

The Third Sunday of Advent  
December 16, 2007

***From Joseph's Perspective***  
A Christmas Monologue  
Matthew 1:18-25

(Costumed in a rough, long vest with a rope drawstring, Joseph ambles into the sanctuary preoccupied with the props of 1<sup>st</sup> Century Bethlehem. He moves to the front of the sanctuary studying the set, while muttering under his breath. Stepping onto the rostrum, he pauses at each visual, touches the door of the inn, glances at the animals, and then sits down on a bench within the stable.)

Lest you have not yet recognized me, I am Joseph. If you read “the begets” in the Bible, you know that I am the son of Jacob, who was the son of Matthan, who was the son of Eleazar...all the way back to David, the king of Israel; in fact, I am a great, great, great...several greats...grandson of Abraham, the patriarch of our faith.

You know me best as Joseph, the husband of Mary, the father of Jesus...er, well...technically, the step father of Jesus. As you will see this evening in your church's Christmas pageant, I am the gangly boy wearing his father's bathrobe, no lines, just a knock on the inn's door and a place beside the manger. I am the guy on your Christmas cards leading the donkey carrying a very expectant Mary toward Bethlehem. I am also the figure among the Nativity scene that you just don't quite know where to place.

By trade, I am a carpenter in Nazareth. Perhaps if we were to embrace hands, you would know that by the calluses and scars resulting from accidents with wood and tool. Although I am a poor wood worker, I am proud of my work. I know the difference between fir, cedar, and eucalyptus. I guess one might say that I am a full service carpenter. I fell the tree, shave the bark, split the wood, and shape the product, whether it is a yoke, a cartwheel, or a table.

Most of all, I am a man of faith, although there was a time when I nearly lost my faith in the God of Abraham, willing to give it up in anger over betrayal. May I share that story with you?

Mary and I were engaged, in the time of betrothal, the second stage on the way to marriage. Years ago, I met Mary, much younger than I, and I felt that I could love her as my life's partner and the mother of my children. So, I did what suitors did in that day. I summoned up the courage and knocked on her door. When she answered the door I nearly fainted from embarrassment but I finally stammered enough to ask if her father was home. I understand that you moderns go about courting in a little different way. You see, my generation felt that love and marriage was too important to leave to chance and hormones. I said to Mary's father, "I request your daughter's hand in marriage, and I have a fair dowry to give in exchange." Before that visit was over, Mary and I were engaged to be married.

I know, I know...we have come a long way toward young girls and women having a say-so in who and when they get married. But as Mary and I got to know

one another, we nurtured a love and respect that convinced both of us that it was God's will that we spend our lives together as husband and wife.

If you could have seen her! Her sparkling eyes and disarming smile would make your head swim. She was the most beautiful person in the entire world. We talked for hours about that the life that we would live together, the children that we would raise together in our home.

But one day, Mary came to my shop as I worked the wood for a set of yoke. Her eyes were not sparkling; she was not smiling. Mary was despondent. Finally, she said to me, "Joseph, I must tell you something. I am going to have a child."

Without looking up from my work, I said, "Yes, I know, Mary. We have talked many times that we will have a child. In fact, with God's blessing we will have many children."

"No, Joseph, you don't understand. I am going have a child. I...I...I am with child now."

"Mary, what are you saying?!"

"Let me explain," she pleaded. But the room was spinning, and I was so much in shock that I could not understand, hardly even hear what she was trying to say. I was feeling betrayed, listening for the name of another man, but she kept saying something about God, that she was still a virgin but very much pregnant with a child.

She kept pleading for me to listen and try to understand, but my shock was turning into anger, even rage. I shouted at Mary to leave, to get out of my sight. I

did not see her go out the door, the tears of anger and betrayal had flooded my vision. Although I tried to resume my task, I ruined the yoke and cut my hand badly in the process.

I did not go home that evening. I tried to sleep in my shop, but sleep would not come, even for the next couple of days. I was in a depressed stupor trying to decide what to do. Finally, the anger and rage settled into disappointment and hurt. I would divorce Mary, not openly, but quietly. I would divorce myself from our dreams. Eventually, I would be able to work again and perhaps my carpentry would be my life. That evening, when I lay down to sleep on the cot in my shop, I was finally able to sleep the sleep of exhaustion.

But I had a dream. You have heard about that dream in your scriptures. An angel called my name, “Joseph, son of David. “Don’t be afraid,” he said. “Take Mary as your wife. What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

For the rest of the night I thought about the dream, what I had heard. As the first rays of light came through windows, I gave my heart to that vision. I did not understand it, but I decided to trust it and obey the word that I had been given. I went home to Mary and asked her to forgive my rage and silence. I told her what I believe had come from God.

We lived together but apart from one another for all those months until the Roman census compelled us to Bethlehem. In the crowded city of David, Mary

gave birth to a son, and together we wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because I could not find room for my wife and child in a decent place.

As I helped birth that boy, in a dirty, smelly place, all of my doubts returned. If this birth was indeed from God, what cruel joke was he playing with our lives? The savior of the world born in a stable, laid in a manger? Surely not. How can a baby born in such humble surroundings be the means of saving our people from their sins?

As I pondered those thoughts and nursed my doubt, guests came calling, having traveled from hillsides surrounding Bethlehem. They said that they had received a visit from a messenger from God, calming their fear, saying, “For unto you is born this day in the city of Bethlehem a savior who is Christ the Lord.” They said angels had sung for them:

*Glory to God in the highest  
And on earth peace goodwill to men.*

They gave witness to their faith that this child was the promised one, in spite of his surroundings. Within my heart I heard another word from God, “Joseph, I do not call you to understand. I call you to trust.”

How you, there in the balcony, with all the difficulty that you have been facing? Does God seem far removed from your world? He does not call you to understand. He calls you to trust.

Remember that the One born in a stable was the same One who died on a cross. Buried in a grave intended for another, he arose from the grave in order to give meaning and purpose to our lives.

God does not call us to understand. The Spirit calls us to trust.