

**“It’s A Boy!” *Joseph Speaks***  
**Message for December 9, 2018**  
**North East United Methodist Church**  
**Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian**

Today, we celebrate the 2nd Sunday of Advent. Advent means “coming” or “arrival”. It is through the weeks of Advent, leading up to Christmas, we prepare. We prepare for His coming, His arrival, not only for the coming of a child a Bethlehem, but more importantly we prepare for Christ’s return. We prepare for “the second coming”...



...when we will stand before Jesus and He will judge wickedness, will prevail over every evil, will take His faithful home.

Therefore, we prepare our hearts for Christ’s arrival, not just 2000 years ago, but perhaps days from now. We spend time in self-examination, prayer, study. We forgive and reconcile relationships. We give and serve that others may experience God’s love. We prepare by putting our faith into action.

**PRAYER**

A simple carpenter.

As Americans we are star conscious. We like famous people. Paris Hilton goes to rural America; that becomes a T.V. series and makes someone millions of dollars. If somebody from our congregation goes to rural America, we call it a mission trip. But the point remains we like famous people. We are fascinated by the lives of Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, Prince William and Kate’s baby...



...the Robertson family or like Matthew and I one Monday night a few years back, we wanted to be in the stadium with RGII and Colin Kaepernick.



In fact, your pastor and his son became quite famous themselves that night. We were on ESPN Sports this past Monday night.



So many people are glued to Oprah and Dr. Phil and seek them out even in areas where they might not have any expertise, simply because they are famous. Heck, many of us wouldn't hesitate to take advice on our personal life issues from this guy.



Even as Christians, the opinions of Billy Graham, Chuck Colson, James Dobson, Rick Warren and others matter more to us than others.

We are drawn to the famous people in scripture; people who were at the center of the action like David and Moses, Peter and Paul, even Mary.

Yet, none of these people seem to be like us. You know...just normal fathers, mothers, children...everyday...going to work...pay the bills...struggle along...people. Perhaps that is why we have the fascination. Part of us yearns to be famous, to be in the limelight, to have our own television series, be adorned by millions, be sought after for advice,

write the next great Christian book, or experience, personally, the parting of the Red Sea or one of the many miracles experienced by the heroes of scripture.

Perhaps this is why God has Matthew introduce us to Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus.

**Matthew 1: 18-25 (NIV) –**

*This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.*

*But 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. 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.”*

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

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

Let’s think about Joseph for a few moments.



Joseph was somebody like us. One of the faces in the background. Joseph is introduced in Matthew 1: 16 as “*Joseph, husband of Mary.*” He was a simple tradesman, a carpenter. He doesn’t show up once Jesus goes into public ministry. He doesn’t write a book on “How to Raise a Messiah.” There are no miracles that follow him in his life. He understood little of what was happening, and he didn’t even get to see the fruit of his obedience by witnessing Jesus’ public ministry. In our Christmas plays, Joseph stands silently beside Mary, a quiet presence, an unknown voice.

That is one of the many things I enjoyed watching the film, “The Nativity.”



In that film, one gets to see more of Joseph, to get a sense of his fears, frustrations, and great faith, to see a greater picture of the man who was willing to step into the “biggest shoes” ever asked of a man, to be the earthly father to the Son of God and to protect the mother of the Savior.



We have much to learn from Joseph. Joseph is somebody like us, not in the limelight, not famous, not at the center, but on the sidelines, making a living, dealing with everyday issues; yet, his reaction to the news, “It’s A Boy!” challenges and instructs us.

Joseph hears “It’s A Boy!” and reacts with Courage.

### **Courage.**

Joseph showed tremendous courage. In Israel at the time, engagements were binding premarital contracts leading to marriage. During the year of engagement, the couple behaved like husband and wife (except that they did not live together or have sex). To break off such an engagement, a divorce was required. Furthermore, as stated in Deuteronomy 22 and Leviticus 20, sexual unfaithfulness during this engagement period was considered adultery, the penalty for which was death by stoning.

