



Sermon Notes: Steve Stanis,

08 Dec 2024

“The Glory of the Saviour; Joseph”

Readings: 2 Samuel 7:4-17, Matthew 1:18-25

Introduction:

This Advent we embark on a journey of reflection, as we celebrate the upcoming birth of our Saviour, Jesus. We stand on the precipice of a glorious occasion, and our hearts echo with the anticipation of the miraculous.

Today, let us ponder the magnitude of God’s love; wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a humble manger.

We are thankful that the Almighty chose humility, to come **to us**, to share our humanity and bring salvation. We think today about the glory of the Saviour. Let us join the heavenly chorus in proclaiming **glory** to God in the highest, and peace on Earth.

As we have heard from Matthew chapter 1, we are in anticipation of the big event that has been foretold through the prophets; the coming of the promised one.

Matthew tells of events from the perspective of Joseph. Unassuming Joseph. Even the sheep get more lines than he did! Not being “sheepish”, Joseph’s name means “He will add” or “God will add”. And yes He does!

Remember, we are focussing on the New Testament Joseph, not the other one in the Old Testament. On first look, Joseph’s only role is portrayed as an usher to Mary. But there’s much more to the Joseph figure. The heavenly Father deliberately chose him to be the earthly father of Jesus.

Joseph’s Family

Matthew 1:1–17 gives us Jesus’ family line, from Abraham to Joseph.

Two figures stand out in this list: Abraham and David.

- Two thousand years before Jesus, God made a promise to Abraham: *all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through your nation of offspring (Genesis 12:3)*. In Jesus, God kept that promise.
- One thousand years before Jesus, God made a promise to David. When David became king of Abraham’s nation, God promised to raise up one of David’s descendants to rule over an eternal kingdom.

(2 Samuel 7:16) says,

‘Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.’

Jesus was the fulfilment of that promise: the anointed one, the Messiah, who would rescue the people and establish an eternal kingdom.

A descendant of Abraham and David, Joseph was qualified to be the earthly father of Jesus because of **his family**. But it’s more than just his family that makes Joseph a man worth remembering. It’s also his *faith*.

Joseph's Faith

In Matthew 1:18–25, Joseph displays God-pleasing character and unique faith, expressed in two ways.

1. His Example of Balancing Righteousness and Love:

The Bible tells us here in (V19) that Joseph was “a **righteous man**.” To be “*righteous*” means to be in “*right standing*”; to be right with God and in right standing with other people. Joseph was a “*righteous*” man — that is, he wanted to do the right thing before God.

He is faced with the conundrum of his fiancé, Mary, who is with child. He didn't know at the time that this was by the Holy Spirit. For all of human history, there was only one explanation for this.

In Jewish culture, when you were “*betrothed*” to someone, it was a strong bond; you basically had to be “*divorced*” from it — which was what Joseph was going to do.

When it says “*he planned to send her away*” the word for “*send her away*” (V19) in Greek is “*apolusai*”, which is the same word Jesus uses for “*divorce*” in (Matthew 5).

So, Joseph was going to do the right thing. Mary was found (or so he thought) to be immoral, and so he was going to do the right thing and sever that relationship. He was a **righteous man**, who had godly, righteous standards. But Joseph was not only an example of a man of righteousness and holiness, he was also an example of offering dignity and love. He was a **compassionate man**.

The second part of (V19) says

“and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly.”

I think this is an important side of Joseph for us to see as well. Not only was he a righteous man, but he was also a **merciful man**. He didn't drag her out into the streets, like John 8 tells us that the scribes and the Pharisees did with the woman who was caught in the act of adultery. There was going to be nothing like that from him. He didn't want to “*disgrace*” her. He “*planned to send her away (or divorce her) secretly.*”

This says a lot about Joseph. He was indeed righteous. There was no hint of arrogance or self-righteousness. It would have been easier to deny this and send Mary away. There was a cost for Joseph but he was willing to accept this and do what he believed was right, regardless of what others thought or probably said. He did want to do the right thing, and uphold a holy, righteous standard for his family. But he also cared about Mary, and he was not going to just throw her out on the streets to be a public spectacle.

He had a balance of both holiness, and of love; of Godly standards, and yet a **man offering dignity and concern**. I think one of the hardest things in the world is to keep a balance of both things: to hold to the righteous standards that God has given us in His Word, and yet not to hold them coldly, but to genuinely love and care about the people who are involved. Keeping love and truth in balance is one of the most challenging tasks of the individual Christian life, and of the Christian church.

