

## **The Holy Family: Joseph**

This is the second Sunday of Advent but it feels like we are just getting into the Christmas season. I can't shop for presents when it's sunny and 60 degrees outside. I think the cooler temperatures will help get me in the mood for the season and will heighten my sense of anticipation as we prepare our hearts to celebrate the Lord's birth.

It is all about anticipation after all. As kids we couldn't wait for Christmas and the presents under the tree. It felt like Christmas would never get here! I imagine Mary and Joseph were feeling the same way. "When will this baby get here?" Nine months is a long time as many of you can testify. Of course, there was an even longer anticipation involved in the Christmas story. It had been 400 years since a prophet had spoken to Israel. 400 years of silence and anticipation, waiting for the coming of the Messiah, waiting for a word from the Lord to break that silence. 400 years of waiting in hopeful anticipation for a Savior, a Deliverer, a Redeemer to come. And like Joseph and Mary and the faithful of Israel who were anticipating the coming of their Messiah, we too are waiting for the coming of our Savior and Deliverer, waiting for his promised return. As we wait, we put our hope and trust in the Lord. Stand as we read responsively from the Psalm 130

**Reader: "Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord; O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.**

**Congregation: I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.**

**Reader: O Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption.**

**Congregation: He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins."**

From Psalm 27

**Reader: "The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?**

**Congregation: One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.**

**Reader: Hear my voice when I call, O Lord, be merciful to me and answer me...My heart says of you, 'Seek his face!' Your face, Lord, I will seek. Do not hide your face from me...Do not reject me or forsake me, O God my Savior.**

**Congregation: Teach me your way, O Lord and lead me in a straight path...I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord."**

"Lord, in this season of waiting and wonder, we set our hearts upon you, to seek your face, to sit at your feet, to learn your ways, to wonder at your grace. Lord, teach us to wait upon you, to listen to your voice, your instruction and correction. Lord Jesus, come and be born in us again today. As the light of the Advent candles glow, may our hearts be drawn to the light of your presence, the radiance of your glory, and grant our request, that we may dwell in the house of the Lord all our days. In Jesus name. Amen."

It's been six years or so since we looked specifically at what the church calls the Holy Family: Joseph, Mary and Jesus. This morning we look at Joseph. We are often at a loss for words when we look at Joseph. He is the guy kneeling in the manger scene, along with the shepherds and a couple of the wise men. We never hear him say anything, the strong silent type perhaps. He is kind of a bit player in the story of Jesus' birth and childhood. If you didn't know better, you could view him as the driver, the chauffeur that got Mary to Bethlehem, to Egypt and back to Nazareth. Of course the story was not about him, it was about Jesus and somewhat about Mary. But Joseph has an important role to play. Though he is not quoted in the gospels, his life, his presence, and his character had plenty to say then and now.

As we consider the life and character of Joseph, I want you to notice that contrary to the popular trend of today, God considered the best way, the ideal way for his Son to be raised was in a household consisting of a father and a mother. Today we have women who deliberately choose to have children without the involvement of a father, I assume feeling that a father's role is just not that important in the life of a child. If ever there was an opportunity to make that point, it would certainly be in the virgin birth of Jesus. No man was involved in any sense, and yet even with a miraculous conception and a virgin birth, God saw the need for a father and chose Joseph to be the father who would raise Jesus. No offense intended to any single parents, and God bless you as you carry out the difficult task of raising children alone, but you yourself

know that ideally this would be better if there were a godly mother and a godly father involved in raising a child.

At one time the absence of a father was thought to be a tragedy in the life of a child and a family. Now a masculine role model is diminished or downplayed. True manliness or masculinity has been belittled, caricatured, stereotyped until there are few male role models worthy of following or admiring.