When Joseph found out Mary was pregnant, he knew the ramifications. He knew that Mary’s very life was in danger and decided to divorce her quietly, yet the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and explained that Mary was carrying God’s Son. Joseph showed great courage in marrying Mary, facing personal embarrassment and being socially ostracized. Joseph believed God and married a young girl carrying a child that was not His own.

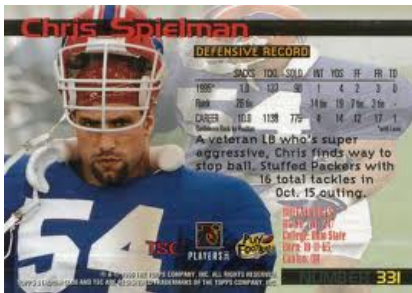


Later, Joseph protected his wife and child during the early life-threatening years, escaping to Egypt from Herod and returning to Israel years later.

C. Raymond van Pletsen writes, *“Courage is cultivated by learning that God is more powerful than any threat that may come our way...Joseph had cultivated his relationship with God and so he was ready when the day of testing came.”*

Pletsen goes on to say, *“Children Need Courageous Dads! Children want to be able to boast ‘My Dad’s bigger than your Dad!’ It gives them security to know that their Dad is brave enough and strong enough to protect them. Wives Long For Courageous Husbands! One of the greatest statements of a husband’s love is when he protects her regardless of the cost to himself.”*

Furthermore, Pletsen writes, *“God is still at work creating courageous men like Joseph. Men with moral courage and manly courage. Chris Spielman is such a man.”*



*When Chris Spielman played for the Buffalo Bills, he was everything a middle linebacker should be: tough, strong and smart, with passion, total commitment and loyalty to the game. He played the entire 1995 season with a torn pectoral muscle that he sustained in the season opener.*

*But the game took a distant second place in this thinking during the 1998 season. He chose to stay home. He cooked, took care of his kids, and cared for his wife—by choice. Stephanie, Chris’s wife, was struggling through the stark reality of breast cancer. Surgery, chemotherapy and nausea were Stephanie’s opponents. During her fight Chris was at her side; his actions supported his "family before job" credo.*

*Asked by a reporter from the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle if he'd consider a return to the Bills late in the season, Spielman said, "I'd play in a heartbeat, but what kind of man would I be if I backed out on my word to her? I wouldn't be a man at all."*

*Football fans saw Spielman as a man because of his aggressive, leave-it-all-on-the-field style of play. But what really makes him a man? It's his personal sacrifice and unending commitment and loyalty to his wife."*

Every Christmas we hear a story of a very courageous man who quietly stands in the background of the "greatest story ever told." We are called to stand tall like Joseph and be men and women of courage, stepping out in faith, knowing God will walk with us, will protect us as we stand firm and protect those around us, stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves, and stand firm in what we believe, professing Christ in a culture that ignores Him.

Joseph hears "It's A Boy!" and reacts with obedience.

### **Obedience.**

In Matthew 1: 18-25 we read how the angel of the Lord came to Joseph 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. 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."***

Joseph responds by being obedient.



He does not divorce Mary and instead faces public humiliation. He has no sexual relations with Mary until after the birth of Jesus. He follows God's direction and names the child Jesus. He gets up in the middle of the night and takes his family on a cross-country, hazardous journey to Egypt. After making a life there, he gets up in the middle of the night, at God's command, and returns to Israel.

Through Mary's obedience Jesus was born. Through Joseph's obedience, Jesus was adopted as a true son in the line of David, fulfilling the many prophecies spoken by God through the prophets, including Isaiah in 2 Samuel 7: 11-17, that *"a descendent of David would sit on his throne forever."*

Nathanael Emmons writes, *“Obedience to God is the most infallible evidence of sincere and supreme love to him.”*

Joseph clearly loved God and obeyed God, taking Mary as his wife, even if it meant public humiliation. He is an example to each one of us as God calls on us to “step out” and serve Him, to make changes in our lives, to refocus and change our priorities, to think of others before ourselves. Joseph teaches us that we are called to obedience and through our obedience we will experience God and be blessed in ways we cannot even begin to imagine.

