

Text: [Matthew 1:18-25 \(CEB\)](#)

Date: December 21, 2025

Title: "Room for Hope" – Sanctuary Advent Series, wk 4

Theme: Hope is about leaving room for God to do SOMETHING, even if it's not THE THING we imagined.

# 1

Hope is an essential theme of Christmas

Hope is what brings the shepherds out of the fields and leads  
them to the manger

Hope is what prompts the magi to make a trip across the desert in  
search of a king

And hope is the thing that causes Joseph not to abandon Mary,  
even when his life stops making sense

Hope is important to biblical faith

But it often gets a bad rap

We will say things like "hope is not a strategy"

Dismissively

As though hope doesn't matter

Like it's the same as believing in fairy dust or magic potions

But in the same way hope isn't a strategy

I can also 100% guarantee this: neither is despair

Hope will at least get you out of bed to *plan* your strategy

Despair pulls the covers back over your head

If you've spent any time at that level of hopelessness, you don't  
ever want to go back there

Hope matters because it OPENS UP possibilities

Where despair SHUTS THEM DOWN

## 2

Joseph had a choice to make upon hearing some unexpected  
news about his soon-to-be bride  
He faced a choice between hope and despair

We're told that he learns of the pregnancy *before* the visit from  
the angel

How he finds out, we're not sure – from Mary or someone else

But either way, at the moment of the angel's visit –  
he's contemplating the fact that his fiancé is pregnant, but not with  
his baby

And he's deep in thought on a question that must have seemed  
momentous to him

To go through with the wedding or to tear up the marriage  
contract

We read that Joseph is “righteous” – which can go either way in a  
decision like this one

Some people we might describe with that word “righteous”

Well, it's not hard to imagine them jumping immediately to public  
humiliation –

They might immediately make Mary's infidelity known

In order to preserve their own dignity

We've probably all known enough nasty church people that we  
can easily imagine it

But Joseph was a DIFFERENT kind of righteous

The humble kind who believed in a God who is still in the  
business of doing amazing and miraculous things

So even if Joseph couldn't quite wrap his head around what the  
angel was telling him,  
he wasn't prepared to rule out the possibility  
That God was up to something here

Joseph, the scripture says, woke from his dream and immediately  
acted  
He didn't hesitate, but did just as the angel commanded

Not unlike Mary's response that said, "Let it be with me according  
to your Word,"  
Joseph also accepts his role in God's plan without reservation  
and without hesitation

### 3

We may have a hard time imagining ourselves inside the Holy  
Family's situation  
What we would do if angels told us that something big was  
happening  
And God needed us to be part of it

But here's the thing:  
Something big IS happening  
And God DOES need you to be part of it  
Do you believe that?

Because as long as we are on this side of heaven  
There is a gap between what is and what should be

And in that gap, there's a whole lot of human suffering:  
Children being abused and neglected  
Young people dying from addiction  
Families living in their cars  
Older adults choosing between food and their medications

And the distance between what is and what should be is the place  
where Christ calls us to get to work  
It's the place where he himself was at work  
Healing the sick  
And feeding the hungry  
And reminding people that God doesn't give up on us

Whenever we see people *falling* into the gap  
Jesus *calls* us into the gap  
Because God needs us there

#### 4

Joseph found himself in that place  
Between what was and what should be  
And as he thought more and more, he realized there was only  
one way out: to let Mary go  
The only question was: whether to do it quietly or publicly?

But the encounter with the angel opened up another possibility  
entirely – that this wasn't a "problem" but rather a "plan"  
Joseph's dream revealed God at work in an entirely unexpected  
way

Have you ever had that experience of a surprising solution?  
One you never saw coming?

It's easy, in the midst of hardship  
To run out of hope  
Which is often the same as running out of imagination  
We get stuck  
So we embrace a solution like Joseph did – cut your losses

Or maybe in *more* hopeful moments, we can imagine *one* or *two*  
possibilities –  
but they seem like they would require miracles  
So it just feels ridiculous to even pray for them

In those moments, it's important to hold on to hope  
To remember what Paul said in Romans 5:5 – that “hope does not  
disappoint us”

Hope does NOT disappoint us  
It's not the fragile, weak thing we often imagine it to be  
In fact, it's the thing that keeps us moving forward

The great thing about hope is that  
Even when we can only see ONE possibility  
And it seems so farfetched that it's ridiculous  
Hope doesn't require us to believe that God will do THE thing  
It just requires us to trust that God will do SOMETHING

Because God isn't confined to the miracle we're praying for  
God doesn't need to do the thing we expect  
God is free to move in an entirely different direction – in ways we  
haven't even imagined yet  
Hope is about us giving God room to work

And when we trust God to move, then we can too  
We can trust that God *will* work it out  
Even if we don't yet know *how* God's going to work it out

I know, hope is not a strategy  
But I'm telling you: neither is despair

In the gap between what is and what should be  
In that space, we will find all kinds of human suffering  
That's the place where Jesus calls us – where big things are  
happening  
Where God is changing things for the better

And you can't go in there without making room for hope  
Not in naïve way, not in a clueless way  
Not in a way that has no plan

But in a way that admits of possibilities that we have not yet  
imagined  
God doesn't have to do THE thing that's in your mind  
God just needs to do SOMETHING!

What if that situation you've been stuck in  
Is STUCK precisely because you haven't actually given God any  
room to move?  
I want you to ponder that this week

Instead of giving up,  
Instead of pulling back in despair  
What if you lean even more firmly into the promise of hope?

Hope is about making room for God to do SOMETHING  
Even if it's not THE THING you imagined

Amen.

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