I would think the man God chose to be the earthly father of God the Son, the earthly father of Jesus, that might be someone whose life and character is worth a second look. And while the bible has little to say concerning his role in the life of Jesus, I believe when we finish looking at Joseph we will see the valuable role he played. You see, whether you call him a foster father or adoptive father or step-father, whatever you want to call him, the truth is Joseph was the man who, at the instruction of the angel, “gave him the name Jesus.” It was Joseph who cared for and brought Mary and Jesus into his home and into his heart. Joseph would be the first human face to whom Jesus would have said, “Abba. Father.” It was Joseph who gave his name to Jesus, so that in his hometown, they referred to him as the son of the carpenter. Joseph, in spite of his silent role, was very much a father to Jesus. In fact, it is through Joseph’s lineage and not Mary’s that Matthew traces Jesus’ ancestry back to David and to Abraham. Jesus was known as a Son of David because Joseph was known as a son of David.

With that said, look with me at **Matthew 1:18** and let’s see what we can learn about Joseph. (Read Matthew 1:18-25). The first thing we notice is that **Joseph was a righteous man**. He stood in a right relationship with God with a desire to please and serve the Lord with his whole heart. Luke 2 shows Joseph’s dedication and determination to keep the law of God. Luke tells us Joseph made sure Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day and he presented him to the Lord at the temple and offered sacrifice there in keeping with the law. Luke 2:41 tells us every year Joseph and Mary went to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover. It was no small journey for them, but it was part of Joseph’s character. Joseph was a righteous man because he was a godly man. He was a righteous man because he was obedient to God and obeyed the law of God. Joseph was a righteous, godly man and that character is seen in his faithful service as a husband, father, provider and protector.

**Joseph chose a godly wife.** Something of a man’s character can be seen by the wife he chooses. We will talk about Mary next week but we know she was humble, obedient to God,

grateful, she knew the Scripture and was full of the Spirit of God. Tradition says Joseph was older and possibly a widower, but he was not searching for a trophy wife. He chose wisely, choosing a godly wife whom he cared for and cherished.

**Joseph had proven character.** People can say you are a person of character and integrity, but nothing reveals that like testing and trouble. The bible says he was a righteous man but it is his actions after he finds out Mary is pregnant that really prove he was a righteous man. Understand, he is referred to as her husband but notice it also says Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph. This betrothal was much different from our engagement period. According to some scholars, in Jewish law, betrothal was a binding contract that lasted for about a year. It could be terminated only by death, which left the betrothed a widow or widower...or terminated by a divorce. The man was already considered the husband but the woman remained in her father's house. The marriage was completed when the husband took the betrothed home in a public ceremony which is what Joseph did in Matthew 1:24. They then would consummate their marriage in sexual union. Notice however the Scripture tells us that although Joseph took Mary as his wife, i.e. he took her to his home, protecting her from further shame, he kept her as a virgin and did not consummate the marriage until after she gave birth to Jesus. Understand too that when Mary was discovered to be pregnant, the Old Testament penalty for having sex before marriage was stoning (Deut. 22:13-21), but by this time, divorce was allowed instead. Joseph could have divorced her with a public trial, accusing her of adultery, but he did not want to publicly humiliate her, so he decided to divorce her privately, quietly, secretly. If you think this seems outrageous, remember that honor killings still happen in the Middle East for adultery.

Just consider the character of Joseph. Not everyone is willing to marry a woman who is pregnant with someone else's child. Not everyone is willing to love a child not your own. Joseph proved himself as he took Mary as his wife and Jesus as his own son.

Notice too that **Joseph was a man of self-control.** He refused to be controlled by pride and divorce Mary. He chose not to be angry, not to worry about what others might think of him but obeying God, he took her to be his wife. As we mentioned, he took her home as his wife, but he didn't have sexual relations with her. He was a man of self-control and self-restraint.

I'm tired of and personally offended by this modern image of men and women, that we can't help ourselves, we can't be expected to control our sexual passion, that we are like animals driven by sexual urges. Listen, men and women, you are more than the sum of your biological

and sexual drives and urges. We are created in the image of God. Men, stop allowing your life and your choices to be driven by sexual impulse and desire rather than being compelled by the life and Spirit of God. Your life is about more than being sexually satisfied. You are going to give up your wife, your children, your family, your reputation, your integrity for sex? Come on, you're better than that! You're more than that! Ladies, stop allowing your life and choices to be driven by your sexual desire or your misconception that you can't live without a man in your life. Live a life of self-control and self-restraint. Live an honorably life. Be an example to others by your godly life and godly reputation.

