

*Based on Matthew 1:18-25
Fourth Sunday of Advent*

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do 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 as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

Matthew 1:18-25

Here's a fun Bible fact, Joseph never speaks in the Gospels; we only ever learn what he is thinking or what he does but no spoken words of his are recorded!

For the most part, this time of year is focused, rightly, on the baby Jesus. And, of course, his mother, Mary, comes

in a close second. There are unnumbered paintings, carvings, and other works of art showing Mary and Jesus; the Madonna and child, and really, who doesn't love a picture of an adoring mother and newborn child?

But I feel a little for Joseph. His is really an impossible situation. His fiancé is pregnant, and he knows it's not from him. I imagine most men would feel hurt, heartbroken actually and probably also at least a little angry. It's hard to realize there's someone else in your beloved's life who has a place in her life that you feel should be yours but isn't and maybe never will be.

We make a big deal about the angel visiting Mary and her assent to bear the Son of God; songs are made of her beautiful response, and we wonder at the challenges she will face as His mother. But Joseph isn't allowed words; his answer to God's unique call on him is mute acceptance. Joseph merely puts his head down and carries forth.

And yet, from the briefest of glances allowed us of Jesus' childhood, we encounter a Joseph who loves and cares for the wondrous boy Jesus. We see a father who works to provide for his family and to teach this boy how to be a good and faithful man.

Most of us are never likely to be called by God into something so big as the Incarnation. We probably won't get "saint" added to our names or have churches named

after us. No, most of us aren't called to be the center of the story of God's redemption of humankind.

But most of us will have opportunities to play important parts in God's plan. We will have opportunities to, like Joseph, put our heads down, shoulders to the task, and just carry on providing steadfast love and support to others. And truth is, God's plan requires a lot more Josephs than Marys. There can only ever be one mother of Christ; but there is room for an endless number of persons willing to step up and put their love of Jesus to work in furthering the kingdom of God.