

Rappahannock Christian Church – 12-19-10
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Advent Reading

- God told David and Solomon to build a permanent home for the tabernacle.
- At its best a permanent home means stability, rooted-ness and peace.
- In a world where stability and peace often seem elusive, how do we make a home for the Babe in our hearts?
- Are we centered?
- Are we able to reach out a hand to our neighbor even when there are differences between us?
- Can we repair the valleys that separate us from God, one another and the peace that is promised?

We light these candles as a prayer for peace. May the peace that passes all understanding come into our lives and into our world.

Let us pray together: Help us God to be a peace loving people. Give us the patience to deal with those who hold different opinions and those we do not understand. Help us stay focused on the lives You would have us live, instead of lives of self-interest. Prepare us to welcome the Prince of Peace as a fresh start. Transform us into the peaceful and loving people You Created us to be. AMEN.

Communion Meditation

There are plenty of names that we use for Jesus. Isaiah names a few of them in Isaiah 9. Perhaps most often we refer to Jesus as Lord. This implies that He is our Master and King. He is our Lord. At the same time, as we come to this Table we remember that Jesus is also our Servant. He says, “I come not to be served, but to serve” (Matt. 20:28). In what way is He our servant? He is the Suffering Servant. He serves us as no one else can. He alone could take our place, dying in our stead so that we could live. So we have this dichotomy; at the same time that it is right for us to view Him as our Servant, it is also right and appropriate that we should call Him “Lord,” for when we accept Him He becomes our Master and King.

I think we can ponder *both* of these things as we take these Elements. Jesus is our Servant. He has offered Himself to serve us. He is also our Lord and Master and we are to offer ourselves in His service. Let me read you these words from Matthew’s Gospel:

Matthew 26:26-29 – While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

“Joseph: What a Character!”

Matthew 1:18-15 - 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

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.

During this season we’re looking for inspiration. We want to be excited, touched. We are looking for something that will inspire us and we want something more than “The Elf Who Saved Christmas”!

As we look at the story of Jesus there is a long list of characters. Besides God, who is over all, there are many human characters who are used by God and who give us inspiration. We have Zacharias and Elizabeth who have faith and have a baby in their old age; Mary, of course, whose willingness to serve is of great inspiration. There are the shepherds. What were they doing when they saw the angel? Why nothing out of the ordinary, just tending their sheep. This tells us that God uses people in the normal situations of their lives. There was old Simeon, whom we met on the first week of Advent. This old man had waited in the temple to see the Messiah and he was so very glad when He held the Christ Child...

Joseph is one of these characters. He’s a guy I particularly like. What do we know about this man whom God chose to be Jesus’ earthly father?

Joseph isn’t even named in the Bible outside of the Gospels. Of these, Mark never mentions him and John only states, in regard to the incident that happened later at the synagogue in Nazareth, that the people asked, “Is this not Joseph’s son?” Luke takes the point of view of Mary in telling the story in his Gospel. Joseph is only mentioned indecently as her betrothed. So all of the information we have about Joseph comes from Matthew. There are a couple of other tidbits in chapters 2 and 3, but the passage that we have read is the largest view we have of the character who was the earthly father of the Lord.

We do know that he was a descendent of King David. He traveled to Bethlehem with Mary who was with child. He called Nazareth “home” and he was a carpenter. But was he a hard worker? Successful? Honest? We simply don’t know. The Scripture doesn’t tell us.

We know that Joseph had a relatively large family. Many people don’t realize that Jesus had 4 brothers who are named, and on one occasion we are told that his brothers and ALL his sisters came to him. This makes it seem to me like he surely had more than one sister, and likely more than two.

Joseph must have been a fairly religious man. We know that on the 8th day he was right there in the temple to have his new Son circumcised, just exactly as the law prescribed. We know that he kept the feasts. We are told of the incident when Jesus was twelve years old and the family traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. The Bible says that they went, “According to their custom.” Apparently they made the journey each year. We know that, even at a very young age, Jesus was well versed in the Scripture. On that same Passover trip, remember how the temple rulers were so surprised at His wisdom. Someone must have taught Him. Was it His father, Joseph?

But what about his character? Was Joseph a “good” man? Well, to find out about that we have to look Scripture for some clues.

The first clue we have is that He is obedient. We learn this because we have stories of three times when he receives a visit from an angel of God. In the first the angel announces Jesus birth and tells him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife. In the second the angel comes to Joseph to warn him in a dream to flee because Herod wants to kill the Baby. “Run! Flee!” the angel says. Then a third time, we have another angel who comes and tells him the danger is past and it’s okay to return to Nazareth. In all three of these cases Joseph immediately does what he is told by God.

Joseph is obedient.

Of course, we say. Of course anyone would obey if God sent an angel! But no! Don’t be so quick to think so! All throughout the Bible, and especially in the Old Testament, when God comes to people to ask them to do a job for Him, 99% of the time their response is just like that of Moses at the burning bush; “On no Lord. You’ve got that wrong. I’m not your guy. I can’t speak. I’m shy.....” On and on! They make excuse after excuse for why God should choose someone else.

But Joseph doesn’t do this.

Consider, for a moment, what his obedience meant. He had to take this pregnant girl and marry her and then they had to flee for their lives to a far place (Egypt). This was a serious hardship. But Joseph didn’t hesitate for a second. The most important thing for him is to do the will of God and if this meant hardship, well, so be it.

Joseph was also a righteous man.

Now we don't really use this word very much today, so let me talk about it a little bit. Apparently righteous means something else here in Matthew's Gospel than what we usually think of as "self-righteous". Maybe they should have said that he was "a good man" when they translated this word.

What indication do we have that this was a "good" man?

Well, here's what I think. I believe that before any angel ever appeared to Joseph, he had already decided to do the kind thing. When he first heard that Mary was pregnant and he knew he was not the father, Jewish law allowed him to publicly punish her and to declare his own self-righteousness. We are told, however, that this is not what he wished to do. Before the angel ever came to explain, he had already decided to act kindly toward Mary, putting kindness before religion and tradition.

Does this sound familiar? This is exactly the message that Jesus brings. Where do you suppose He learned this lesson? Should we be surprised that the very person whom God would choose to be His Son's earthly father would be a man who saw the importance of kindness?

So how about it, men, fathers? What is that which is most important to you as a man -- as a father -- as a Christian?

Joseph knew that God was uppermost in His life and that he would choose to obey God no matter what. And so we come to the title of our sermon today; "Joseph: What a Character!"

What a character, indeed!

Benediction

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. – Hebrews 13:20-21