Some Christian traditions teach that Mary remained a virgin her entire life and Joseph never had a sexual relationship with her even though they were married. I believe they had other children. Regardless of whether that is true or not, Joseph proved himself to be a man of self-control and self-restraint.

Notice too, Joseph didn't want to expose Mary to public disgrace. Another good lesson. Men, don't belittle your wife or subject her to public scorn or ridicule or humiliation. Don't talk about your wife in disrespectful or inappropriate ways. Honor your wife.

**Joseph was obedient to God.** He had his own ideas and plans as Matthew's gospel shows us, yet when God spoke to him through a dream, he set aside his own plans and obeyed God. Verse 24 says, "**When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him...**" We see this repeating itself two more times as God speaks to Joseph in a dream and he obeys whatever God tells him to do. This was how he lived his life, obeying the written word of God, the commandments of the Lord, and obeying the instruction given to him by the angel of the Lord. You may have a plan, a way you want to go, but God is showing you his plans, a different path to take. I can assure you God's plans are better. Be like Joseph. Obey God. Do the right thing!

**Joseph was a provider for his family.** We notice it first when they went to Bethlehem to pay their taxes and to be counted in the census. There was no room in the inn, but Joseph did the best he could and made provision for Mary in a stable. There was no place else to go and Joseph did what he had to do to make her comfortable for the birth of the child.

After the baby was born, when they had to flee to Egypt because of Herod, when they came back to Israel and then in Nazareth, wherever they were, Joseph found a way to provide for his family. It's a good lesson and example for every husband and father. The bible says if a man

doesn't provide for his family, he is worse than an infidel, an unbeliever.

**Joseph was a protector of his family.** Look at Matthew 2:13-15, and then again in verses 19-23. This was no small thing, fleeing to Egypt in the middle of the night (v14). Becoming a refugee in a foreign country with nothing but the clothes on your back. And consider the isolation involved in this. Not only did they have limited means of communicating with family or friends to begin with (no cell phones, mail, internet), but Joseph wouldn't want anyone to know where they were for fear that Herod could find them. It was like going underground, joining the Federal Witness Protection Program. They had to hide with perhaps new identities in a foreign country, but Joseph took seriously this responsibility he had to protect Mary and Jesus. He would do whatever it took to protect his family. Perhaps that meant no contact with his family or her family back in Galilee, leaving his business behind, his tools behind. I don't think Joseph ever saw this as sacrifice, this was simply what it meant to be a husband and father. This was what doing the right thing required.

Joseph Fornieri, a professor of political science and an author wrote, "One can point to Joseph as the greatest advocate of adoption...Joseph testifies to the nobility of a self-giving love that transcends blood and genetics." Joseph loved Jesus like he was his very own. God bless all you adoptive parents and your children. Jesus and his parents are strong examples of and advocates for adoption. We see the concern and love of Joseph for Jesus throughout the Scriptural narrative. Mary treasured all these things in her heart, but the Scripture says "the child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him." Luke 2:33. Joseph was a part of all of this.

Remember when Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem when he was twelve? The Scripture says his mother said to him, "**Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.**" **Luke 2:48.** Joseph was a father in every sense of the word to Jesus. He accepted that responsibility to protect and care for and train up this special child.

Thank God for Joseph as a protector. If he hadn't done this, Jesus would have been killed by Herod and we would all be going to hell because we wouldn't have had a Savior to die on the cross and atone for our sins. Dads, take notice, there is such a need for fathers today to accept this role of protector in your homes and families. I'm not talking about arming yourself with automatic weapons, but protect your children from the violence and perversion and the cultural and intellectual compromise and the secular worldview that is prevalent everywhere.

