

<b>Series:</b> The Invitation	<b>Reference:</b> <i>Matthew 1:20-25</i>	<b>Title:</b> Joseph's Peace	<b>Date:</b> 12.15.2019
<b>Website Writeup:</b> Joseph seems to find peace in acting in faith, and in doing so becomes an image of godly love. Let's explore this largely silent characters contribution to the Christmas story.			

## COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

### Memory Verse for this Series

*Romans 6:23*

*For the wages of sin is death,  
but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Today we'll be looking at Joseph as the surrogate father of Jesus, exploring this largely silent characters contribution to the Christmas Story.

Fatherhood can seem a thankless job. Dads are often in the background as a family's silent stable force. As a quiet guy my dad is a strong foundation, although everything he does isn't always outwardly noticeable. Fathers are like the background music track of life. You're not always aware of it until it's gone. Did you ever watch a movie without a soundtrack? Boring!

There are statues of Mary on every Italian Catholic lawn across north Jersey, but statues of Joseph - NADA! Sort of like when a guy makes a touchdown in the end zone & turns to the camera & says, "Hi Mom!" But what about dad?

Although we know little about Joseph, what we do know reveals a humble obedient man willing to sacrifice for his family & to play a willing part in the story of God. Father's say yes to their calling. Joseph was of that sort, one who found peace through saying YES to the Holy Spirits leading.

In Luke, Joseph's only mentioned as a background note. When the census was called, it says in Luke 2:4... *Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house & line of David.* And we know the Messiah was prophesied to come in the line of David. When the shepherds come to worship Jesus, Joseph's mentioned in the scene in Luke 2:16. When Jesus was to be consecrated to the Lord, Joseph made sure it happened as it should (Lk 2:22-24). When everything had been taken care of, Joseph brings Jesus back home to raise him as his own (Lk 2:39-40) although he wasn't the father.

In doing what needed to be done **Joseph reflects the fatherhood of God, always in the background taking care of details.** We celebrate maleness & fatherhood found in people such as Joseph, exactly because they reflect God.

I remember when each one of my children were born in Indonesia. I'd gather documents, drive 10 hours to Jakarta from Lampung, crossing the Sunda Straits by ferry. I'd stand in line at the heavily barricaded US Embassy to get their birth certificates done as Kim managed the kids. When it came time to come home to America I'd get travel plans together toting my young family through the immigration process, airports & into taxis to get them safely back to Philly. Fatherhood is responsibility. People rely on you. Lives don't reach their potential without your advocacy & working for their benefit.

This week I became temporary surrogate father to two Central American kids. I've deloused them. Driven them to school. Learned about diabetes. Taken one to the ER already. Cooked for them. Bought presents. Shopped for clothing. Learned more Spanish, eaten more Spanish food, and listened to more Spanish Christmas music in a week than in a lifetime. It's not totally thankless though...I got this very colorful bracelet little Madahi made for me. I'm designated protector during this time of life for Luis & Madahi, and they certainly don't understand all that's being done on their behalf. As we don't understand all that God does on ours.

Good fathers fight & struggle for their families. Let's look today more closely at Joseph's struggle for his...

In Matthew 1:15-16, Joseph's mentioned first in the genealogy of Christ. All these small vignettes & factoids of Joseph serve to reveal a man who, although silent, was vital to God's plan. He's an image of God the Father in that way, quiet, in the background fighting for his family. Matthew gives us a bit more than Luke, which rounds out our picture of Joseph & his fatherly love. An image of a father protecting his family in the face of intense communal pressure.

Matthew 1 states, before they were able to consummate their marriage, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. And Joseph was devout & faithful to the law of God, like Simeon we looked at last week. Yet he didn't want to disgrace Mary publicly, so he planned to divorce her quietly.

Turn with me to p657 in your church Bibles. This is Matthew chapter 1, first chapter of the New Testament. We're looking at 1:20-25 where it says...<sup>20</sup>*But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream & 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. <sup>21</sup>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."*

<sup>22</sup>*All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: <sup>23</sup>"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").*

<sup>24</sup>*When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. <sup>25</sup>But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.*

**Like Jesus, Joseph willingly takes on his families shame before the world.**

Joseph had a clear choice of quietly divorcing Mary which would've centered disgrace on her. He could've saved face. But, he chose to believe & be obedient to this message, and to share in disgrace with his wife. And Joseph had to believe that this child was something pretty special to do so. He'd give him the name Jesus, the Greek form of Joshua which means 'the Lord saves', 'salvation', or 'Jehovah is salvation'. Think of the spiritual strength that must've taken to do so.

This situation reminds me of Indonesian village life. Not a thing gets by in a small Muslim village - everyone's business is on full display in a small tight knit community. The same would be true here - Joseph will forever be known as the guy who married the girl who slept around in a highly moralistic religious community.

