**Joseph - A Righteous Man**

Based on [Matthew 1:18–25](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt1.18-25)

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Advent Midweek 1

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Joseph was an honorable and just man. Mary and Joseph were righteous people. It is important to the gospel writers to say this. It doesn’t mean that they were sinless. It doesn’t mean that they didn’t need salvation from God. It means that they were of such character that ***they feared God*** and ***wanted to do what was right in His sight***. They were humble; they didn’t try to be God’s equal or partner; they didn’t want to claim his glory for their own. They wanted to be his servants.

It was important that the parents of the Messiah were blameless, because Jesus himself would be slandered. And those who try to destroy reputations don’t particularly care about the truth, only about twisting people’s opinions. Had Joseph been a drunk, or an open despiser of God’s Law, Jesus’ opponents would have used that to malign Jesus. Instead, Joseph was a just man. So they mock his occupation, “Isn’t he the carpenter’s son?” And had Mary been known for sexual immorality, Jesus’ opponents could have confused many sincere people by saying that Jesus was conceived out of wedlock. But she was a virgin. Even though, that didn’t stop the pharisees from implying that Jesus was conceived in sexual immorality (John 8).

Now, if you had rotten parents God does not judge you guilty of their sins. Even so, you have to live with their bad name, and many people will have a lesser opinion of you because of them. So, the Holy Spirit decided that it needed to be absolutely clear that ***the Messiah was persecuted not for any actual sins of himself or his family...but that he was persecuted purely out of the envy and spite of those who would kill God if they had the chance.*** They did. But he was blameless, his parents were blameless, therefore he was the perfect unblemished sacrifice for sins.

Joseph was a just man. And Matthew writes that, when he found Mary to be with child by the Holy Spirit, he did not want to put her to shame publicly, but resolved to divorce her quietly. Why? **You no doubt have heard or understood that Joseph wanted to divorce Mary quietly *because he thought she had committed adultery*.** Virtually every English translation of the bible follows with this verse quoting the angel who said to Joseph, “Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.” This sounds like Joseph didn’t know that the child was conceived of the Holy Spirit, and that the angel came to tell him “Don’t worry, Mary didn’t commit adultery, it was the Holy Spirit”. But the original manuscript doesn’t have punctuation. Here’s how it is better said, “Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife because the Holy Spirit conceived in her”.

If Joseph was a just man, he would follow God’s Law given by Moses. And Moses said that adulterous women ***should*** be put to shame. Did Joseph think he was more merciful and honorable than God? By no means! It doesn’t make sense that a righteous man would prove his righteousness by disobeying Moses. ***But that’s exactly what one must think if Joseph believed Mary to be an adulteress.*** And another thing...if Joseph were righteous because he wanted to save her from shame, wouldn’t an honorable man also believe his betrothed if she pleaded her innocence in adultery. Wouldn’t he have mercy on her and rather than divorce Mary. Wouldn’t an honorable man marry her anyway, rather than quietly abandon her to deal with her shame herself? To think that Joseph believed Mary to be an adulteress, just doesn’t compute to the righteous reasoning of the Scriptures.

No, Joseph did not try and divorce Mary because he believed she’d committed adultery. Joseph thought to divorce Mary *precisely because the Holy Spirit conceived this child in her.* The simple fact is that Joseph feared marrying a woman whom the Holy Spirit had claimed for God’s sanctuary on earth. Wouldn’t you?

Joseph was a righteous man, and a righteous man fears God. A righteous man knows he cannot stand in the presence of the almighty God. When Isaiah the prophet found himself in the presence of God he said “**Depart from me for I am a man of unclean lips, and dwell amongst a people of unclean lips**”. When Peter realized that Jesus was God, he fell down on his knees and said **“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man.**” One of the most righteous qualities of a just man is that ***he knows he is a sinner and unworthy to invade God’s territory uninvited***. God in the burning bush told Moses to remove his sandals because he was standing on ground that was in the *revealed presence and glory* of God almighty. How much more caution and fear ought Joseph have before presuming to consummate a marriage with a woman whose womb has become the sanctuary of the living God?

In the OT, in God’s Temple, no one could go into the *Holy of Holies*--the room where God’s presence loomed with His Ark of the Covenant. Only the High Priest, once a year, had the divine invitation to do so. This was in order to cleanse the blood of the yearly sacrifice. Legend has it, the Israelites learned to tie a rope to the priests ankle, or around his waist, in case he accidently touched the ark and was struck dead. Think about it...no one could go in after him if he died, so they would have to pull him out by the rope. This might seem a strange concept *to us christians of the new covenant*. But the Scripture records people who died in the Old Testament because they came in unintentional contact with the ark--even good intentioned people like Uzzah in 2 Samuel 6. The scripture says that both Mary and Joseph found her to be with child from the Holy Spirit *before* he resolved to divorce her quietly. Joseph was of the Old Covenant. He understood the presence of God on earth was not veiled in human flesh...yet...but was raw and dangerous to sinners. *He also would not presume to invade the sanctuary of the Lord uninvited*. In this way, Joseph was a righteous man.

We are called to be righteous also, blameless and perfect. We are not perfected by the law or by our works, but by faith. **Faith** believes the word and promises of God. **Faith** is shown to be righteous when it repents and regrets sins, and when it obeys God’s commands with a willing heart. It does not think of equality with God something to strive for, but instead seeks to live under his reign, trusting in his forgiveness his goodness, his loving-kindness and mercy towards weak and frail sinful beings like us. Your faith, if it is sincere, out to be afraid of God, until He invites you not to be afraid.

The angels who appear to God’s people always say “Do not be afraid.” It is because the presence of God, and of his messengers is a fearful thing. *Be afraid of standing in the presence of God, until you are invited by Him not to be.*  He does not invite those who make a practice of sinning. Those who continue to live openly unrepentant lives, choosing the pleasures of the flesh and the glory of the world. He does not invite into His presence those who are in open defiance or negligence of God’s Word. They are lawless men and women, who are not righteous to enter the sacramental sanctuary. But faith is credited to you as righteousness.

Many years ago, I was on vicarage and working under a pastor who told me about a young woman who had started attending church. He said he told her that she is welcomed to worship and that the church is are happy to have her. But, he also told her that she must be confirmed in the true doctrine of the faith by one of our ministers before she can partake of holy communion at that altar. She did not scoff, she did not wince, she was not offended. She didn’t even show any confusion or misunderstanding. Instead, she said, “Oh Pastor, I would never presume to go to the Altar of God uninvited.” What simple faith.

Those who take the kingdom of God by violence are trespassers and robbers. Those who wait upon the Lord for an invitation to grace will never be put to shame, but receive their heart’s desire at His Advent.