

Advent Reflections

December 18, 2019



As a child growing up in a Catholic home, I always loved assembling the nativity set before Christmas. I'd put the manger in the middle, the three kings in a row, and the farm animals on either side. Mary was important, and Jesus, of course, was front and center as the star of the show. Honestly, I didn't pay too much attention to the unassuming man on the opposite side of the crib: Joseph.

As opposed to making the obvious choice and building his story around Mary, that ordinary girl through whom God chose to do extraordinary things, Matthew's birth narrative focuses on Joseph, her then fiancé, the simple craftsman who had a girlfriend who got pregnant before they were married, and not as a result of his involvement with her. Mary appeared to have committed adultery to him, no doubt, and I'm sure he was hurt and disappointed by this, as any boyfriend would be. But since he was a good guy, he chose not to act out and instead had the intention of handling this situation quietly by breaking it off with her. Had he not been so good, he might have been public about it, which likely would have resulted in her being stoned to death for her apparent indecency.

Still, God had more in mind for Joseph, so he sent an Angel of the Lord to him in a dream. This angel explained how Mary got pregnant through the Holy Spirit and how she was going to give birth to the same Messiah that was spoken about in the Scriptures. Joseph was supposed to marry Mary and raise the child as his own. So he woke up and did as the Lord instructed. He didn't question it or second-guess himself: he just submitted by taking on the responsibility of providing protection, care, and economic support for his family. By foot and donkey, they took the long trip to Bethlehem for that humble, star-studded birth.

I imagine Joseph as a quiet carpenter and a good dad. His actions show this because

he fulfilled his role with integrity and faith. Not all fathers do what they are supposed to do, but Joseph did. Presumably, he knew the prophecy for his son all along, specifically that Jesus was going to die a very violent death, since all of it was spelled out in the scriptures. I can't imagine having foreknowledge of the death of my child in such a horrible manner (albeit for such an amazing cause). The most astonishing part of the story, I think, is that the prophecy of Jesus was fulfilled because of Joseph's ancestral line. Joseph (not Mary) was a descendent of King David—so here is this humble, good guy who steps up to be a father and at the end of the day is the entire reason Christ is descended from David and fulfills the Scriptures. It is very typical of God to use some unassuming character like Joseph to work a tremendous miracle. I also imagine Joseph protecting his family by bringing Mary and Jesus to Egypt to shield them from Herod's jealous and wild campaign to kill babies because he saw the star in the sky and knew there was a king much greater than he, born somewhere. So there they were, refugees in another land, fleeing from a crazy dictator, with Joseph, their father, skilled enough to make yokes for oxen, furniture, and doors. How did they survive?

Perhaps it was by their faith. Joseph is said to have had two more dreams telling him when to travel and when to return to Nazareth, Mary's hometown and the place where they decided to raise Jesus. I wonder what kind of father he was. Was he like the forgiving and generous father we meet in the story Jesus told about the prodigal son? Did Jesus base his father character in the parable on Joseph? My deepest curiosity concerns how it must have felt for Joseph to share being Jesus' father with God the Father.

Today's world is filled with many different kinds of fathers: step fathers, single dads, first time fathers, and adoptive fathers; there are grandfathers and uncles and family friends and coaches who step up to be fathers when biological fathers are unavailable, absent, or deceased. There are even mothers who have to be mothers and fathers for their children. With all of these varieties in mind, it is safe to say that Joseph was a great father because he was a role model, not just for Jesus but for all of us. In the final analysis, he protected his family by listening to the greatest father of all, God.

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Reading 1 [JER 23:5-8](#)

Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD,
when I will raise up a righteous shoot to David;
As king he shall reign and govern wisely,
he shall do what is just and right in the land.
In his days Judah shall be saved,
Israel shall dwell in security.
This is the name they give him:
"The LORD our justice."

Therefore, the days will come, says the LORD,
when they shall no longer say, "As the LORD lives,

who brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt";
but rather, "As the LORD lives,
who brought the descendants of the house of Israel
up from the land of the north"—
and from all the lands to which I banished them;
they shall again live on their own land.

Responsorial Psalm [PS 72:1-2, 12-13, 18-19](#)

R.(see 7) Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.

O God, with your judgment endow the king,
and with your justice, the king's son;
He shall govern your people with justice
and your afflicted ones with judgment.

R. Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.

For he shall rescue the poor when he cries out,
and the afflicted when he has no one to help him.
He shall have pity for the lowly and the poor;
the lives of the poor he shall save.

R. Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.

Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,
who alone does wondrous deeds.
And blessed forever be his glorious name;
may the whole earth be filled with his glory.

R. Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.

Alleluia

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

O Leader of the House of Israel,
giver of the Law to Moses on Sinai:
come to rescue us with your mighty power!

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel [MT 1:18-25](#)

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about.
When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph,
but before they lived together,
she was found with child through the Holy Spirit.
Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man,
yet unwilling to expose her to shame,
decided to divorce her quietly.
Such was his intention when, behold,
the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said,
"Joseph, son of David,
do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home.

For it is through the Holy Spirit
that this child has been conceived in her.
She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus,
because he will save his people from their sins."
All this took place to fulfill
what the Lord had said through the prophet:

*Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,*

which means "God is with us."
When Joseph awoke,
he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him
and took his wife into his home.
He had no relations with her until she bore a son,
and he named him Jesus.