

Text: Matthew 1:18-25

Happy fourth week of Advent! We are only one week away from the celebrating the joy of Christmas. As we were preparing for our Christmas Pageant last week, I was talking to Leighton about the fact that Joseph so often gets short changed in the Nativity story. It's not just that Joseph is in a supporting role in the story, the fact is that the Bible just doesn't give us much information about him. Think about your favorite quote from St. Joseph in the Bible.... if you can't think of one it's because none exists! He is silent in the Bible - we don't get a single word! There's even a meme I saw with a painting of St. Joseph; at the top it says, "My favorite quote from St. Joseph:" and in the bottom are just two empty quotation marks. And worse, I came across another one this week with a picture of St. Joseph that reads, "Happy belated St. Joseph's Day. To be fair, nobody cared on March 19th either." Terrible, right?! But clearly in a family with Jesus and St. Mary, it would be hard to

But our Scripture today from the Gospel is about Joseph. So let me out myself now as a big St. Joseph fan. The reason I'm such a big St. Joseph fan is, in part, because I think he has so much to teach us, not in what he said, but in how he lived. In fact, his witness may even be more important, because instead of his words, we have his actions to study.

So, what do we know about St. Joseph? First, we know he was chosen by God, as was Mary, to be a parent to Jesus - to God's Son - to raise Jesus as his dad here on earth. It's an impressive job description and calling. Joseph is described in the Scriptures as being "faithful to the law" and "righteous" - and that speaks volumes about him right there. He was a holy man and given one of the most important jobs imaginable as Jesus' dad. Can you imagine him holding and playing with baby Jesus - doting on him like a loving father? Like so many dads we all know and love.

We also read about the hard choices Joseph had to make - and we see that he put others interests before his own - he was aware that Mary had become pregnant, and he knew it wasn't his child -

but he was not willing to subject her to public disgrace. This was not a man who acted out what could have been rather righteous anger or vengeance - despite what looked like a very painful betrayal by his betrothed, he just was going to quietly dismiss her. However, Joseph had an open heart and spirit, and, like the biblical hero of Joseph in the Old Testament, God communicated to Joseph in his dreams. Do you know how many times we read of God sending angels to communicate with Joseph in a dream? Three times! And on this first occasion of a divine dream, he is told not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife because her child was conceived by the Holy Spirit; she is going to have a Son and he is to name him Jesus. Joseph wakes up from this dream and has faith that something miraculous - actually impossible - was happening. And, like Mary and the other saints, Joseph obeys what God commands despite how the clear challenging it is.

Joseph is a model to all those dads - those fathers that choose to marry and take on the role of dad or stepdad to children that are not his own. Throughout history much is made about fathers having children to pass on their genetics and name, but in contrast, there are those men who, like Joseph, for the sake of love, choose to raise children that are not their own biologically. The patron and model of this kind of fatherly love for all such dads is St. Joseph. We need dads like Joseph on this earth.

But St. Joseph never makes this calling about himself - he is there always to simply support Mary and Jesus and their calling. He shows true sacrificial love. Because after this act of marrying Mary and taking on the role of dad to Jesus, Joseph has another dream from God and is told to flee his home and go to Egypt to protect Jesus, whose life is threatened by King Herod's and his command to kill all baby boys under age 2. So, Joseph again, in faith, obeys and simply acts - he leaves his homeland, all his family and friend, his job, and he moves far away to protect his wife and child. He saves Jesus' life and protects Mary once again.

In a dream to return when it is safe - and then what does Joseph spend his time doing? Does he draw attention? Do something flashy? No - he just works as a humble, honest, but stable carpenter, providing for his family, and no doubt teaching Jesus these carpentry skills. Joseph also ensures that Jesus is raised in the Jewish faith with devotion to God. We know this because we read of Joseph taking Jesus, with Mary, to the temple after his birth in observance of the law to dedicate him, we read of Joseph taking the family to visit Jerusalem every year at Passover to observe this festival, and we read of Jesus learning the law and engaging with the rabbis like at age 12 and that Jesus, "increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and others." I mean, Joseph is just providing Jesus a simple and stable life in faith.

After this, we hear nothing more about Joseph in the Bible in Jesus' later life - leading many to believe that he was older and had died. We don't know - it's just quiet on this front. A simple and humble life lived in faithfulness to God.

Now it is amazing to think of the cosmic significance of Joseph and his role -that in just being a good dad and husband - in being willing to raise Jesus as his son - he helped support Jesus' calling and mission to save the whole world. We cannot and should not under-estimate our lives here on earth -even when they may appear less than glamorous or significant- because just living a faithful life of faith, quietly living out the tasks given to us - in work and family life - can be the most important thing imaginable. Your day-to-day life lived in love - is incredibly valuable and important to God and to God's story. Living a life of faith - just doing the things God invites you to do - simple as they may seem - can and are the very catalyst for bringing God's Kingdom here on earth.

Our task this Advent is a simple but profound one - to live faithfully - listening and preparing for whatever daily task or calling God gives us. Like St. Joseph, we may never know the immense difference and value our lives may have on those around us - or even the world. Being faithful in the little things, like Joseph, leads to us being faithful in

the big things - and this is how God's kingdom spreads - this is how the Good News is made manifest in our world - this is how God transforms this world and saves us all. This is how God - Emmanuel, comes to be with us at Christmas. Thanks be to God!