

Joseph – the silent one

Christ Church: 15th December 2024 10.00 am. & online
Matthew 1:18-25 (pages 965-966)

Introduction to the silent man

Imagine the casting interviews for the Primary School nativity....

Matthew has much less than Luke to say on Jesus' birth (Mark and John do not cover it) but what he does say is from Joseph's viewpoint (Luke tells the story from Mary's side). From both these gospel writers we can piece together a fascinating picture of Joseph. Do not confuse him with Joseph in the OT or Joseph of Arimathea.

He comes as the culmination of Matthew's genealogy for Jesus (Matt 1:16), in our passage today to prepare for the birth (Matt 1:18-25), in the flight to Egypt and the return (Matt 2:13-23) and, in Luke, in the birth narrative (Luke 2:4-16) and later in the presentation in the temple and, years later, when the boy Jesus engages with the leaders in the temple (Luke 2:22-51). There are a few other references to him in his parental role (Luke 1:27, 4:22 & John 1:45, 6:42). But he never speaks in the record we possess.

What can we all learn, especially what can *men* learn, from him?

He is humble

He is very much a No.2. Mary and Joseph are pledged to each other, in v18, a much stronger tie than today's 'engagement' (and hence the use of the words 'husband', 'divorce'). But to become pregnant at this point was a huge public disgrace so imagine the conversation when Mary tells Joseph the news! But he aims to act in Mary's best interest until the angel presents him with a different plan. Our verses are titled, 'Joseph accepts Jesus as his son'. Ponder on that.

He is no alpha-male. He comes across as the lesser in importance of the couple. In all biblical references to him he is silent.

Note that the prophecy which now comes true (Matt 1:23) is Isaiah 7:14 but it is all about the virgin. Do we accept this? Joseph is playing a vital but supporting act to the real human hero, Mary. He fades out of the picture after Jesus' childhood.

But Joseph himself if being a hero simply by playing the part that God has for him. He is so humble. *Men: that means it's OK to be*

male and to be a natural No. 2, to be humble. To play the role God has prepared for you.

.... and he is obedient

But because he is so humble he obeys whatever God tells him to do. First, we are told he is faithful to the law (Matt 1:19).

Then in 1:24 Joseph did 'what the angel of the Lord had commanded'. And he gives the baby the name 'Jesus'. In 2:14 he obeys the order to become a refugee. Again in 2:24 he obeys the angel. Whatever Joseph is told to do through an angel, he immediately goes and does it. Not only is he humble, he obeys divine instructions.

Put yourself in his shoes. He has to accept incredible facts.

Notice something I had never spotted before and that in four passages he gets these orders for obedience from a dream of the angel of the Lord (1:20; 2:13; 2:19, 2:22). This was God's chosen means of communication to Joseph and if he was to keep the baby alive he needed to do exactly as he was told.

We have Scripture to obey. But note this was true here too (1:22). Do we seek humble obedience to what we read in these pages?

Men: it is not wimpish to obey the word of the Lord. It may be counter-culture today but it is not weak in any way.

.... But he is important!

But Joseph is no nobody! Look at Matt 1:1-17 which shows that Matthew had done his research to show that Joseph, Jesus' legal father, is in direct line from Abraham in exact but selective multiples of seven to prepare for the coming of the Messiah.

Joseph has been chosen out of all the men on earth to be the human father of the Lord Jesus Christ. And look at the two names given by the angel and then in the OT prophecy: 'Jesus' will save his people from their sins (1:21) and 'Emmanuel' is God with us (1:23).

Matthew sees Joseph as a vital part of God's plan and then does not bother to tell the birth story: from our passage he goes straight to the Wise Men, probably a couple of years later.

Men: we can be important in God's sight even if seen as a nobody in people's view of us. In fact we will be important to him because of our humble obedience. Be ready: we may be a vital link in God's chain of events. Could you have been silent Joseph? Are you ready?