

# Sermon for Advent Mid-week #4

**Date:** December 23, 2020

**Location:** St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

**Old Testament:** Jeremiah 31:31-34

**Epistle Reading:** 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

**Gospel Reading:** Matthew 1:18-25

**Sermon Text:** Matthew 1:18-25

**Sermon Title:** Jesus: The Son of Joseph



## Hymns:

LSB 357 – O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

LSB 354 – Arise, O Christian People

LSB 934 – My Soul Now Magnifies the Lord

LSB 364 – Away in a Manger

## Liturgy:

Creative Worship



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**Text: Matthew 1:18-25**

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall call his name Immanuel”

(which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

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Grace to you, and peace, in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

Jacob [was] the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.<sup>1</sup>

During the 2008 presidential election, fame fell on Joseph Wurzelbacher, or, as he became known, “Joe the Plumber,” as a symbol of the common, ordinary citizen. He would be referenced in debates and stump speeches by the candidates who tried to appeal to the “average Joe.” For a brief moment, this plumber from Ohio became a household name... only to slip back into obscurity after the election.

Every family tree has members who have been forgotten over time. Their existence seems confined to census data. There are no statues or memorials commemorating their accomplishments. After the third and fourth generations, the memory of them is gone. It's only when someone begins the process of constructing the family tree that their names and places in the family history are recalled. Their lives are remembered by little more than the dash between two dates. For those who research their family genealogies, their computer files are mostly pages of names and descendants, not unlike what Matthew has constructed for us in introducing Jesus as the Son of David and the Son of Abraham.

One of the last names in that family tree is Joseph. While Mary is a key figure arrival of Jesus, Joseph is barely remembered. He is the ultimate “Average Joe,” whose stature pales in comparison to Mary his fiancée. In Mark's Gospel he does not refer Joseph at all. Outside of the birth accounts in Matthew and Luke, the only recorded mention of Joseph is when he and Mary took twelve-year-old Jesus to Jerusalem for Passover. When Jesus went missing, it is not Joseph who rebukes him, but Mary. Then it was Joseph who went missing, never to be seen again, like a character written out of a television series. Beyond age 12, Jesus will regularly interact with his mother and brothers, but Joseph is never present, never seen.

Jesus was called the Son of David fifteen times throughout the Gospels. Blind men would cry out to him, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David.”<sup>2</sup> The Roman centurion who oversaw the crucifixion and saw how Jesus died called him the Son of God. In fact, nearly thirty times, Jews and Gentiles, clean and unclean, and even demons would call Jesus the Son of God. The messianic title the Son of Man—Jesus' own preferred name for Himself—is used nearly eighty times, but Jesus is only referred as Joseph's son, or the carpenter's son, four times in all of Scripture.

1 (Mt 1:16)  
2 (Mt 20:30).

When Luke references Joseph in his genealogy, he refers to Jesus as “the son (as was supposed) of Joseph.”<sup>3</sup>

Joseph is like one in so many other family trees, the relative who is not exactly a relative and little more than a footnote scribbled off to the side in someone’s tattered family Bible. Joseph is that extra figure in nativity sets who is not a shepherd but not a Wise Man. He simply balances out the scene with the beloved Mary on one side and the extra figure opposite her. How many “Mary and Child” paintings have you seen? How many of Joseph with Jesus? Joseph is quite forgettable.

Matthew’s version of the birth of Jesus is different from that traditional scene. It contains no shepherds and only one angel. There is no innkeeper, no stable, no manger. There’s no difficult journey to Bethlehem. Matthew focuses on the events leading to the birth of Jesus from Joseph’s perspective. During Joseph and Mary’s day, the period of engagement usually lasted about a year. This was a formal timed that could only be broken by divorce or death. They would not live together. They would not even be along together. That would wait until the actual marriage ceremony.

When Joseph learns that Mary is pregnant, and knowing that he is not the father, he is only left to conclude that Mary has committed adultery. It would have been within his right to have her put to death for her sin, but Matthew notes that Joseph was a righteous man, so while he didn’t wish to shame himself publicly, he did not wish such punishment on Mary either.

So, he decided to have the marriage dissolved quietly on account of her sin and then go his own way. Joseph’s plan shows us why God in His infinite wisdom also chose Joseph to raise His Son, Jesus. Joseph is a compassionate man who seeks to do the Lord’s will. Rather than lashing out at Mary in anger and vengeance, Joseph sought to show her mercy and compassion, while still being faithful to God and turning away from sin.

The angel appeared to Joseph and told him that this Child in Mary was not the result of sin, but of God’s grace. The angel then told Joseph that he was to name the Child Jesus because He would save His people from their sins. This had been no ordinary conception. Likewise, He would be no ordinary Child. He would be given the name Jesus, defining Him as God’s action, His fulfillment of His promise to send the Messiah. This name was not to symbolize the idea that God saves His people like at the Red Sea or in bringing them back from exile. This Child would be the ultimate embodiment of God’s plan of salvation, saving them from more

3 (Lk 3:23).

than just oppression and suffering. He had come to be the Savior from sin. He was the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One. He was the one who would rescue and redeem God's people from death. Unlike any child ever born, because He came to save His people.

There are no words from Joseph. He simply did what the angel commanded him to do. He took Mary home as his wife and cared for her. When she gave birth to a Son, Joseph called Him Jesus. It sure wasn't the kind of thing Joseph ever expected, but God had a plan. The angel revealed that perfect plan of salvation to Joseph, and he believed.

The angel would appear to Joseph twice more. First to tell him to take his family to Egypt to protect his adopted Son from the murderous King Herod. Then, after Herod's death, Joseph was told to return to Israel, and he once again settled in Nazareth. No objections. No debate. No recorded words at all. Joseph simply did what was commanded of him, but all this we do remember about Joseph.

Many of you may have felt like Joseph. You've felt forgotten by people or dismissed. You don't want to be just an "Average Joe" lost to time. You want to be remembered. You want to be someone who leaves a mark. The marks we ultimately leave on those around us are the stain of sin. The only hope we have is not that we will be remembered by the people around us, but that God has remembered us in His infinite mercy, not remembering our sins. We can find comfort in knowing that God put His name on us in the waters of Holy Baptism and sealed us with the Holy Spirit as the deposit and guarantee of God's promise to remember us in His kingdom.

Jesus' earthly father, average Joseph, held something in common with all the other names in the family tree, even those much more famous and renowned. Joseph was a sinner who needed a Savior. When he gave the child the name Jesus, it was because he too needed someone who would save him from his own sins. God would use this average Joseph to protect Jesus from Herod's soldiers, who ran their spears through the baby boys around Bethlehem. One day, Joseph's adopted Son would allow Himself to be run through by the thorns, the nails, and the spear. The Son of Joseph did it for His earthly father and for all who are part of His family by faith.

Joseph serves as a silent but faithful witness to the Church of the ages. May God strengthen us that we find comfort in knowing that our God not only remembers us but that he also sent Jesus to save us from our sins.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

**Proclaim God's Word,  
Encourage one another in faith,  
Witness to God's love and  
Serve all people**