Wake up and pay attention to the influences that have targeted your children and then protect them in every way you can. And be careful not to just preach at your children, live a godly life of integrity before them. Protect your family by holding up a strong standard of righteousness which you live by and exceed personally. Be a godly example in your home. Be like Joseph and if sacrifice is required, do whatever it takes to protect your family.

**Joseph was a teacher.** Notice that Luke 2:51 says of Jesus, **“then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them...And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” Luke 2:51-52** Jesus grew in all the ways a young man would grow – physically, spiritually, socially, morally, intellectually, emotionally, vocationally. Who do you think was responsible for teaching him how to be a godly, righteous man? Joseph! One scholar wrote, “While God’s Son assumed humanity in his mother’s womb, it was Joseph who taught him what it means to be a man. Thus Joseph was to leave the forming mark of his own manhood on the God-Man. Jesus, in his hometown, was known as “the carpenter’s son” – Matthew 13:55”.

Because Joseph was a carpenter by trade we have every reason to believe he taught Jesus that trade as well. In fact, in Mark 6:3 when Jesus taught and performed miracles in his hometown, the people asked where he got this power and noted, “Isn’t this the carpenter?” He was the carpenter’s son and himself a carpenter. By learning this trade, Jesus affirmed the dignity of manual labor. Joseph showed Jesus by example that being a godly man meant there was no shame in getting your hands dirty, doing an honest day’s work.

It was no doubt Joseph who taught Jesus the Hebrew Scripture and how to live life according to the law of God. We mentioned earlier the example’s given of Joseph obeying the law concerning the birth of the child. Luke 2:39 says, **“When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon him.” Luke 2:39-40.**

Joseph (and Mary) taught Jesus how to live according to the whole law of God. Joseph taught him the Scriptures and helped him understand what it meant to be a Jewish man in a Roman world.

In fact, the very act of Joseph going ahead and taking Mary as his wife after she was pregnant, that in itself is a powerful lesson that Joseph taught Jesus and all of us - about obeying

God and refusing to surrender to the popular wisdom. Joseph taught his son, this special son of Mary, what it meant to obey God and to refuse to compromise, to love God and to love others, even if there was a price to be paid, a sacrifice to be made. What an example of love, what a lesson of righteous living taught by this good man.

Joseph, a carpenter, a just and righteous man. We don't know what happened to him although tradition says he died before Jesus' public ministry began. I doubt that he ever thought he would be spoken about centuries later. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Bernard of Clairvaux wrote concerning Joseph, **"To him it was given to see what many kings and prophets had longed to see, but had not seen, and to hear, but had not heard. And he was given, not only to see and to hear, but also to carry, to lead, to embrace, to kiss, to nurture and to guard."...Bernard of Clairvaux**

What a glorious privilege and incredible responsibility given to Joseph. Yet in spite of all the angel said to him and what Simeon and Anna spoke concerning this holy child, I doubt that Joseph ever really understand what he was accomplishing, the important role he was playing as he carried and led and embraced and kissed and nurtured and guarded the Savior of the world. All Joseph knew for sure was that he was doing the right thing as he daily made the choice to live for God and obey his word.

And perhaps that is one of the key lessons for us in all of this. We can't always judge our life by the great moments of victory or the outstanding accomplishments, but there is much to be said for the difference one person can make who insists on obeying God and doing what is right faithfully and consistently for a lifetime. Here is the life and heritage of a godly man. What a difference this one life made. What an example for us as fathers and for us as believers.

This year when you see a nativity scene, give some thought to Joseph and the sacrifices he made as he brought Mary and her son into his world and protected and cared for the One of whom the angel said, "you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

Father, thank you for this good man Joseph, the protector and guardian of the Lord, the one who along with the angels, stood watch over the infant Jesus on that first night. May our hearts be inspired by this man who was willing to love and sacrifice by faithfully being a father to another's son, a father to Your Son. May we do our best to live our lives in surrender and obedience to your purpose and will, even as Joseph did. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.