We need to pray fervently that God would help us to do that; and we can learn better how to keep that balance by following the example of Joseph here in Matthew 1. When we are righteous and merciful we reflect the glory of the Saviour.

2. His Example of Obedience:

In Matthew 1:24 it says,

“and Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him ...”.

Then God enters the scene. When God speaks in a dream to Joseph about the identity of Jesus, Joseph, like everyone else who follows Christ, recognises the voice and goes forward.

Joseph's adoption and protection of Jesus is simply the outworking of his belief. When the angel told him to take Mary as his wife, despite every objection any natural person might have had, V24 says he awoke *"and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him."* He was obedient.

V25 says *"He called His name Jesus"*, just as he was told to do. Jesus, the angel declared, would save the people from their sins and Joseph believed it. He demonstrated his obedience to God by naming the child Jesus.

The choices Joseph made paved the way for God's outworking of love. Joseph is a great example of what obedience to God looks like. Just like Joseph, we need to obey, even when it is difficult for us, when we don't understand why. Joseph didn't understand everything about the virgin birth — but he accepted it and obeyed. Joseph was a **humble man**.

In the same way, there are going to be things we do not understand about God's Word or His work in our lives. Major life events or hardship, tests a person's limits, but also provides the means of personal growth, empathy, self-knowledge, and deeper reliance upon God. Joseph exemplified these qualities authentically. Through his own values, self-control, compassion, and sense of purpose, he was found **trustworthy** by God. Like Joseph, we need to display humility before God, as we trust Him.

We need to always allow the work of the Holy Spirit to teach us, transform us and trust that God is at work for good in our lives and in the world. Jesus said, *"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."* (John 14:15). He also said, *"Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord', and do not do what I say?"* (Luke 6:46). We aren't saved by our obedience. But if we know the grace of God by accepting Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, we are going to obey. When we obey, we reflect the glory of the Saviour.

Joseph, Faith Hero

Joseph took responsibility, sacrificed his reputation and wedded a vulnerable Mary. He did this because he trusted that Jesus was, who the angel said He was. While Joseph's **family** made him qualified to be the earthly father of Jesus, what stands out about Joseph, the man whom the heavenly Father chose to be Jesus's earthly father, is His **faith**. Joseph acted on his faith, putting God first and himself second.

Joseph may stand quietly in the background of the Christmas story, but that's precisely what makes him a hero of faith. When we are faithful, we reflect the glory of the Saviour.

New Testament scholar and missionary Kenneth Bailey writes of Joseph:

"In his cameo appearance, Matthew presents Joseph as a human being of remarkable spiritual stature. He possesses the boldness, daring, courage and strength of character to stand up against his entire community and take Mary as his wife. He did so in spite of forces that no doubt wanted her stoned. His vision of justice stayed his hand. In short, he was able to re-process his anger into grace."

This is the very work Jesus will do at the end of his life. Jesus too will re-process his pain and anger into the supreme act of grace, dying for those who have betrayed him. He too will remain silent as he is humiliated. As Isaiah 53:7 prophesies:

"He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth."

In this respect, Joseph is a forerunner of the greater things that his adopted son will do. He receives his calling from God, and he resolutely obeys.

Today's passage highlights the miraculous conception of Jesus, the dilemma of Joseph, the divine intervention through the angelic message and Joseph's faithful obedience to the will of God. Joseph's faithful obedience was the embodiment of what the future Teacher, Jesus, would preach.

Through the birth of Jesus, we witness the unfolding of God's justice through His saving grace. This is the glory of the saviour.

This baby was God coming to live in human history. This baby would be human; but he would also be God. He was God's Son, who had existed with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit since before the creation of the world.

In Jesus we see who God is. He's Father, Son, and Spirit. He's existed as this three-in-one God, in perfect love and relationship within himself, for eternity.

And the character of our God is love. He sent his son to be **with us**.

That's a God worth knowing. And that's the God who was going to be born to Mary; God the Son came to live on earth in perfect love and justice.

God's justice, through His saving grace, transcends earthly understanding and transforms lives.

May the Holy Spirit empower us to follow in Joseph's footsteps, embracing righteousness, mercy, love, and obedience in our journey of faith. When we live this way, we glorify our Saviour.

Amen!