

Advent 4 Sermon, 2022

Here's an odd question. Did you ever feel like you were invisible? I mean, did you ever feel that no one heard you, or acknowledged you, or gave you credit for something you did, or maybe just looked right past you when you came upon them?

Maybe you had an opinion and no one wanted to hear it. Or maybe you raised your hand in class in school, knowing you had the answer to the teacher's question, but the teacher just looked right past you before choosing someone else to answer the question. Sound familiar? We've all been there.

Or maybe you didn't get thanked or given due credit for something you did. Parents, you certainly know what this is like.

Being deep into this Advent seasons, we are fast approaching the birth story of Jesus. And the two gospel writers who cover the birth of Jesus - Luke, and Matthew, both sort of treat Joseph as invisible almost. Or just as an accessory if you will. Or someone who wasn't really needed in order to create this child who is about to come into the world. And don't we ask ourselves periodically, "Whatever happened to Joseph anyway after the birth of Jesus? Where did he go? What did he do for the rest of his life? What role did Joseph play beyond this one scene? Did he have a job?" And more, right?

It reminds me of the movie star who came on the scene and made a sudden splash, but who just as quickly disappeared, never to be heard from again. "Whatever happened to...?" recalling the forgotten the movie star who disappeared just as quickly as they came onto the scene. There are even websites devoted to "one hit wonders" in the acting profession.

In Matthew's gospel, the genealogy of Jesus takes up the first 17 verses of his gospel, beginning with Abraham, the father of Isaac, the father of Jacob, and finally down through 28 generations of the lineage of Jesus, her. And it's always the man's name – Abraham – the father of, and so on and so on. Amazingly, Joseph is actually in Abraham's lineage. But when it gets to Joseph in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus, it simply says "Joseph, husband of Mary,

of whom Jesus Christ was born, who is called the messiah.” Wow. Just a footnote in Jesus’ lineage? Kind of a double whammy if you will.

Joseph doesn’t even get credit for being the father of this child, which he wasn't. God was. And there's more. Joseph didn't get to play a role in the naming of this newborn baby. The angel in our gospel text for this particular Sunday says that Joseph to the name the baby Jesus. Sounds like he didn't have a choice in the matter. The angel of God appears, and tells Joseph what to name this child. I mean, what if Joseph had wanted to call his son Joe, Jr. or Arnie, or something else? One of the joys of parenting as I understand it, is being able to choose your child's name. Right? Well Joe was even denied this opportunity.

Invisible? Unnecessary? Overlooked? We can't know for sure, but I'm guessing that some of the emotions Joseph must've been feeling in all of this birth narrative was a feeling of being left out. Invisible. Underappreciated. Taken for granted. And so I'd say yes to all of the above.

We will soon enough turn toward this holy child born in a manger in a godforsaken town name Bethlehem. But for today Joseph is the central character in this gospel story of the arriving child. And so I felt called to give him his due in the sermon today. So what might Joseph’s role be in this whole birth of a savior story? Is there a place for Joseph beyond a bit part in our story? I'd say yes to all the above.

First of all, we can't deny that Joseph is indeed in the lineage of Abraham himself, which includes David, and Solomon, and even four women. That alone, this pedigree, is an awesome thing. Joseph was actually a descendant of Abraham himself. Not too shabby. Do your own genealogy? Maybe you'll find that you yourself have a famous person in your own family tree. Maybe someone like George Washington, or Thomas Edison, or Martin Luther, or even Abraham himself is in your family tree.

But Joseph's story is necessary in ushering in the birth of Jesus. It's essential. Because in some way, just like John the Baptist Joseph also points the way to Jesus the Messiah. But

then he exits the stage. Joseph gets his family to Bethlehem where Jesus is to be born. And that was no small feat in that day. His mission is accomplished.

Maybe Joseph knew that even though Jesus was of a divine nature, that he would still need both parents in the household to help raise and nurture this child. And Joseph is a lot like us I guess, remaining faithful to his calling even when everything that he knew about being a husband a father a good Jew, was being turned on its head. Joseph remains faithful to Mary, because he knew God had chosen him to play a big part in ushering in this sacred birth, even if it wasn't what he had in mind when he fell in love with Mary. In his own way, he knew he was integral to the birthing of the Savior, among us. He could easily have dismissed Mary to deal with all of this, but he doesn't. He remains faithful to God, and to Mary.

I think this is Joseph's story - maybe feeling overlooked in his role as a parent, or feeling unnecessary in bringing about this birth, unsure about how to deal with it all, but trusting that just as he is being faithful to God in this mess, God also is being faithful to him.

I'll bet you know some people just like Joseph, perhaps right here in this congregation. People who are faithful to their call to serve God, not seeking attention or recognition, but people of deep and abiding faith in a loving God. People who follow God's call, often without knowing where it all will lead, but who follow nonetheless. Those who do so remaining almost invisible, without recognition or accolades. But who do so in order to serve their God.

In closing, I thank God for Joseph in the birth story of Jesus just as I thank God for those in this assembly and around the world who serve God faithfully, dutifully, without seeking recognition. So, Joseph. Underappreciated? Taken for granted? Invisible in the overall story of the birth of the holy one? Bit player in the birth of a Savior? Second to fiddle to Mary and all of this?

Maybe, maybe not, but a powerful example of being faithful to God's call to trust and obey God. And trusting that in that call by God, something amazing can and does take place, even

though we may not see it at that time.

A good Christmas lesson for us today. Thanks be to God. Amen.