

## **JOSEPH**

Matthew 1:18-25

Joseph—he is often the forgotten part of the Christmas story. After all, he was not the parent. Mary was the mother of Jesus. God is the Father, as the Holy Spirit brought about the conception of the Son of God in Mary. But if we look at this movie clip from The Christmas Story we see how crucial Joseph's role was.

Mary could not take care of Jesus on her own. Women couldn't get a job, run a business, or own property. They were dependent on a male relative. What's more Joseph would have every right to claim that Mary had committed adultery since she was engaged to Him and had gotten pregnant with someone else. We see how good a guy Joseph was, one who loved Mary so he was willing to release her from the engagement so she could legally marry the real father.

But there was no human father. Even if Mary could be supported by her family, she and her child would live in shame. And how would Jesus have been born in Bethlehem as our Old Testament lesson from Micah prophesied?

Then Joseph took an incredible risk. He took Mary as his own wife and acted as if Jesus was his own son. That not only meant taking care of a child that was not his, but not really being able to be a husband to Mary until after the child was born. People would be able to count the months. Nazareth was a far smaller town than any in even rural Iowa in that everyone knew everyone else's business.

There was more. Joseph would have gone to Bethlehem for the census even if he didn't take Mary. But his life would not be at risk because Herod would not have been looking for a "new king," whom he feared would take his place. Joseph would not have had to become a refugee who fled to Egypt to protect Jesus. He would not after returning to Bethlehem after Herod's death had to flee back to Nazareth in fear of Herod's son, Archilaeus. He could have avoided all that hassle, all the responsibilities of taking care of a boy who was not his own. He could not have had to search three days in panic throughout Jerusalem that Passover to look for Jesus. All that could have been avoided if He hadn't listened to God.

Then what happens to Joseph? He and Mary had other children who are mentioned in the Gospel. Two of them, James and Jude, wrote letters in the Bible where they introduce themselves as "the brother of our Lord." But when Mary and her other children appear in the Gospels as Jesus began His ministry, no mention is made of Joseph. Mary is there when Jesus died and is part of the early Christians who sees Jesus after He rose from the dead. But there is no mention of Joseph. He is dead. That is why Jesus from the cross had His disciples John take care of Mary. She is a widow. Her son can no longer take care of her. This means that Joseph never saw Jesus in His public ministry. He never heard of His miracles, the crowds who followed Jesus, the events in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and Good Friday and Easter. Jesus told His disciples, "Many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you seem but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it." Mary got to see and experience that. She died

knowing for sure that Jesus was the real Messiah, the fulfillment of God's promise. But Joseph died before all of that. All he had was God's promise, God's Word.

Our lives can seem a lot more like Joseph's than Mary's. We don't see God's plan worked out so carefully in our lives. We go to work, raise our families, pay our bills and taxes, and fight illness. We don't see Jesus doing miracles, preaching like no one else, rising from the dead. All we have is God's Word, His promises. "Your sins are forgiven." "Baptized into the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." "This is My body given for you. This is the new testament in My blood shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." "Whoever believes in Me has eternal life." "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live. And he who lives and believes in Me shall never die." We don't see Jesus alive, risen from the dead. Like Joseph we pass our days with just trust in His Word.

Yet look what happened because Joseph did trust. All he got to see was Jesus impressing the scholars in the temple when He was 12. But because He obeyed God, Jesus grew up to be the Savior of the world. No, God didn't have to have Joseph. He could have found any number of other ways to care for Mary and Jesus, but He chose Joseph. Because of Joseph Mary's life was spared from shame and even death from accusations of adultery. Someone was there to provide for Mary and Jesus. Mary got to Bethlehem so Jesus could be born there to fulfill the Scripture. Jesus would be seen as a direct descendant through Joseph of David. Joseph could save Jesus from Herod by going to Egypt. After Herod died, Joseph would take Mary and Jesus back to Bethlehem to fulfill the prophecy, "Out of Egypt I will call My Son." Then Joseph took Mary and Jesus back to Nazareth to escape the threat of Herod's son and to fulfill the promise that Jesus would be from Nazareth and begin His ministry in the north, in Galilee. Because Joseph obeyed God, you and I are saved—we are restored to God.

And God can also work through you and me. No, He doesn't have to, but He chooses to do so. We never know how God can use our witness to affect others. The key is for us to listen to God as Joseph did. What does God tell us to do? There are the Ten Commandments. And those commandments are summarized by Jesus when He said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your strength, and all your mind: and "Love your neighbor as yourself." As Jesus told us, our neighbor is not just our family and friends, it is all the people God has put into our lives. He also said, "Love one another as I have loved you." Hannah McCulloh, our coordinator of international student ministry, first got involved in that ministry as a freshman here at ISU when she heard another student talk about it during a stewardship presentation. A Mexican pastor, who our students met on a spring break servant event working in Juarez, told them that he had first come to the church because of "Queso" which is "cheese." He had been the captain of the guards at the prison for the whole province of Chihuahua. The church was distributing cheese to the poor. This led him to get involved and eventually train to be a pastor.

No matter how small or insignificant our actions may seem, God can use them to do His work, just as He used Joseph.