

“And Now... Joseph!”
December 13, 2008
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Matthew 1:18-25: “This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. 19Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

20But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.'

22All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' which means, "God with us."

24When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.”

In a New England parish it was the custom for the church leaders to go on retreat each Advent Season. There they would plan the major activity for the Christmas season. At one such retreat they decided on a big Christmas pageant. When it came time to map out the production they got into a long discussion on how to symbolize Jesus in the manger. They didn't want to use a doll or a statue. And they ruled out using a real, live baby. Finally, they decided to put a light in the manger. They did this very tastefully so that throughout the pageant a warm glow of light would shine out from the crib. On opening night the church hall was packed. The audience was expectant. When the curtain went up all the principals realized that something was wrong. Then everyone heard the director say in a voice, just above a whisper, “Hey George, you forgot to turn on Jesus!”

During this Advent season Pastor Gary and I are looking at the gifts that those around the Nativity Story bring. Today I want us to look at Joseph. The one betrothed to Mary. Joseph and Mary find themselves in the middle of difficult situation as Mary is found to be with child through the Holy Spirit - it was the creative work of the Holy Spirit that brought this to be. Joseph was a righteous man and in that day a righteous man meant that he was one who obeyed the law. As such it was a bitter blow for him to discover that Mary was with child. He was expecting them to have a wonderful wedding in a few months. It was a time when he would be honored for taking a wife. He would be in the spotlight as the head of

the house. At the wedding he would be the focus of everyone - not the bride.

But all of this had been shattered with the heartbreaking news of Mary's pregnancy. As we heard from the reading of the lighting of the Advent Wreath, his thoughts of betrayal and suspicion were hard enough to take let alone the broken dreams and hopes that died with the news as well. In the midst of this anger and humiliation, add a little shock and disbelief, Joseph encountered an angel in a dream as he slept. The angel instructed him to be faithful to Mary. "*Joseph, son of David*" the angel said, *'do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.'*" Joseph did a very honorable and noble thing - He put his hopes and dreams aside and accepted the new hopes and dreams God had for him and his life. This is the **first gift** we need to remember today. Joseph was willing to let go of his self interests and accept God's the new hopes and dreams that God had for his life.

Joseph stepped into the background in order for Jesus to shine as the one most important. Joseph along with Mary followed through with the name "Jesus," the Greek equivalent was *Joshua*, which means "God saves." You remember, Joshua was the great leader who lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. Therefore, the name "Jesus" bore the mission statement: one of salvation for the bearer's people. Thus, the **second gift**, is that Jesus would save us from our sins.

Returning to Joseph as a righteous man, Matthew indicates that it is Joseph who is to do the naming, indicating Joseph's adoption of Mary's boy. This is the establishing Jesus' legal claim to the title - "Son of David." Once again letting Jesus shine through. Joseph is a very real person in the midst of a very real but difficult situation. He listens to God's angels and submits to God's desires in order to let Jesus shine through. Which suggests to us that God isn't always looking for only the brightest and the best, or the most beautiful, the most polished speaker, or popular. Joseph is one who shows us that God can use even those who stand in the background - yet are willing to be used by God to let Jesus the savior of the world shine through.

So where do you need to let go of your plans and embrace God's plan? Remember, God uses surrendered lives to change the world. God is looking for men and women, kids and youth who are willing to hear and obey. Let us be like Joseph - to hear God's voice in the best and worst of times and commit ourselves to follow. May that be each of us in this Advent and Christmas Season - The world needs to see Jesus!!