**Like Jesus, Joseph says yes to God & fulfills biblical prophecy.** When Herod was on the warpath to find this Messiah & destroy him, Joseph steps in to protect as an angel appears to him in another dream directing him to take mother & child, escape to Egypt, and remain there until directed further. Joseph did that, fulfilling the prophecy which said, "*Out of Egypt I called my son.*" (Mt 2:13-15).

And after the threat had passed, Joseph was obedient to yet a third message which came after Herod died in a dream to Joseph. He's told to go to Israel, but on the way is again redirected in another dream to Galilee, which led him to Nazareth. Again to fulfill prophecy the Messiah would be called a Nazarene (Mt 2:19-23). God's story's unfolding & Joseph is one who accepts the invitation to be a part of it, saying YES at every turn. He seems to have peace, reacting in faith & obedience, facing adversity.

Consider a young man, betrothed to a teenage girl he probably loved & wanted to marry. Living in a small village where even mundane news spreads by lunchtime, his fiancé's pregnant - that news traveled fast! How would he have felt? The torment he must've endured before the angel visited him the first time. Thoughts of her infidelity flooding his mind. Running through all the men in town, trying to figure out who it was who betrayed him with his fiancé before receiving his direction. Wouldn't you have felt shame?

I watched a show once where in a moment of weakness a wife kissed the neighbor next door. The hubby found out, walked next door & punches the guys lights out. Jealousy's powerful & isn't necessarily a bad thing - it originates in love. It's a sign that we love deeply. God's jealous of us in the same way. When the husband in my TV show came back home he found his wife was happy he'd punched out the neighbor - it showed her how much he cared since he was normally quietly unemotional - but that didn't mean he didn't love. Joseph was going to divorce her, emotion would've dictated such a response, and his jealousy would've been a sign of love. Real story of real people going through real difficulties experiencing real emotion.

**Like Jesus, Joseph's willing to suffer on behalf of others.** Imagine the shame his family felt. The weight he bore for this out-of-wedlock pregnancy. Then, he's confronted in a dream by an angel & does an about face to protect his bride. A fish against the flow, fighting the wisdom of elders & a whole town! Arguing for his bride, he must've felt he was taking on the world in a society where decisions were made by tradition & a strict moral code! And Joseph shares in the shame fighting for his wife & child. Joseph said yes to the Holy Spirit & found peace in difficulty.

The male head of a household would've been sufficient to report for the Roman census. He didn't have to take Mary & the baby with him. Did he take Mary to Bethlehem to birth the child away from the judgmental stares in Nazareth? Maybe. Another act of fatherly love & protection.

They were poor. Wealth would've found a room in Bethlehem. They gave the most meager sacrifice when consecrating Jesus. Imagine the cold night air in the stable/cave, the stench & unsanitary conditions. Imagine the fear a young couple would have giving birth to their first child in such conditions. Life wasn't great for Joseph or Mary. In contrast, Elizabeth's pregnancy was probably celebrated by the whole town. An old woman, barren for so long. Contrast that to the birth of Jesus in a stable with Joseph & his wife shunned by everyone around them. **Philip Yancey said, "Nine months of awkward explanations, the lingering scent of scandal – it seems that God arranged the most humiliating circumstances possible for his entrance, as if to avoid any charge of favoritism." ("The Jesus I Never Knew", p32) Jesus grew up under a cloud of questionable paternity - a cloud which surely lingered over Joseph.**

**Think about how strongly his manhood would be called into question sheltering & protecting this young wife who was found to be 'miraculously' pregnant. Who believed that? Joseph fought for his wife & child at cost of reputation & comfort. A jealous husband who loved his wife & child well.**

Models are important & Joseph is one. In each model we see something of the character of God reflected back to us. **Joseph's a reflection of God's jealous love towards us.** Oprah once said she'd had it with Christianity when the preacher talked of God being jealous. As a matter of fact the Scriptures even ascribe the name 'Jealous' to God in Ex 34:14...<sup>14</sup>*Do not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.* And in Dt 4:24 it says, <sup>24</sup>*For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.*

Oprah was looking at a tree instead of the forest. It's good God's jealous! It communicates how strong His love is for us. It's reassuring. He desires us greatly. He fights for us. Sin & death won't have the final say. God, as lovingly jealous, goes to any length to take on our shame & fight to have us back. He punched the neighbor's lights out when He went to the cross!

**Reflecting Jesus, Joseph redeems Mary & Jesus in society, and takes their shame away.** In Leviticus there are prescriptions for Aaron in making atonement for the sin of Israel before the Lord. Turn to p79 In your church Bibles to Leviticus 16:7–10.