Lastly, Joseph, when he heard the news, “It’s A Boy!” reacted with humility.

The scriptures tell us that Jesus did not consider *“equality with God,”* but instead *“made himself nothing”*...



... *“humbled himself,”* and became *“obedient to death, even death on a cross.”* Joseph did the same, not to death, but risking everything.

Joseph was, in many ways, **Invisible but never Unimportant.**

We want to be the center of attention. Or we feel because our lives are ordinary and not famous that we don’t really amount to anything. Yet, God wants us to not only be humble, but to also recognize that we are vitally important.

Joseph had a background role in the “greatest story ever told.” We find him standing next to Mary.



We never see him speak. We need to look at a life like Joseph's because Joseph is somebody like us. He is one of the faces in the background. Yet, Joseph's role, as ours, is vitally important.

Rev. John Schmidt writes, **“There might be invisible Christians, but there are never unimportant ones.”**

How many people does it take to make Sunday morning go off without a hitch? It tried to think about the many invisible people behind the scenes to create a worship service, to make Sunday morning run smoothly, so people might hear about Christ. There's the praise band and the pianist/organist of course...and there's the pastor...but we are up front and center. There's Laura Young, who works all week getting music together and running rehearsals. There's Joe and Robert and Walter and others who volunteer the sound board, run the computer. There are those who decorate the altar, create what the sanctuary will look like, then there are the greeters, like Chuck, welcoming people at the door. There are the ushers handing out bulletins and those who come in the office midweek and help make and fold bulletins. Then there's the Trustees who tirelessly take care of the building, making sure there's heat. We can't forget the custodians, without whom things would be dirty and there would be no paper towels in the bathrooms. Then there's those who come in early to prepare snacks for fellowship. We can't forget the nursery workers, children's church volunteers, and Sunday school teachers. Individuals practicing and doing monologues, singing special music, individuals ordering flowers, men and women praying for the church.

Many people involved in putting together the service this morning are invisible, but they are so important.

God uses regular people with regular lives and so we need to be reminded that there is never anyone that's unimportant to God and there is never anyone that's unimportant to God's plans.



Like Joseph we are called to be humble and see how we can play an important, though maybe *behind the scenes* role in building the kingdom of God.

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In Jerry Jenkins book,  Holding Heaven, Jenkins writes about the birth of Christ through the perspective of Joseph. In one section of the book, Joseph is speaking to the baby Jesus, about His birth, as he cradles him in his arms.

*“Though I had known Your mother to be uncommonly devoted to God and the Holy Scriptures, who would have ever dreamed that my wife would be chosen for such a singular role? As for me, frankly, I may never shed my feeling of unworthiness. To serve as her husband, to be Your earthly father, to be so honored as to be assigned to name You, my child and my Savior...”*

*“Let me tell You, precious one, You did not appear to have been sent from God. Red and squalling, You should have attracted the attention of the revelers in the crowded streets. But apparently no one heard You but us.*

*“Your mother gently wiped You dry and wrapped You tightly in cloth, enfolding You to her chest to keep you warm. Meanwhile I formed a nest of hay for You in a box made of wood. Soon the rigors of the trip and the labor caught up with Your mother, and she asked me to take You. She could no longer keep her eyes open.”*

*“When You settled into my arms, I felt as if I were holding heaven...”*



Next time you look at a Nativity Scene this Christmas season and see Joseph standing in the background, think of his courage and step out in faith.

Next time you look at a Nativity Scene this Christmas season and see Joseph standing in the background, think of his obedience and listen for God’s voice.

Next time you look at a Nativity Scene this Christmas season and see Joseph standing in the background, think of his humility and recognize that the background role you may have to play, like Joseph, may not always be acknowledged by others but will have eternal consequences.

And imagine, for a moment, Joseph, having heard the news, “It’s a Boy!” and having trusted God, looking down and “*holding heaven.*” Amen.