. Where in your own life are you most tempted to ask God to change your circumstances rather than to save you from the deeper thing producing them?

The sermon drew a sharp contrast: "Not God observes. Not God sympathizes. Not God advises. God saves." How does that distinction land for you? In your experience of faith, have you related to God more as an observer, a sympathizer, or a savior—and what has shaped that?

5. The Two Origins of Jesus
The sermon presented Jesus as both Son of David (through Joseph's legal acknowledgment) and Son of God (conceived of the Holy Spirit)—fully human, fully divine, the meeting point of the human story and God's redemptive purpose. Why does it matter that Jesus is both? What would be lost if he were only one or the other?