*It says, <sup>7</sup>Then he is to take the two goats & present them before the Lord at the entrance to the tent of meeting. <sup>8</sup>He is to cast lots for the two goats - one lot for the Lord & the other for the scapegoat. <sup>9</sup>Aaron shall bring the goat whose lot falls to the Lord & sacrifice it for a sin offering. <sup>10</sup>But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the Lord to be used for making atonement by sending it into the wilderness as a scapegoat.*

One goat was sacrificed as a sin offering communicating sin's paid for by death. The second is where we get the term 'scapegoat' - where the shame of our sin is placed upon the goat & it's sent away into the wilderness. Both foreshadow the atoning work of Christ on the cross. A picture of how far God's willing to go for us. He'll take our shame, & send it away. The God of the universe would die in his cheating spouses place, although she deserved to be on that cross, and not Him.

**Reflecting the fatherhood of God, Joseph protects & does for his family what they can't do themselves.** Turn to Exodus 14:10-14, on p48 of your church Bible. This gives a picture of our God who's willing to fight for his people as the Israelites are being hunted down in the desert by Pharaoh & his army. They're defenseless & cornered, but it says...<sup>10</sup>*As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified & cried out to the Lord.*

Skipping down to v13, then Moses says to them...*"Do not be afraid. Stand firm & you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. <sup>14</sup>The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still."*

It's a picture of grace. Of God doing for us what we can't do ourselves. An image of us cornered in sin & God fighting for us. Sin's nipping at our heels. A parasite eating at us from the inside out. Not something we can do anything about, can't wash it off, or crush it. Medicine must be ingested to neutralize the toxicity within & God provides that by coming into the world at Christmas. He fights for us not only in physical ways - but in the area of our sin.

We know the ending of that story, the army's destroyed as Pharaoh's army tries to cross over the dry sea bed after Israel had already passed through safely & Pharaoh's army's drowned. Not one of Pharaoh's army survived.

I have a friend, Sherri. Growing up every night was a nightmare. Nightly, her two older brothers would sneak into her room & violently do as they please. Even when she chained her door shut, they'd come up & through the window. She met Jesus during this time, and gave her life to Him. Then when they came again in the night, she sat up in bed & screamed the name of Jesus. Strangely, her brothers left & never did it again.

Jesus fought for her. The Lord is jealous for you. The Lord loves you. That's what the Christmas story tells us. God's a father full of burning passion & desire for his children - willing even to the point of entering our world in vulnerability, taking on the shame of our sin & dying in order to conquer its power.

When you see the picture of the goats in Leviticus, understand - the sin being paid for was Israel's own. Scripture teaches, we're all full of sin & if we deny that, the Truth isn't in us. One difference in Joseph & Mary's story is that Mary had done nothing wrong. **And as a result, Joseph reflects Jesus in that his shame was unfounded. Jesus took on our sin although he was totally innocent - even the two criminals crucified to his right & left acknowledged that fact.**

**As Christ's bride, we're like Israel in need of a priest to take the shame of our true sin away. A sacrifice & a scapegoat. We've succumbed to sin. We cheat on our holy spouse & despite it all, He still loves us, taking our true shame upon Himself, crucifying it on the cross.**

**We're undeserving of grace, but that doesn't mean we aren't worthy of it.** Since worthiness is defined by who owns the object & how much they're willing to pay for it. God is Creator, He owns us. And Christmas reveals how far He's willing to go to pay for us, which gives us worth. You have a jealous God. You've been kidnapped, and He's willing to pay the ransom to get you back no matter how high the cost. Joseph found peace in his calling. He didn't have to forgive Mary, and she did nothing wrong. But he did choose to walk in her shame along with her. We are the Bride of Christ. He's our groom who goes even farther than Joseph by forgiving His adulterous bride, and taking on her shame. A God who fights for you...all you need to do is be still & receive His love.

Kids don't have to do anything to be loved. They just accept it. They realize the sacrifices made for them at some level, but they'll never understand the extent to which a parent goes. We have, in our church, a family who's adopted 3 children. Kids taken in only because they were worthy of love. They too can't fully understand all their adoptive father & mother have paid to redeem their lives. God goes to even greater lengths still in the story of Christmas.

**Joseph reflects this same God who sometimes seems silent, but who protects & leads us in the story of redemption.** Who loves us to take on our shame although it's not His. Who walks with us through adversity, loss & pain. A Father who goes to any length to lead & protect His family.

If you've not said yes to Jesus yet, today could be the day. Say yes & find peace in adversity, find release from your shame, find the protection & love of your Heavenly Father today. Scripture says that all you have to do is believe in your heart, and confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord & you *will* be saved. Do that now if you haven't already. And for the rest, I hope this serves as a reminder of what Jesus has done, and is doing for you, although you may not recognize the totality of His sacrifice.