

Matthew 1:18-25
St. Marks Episcopal Church – December 11, 2022
Fourth Sunday of Advent A – Track 2
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Joseph, the Righteous Man

Today's Gospel places Joseph in the limelight. This is not something we are used to seeing. Normally, Joseph is not really in the picture. He is off to the side, a footnote to a lot of stories. But here he is front and center. He has the lead.

Many descriptions of Joseph state that he was a "righteous" man. A man of God. Very much in tune with God. But the news he receives that Mary is pregnant must have been quite unsettling.

In their day, a man and woman would be betrothed, engaged, for a year prior to their wedding. It was a commitment, a contract, to marry. Mary is pregnant, and not by him, so he has every right to break the contract. There are two ways he can do this. Publicly, in which Mary would be reviled and face punishment, or privately, where he would present Mary with a paper of divorce in front of two witnesses. Word would still get out and she would be shunned, but she wouldn't be punished. He decides to take the private approach.

Now, remember, Joseph is described as a righteous man. Therefore, he is open to receive messages from the Holy Spirit. In his dream he is told that Mary is not pregnant by man, but that she is carrying the son of God. He is to continue with the wedding and to name the child Jesus. He does so.

Joseph is righteous and a prayerful man. As a result, he is more open to receive messages from God. This is the first message he reacts to, but not the last. He also listens to the following and acts on them appropriately:

- go to Egypt because Herod wants to kill baby Jesus
- Herod has died so you can return
- Herod's son is now in charge, better to stay out of his area. Go to Galilee.

Joseph listens to God's messages and follows them.

Are we open to God's messages? Do we pray enough to have a good relationship with Him? Will we hear Him when he calls? I hope so.

Lord, give us the ability to be open to your message when the time comes. Let us reach out to you in prayer, not only to guide us, but so that we too can be righteous and have a good relationship with you, Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Amen