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Matthew 1:18-25; Isaiah 41:5-10  
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### When You Are Afraid, Give Me Your Hand

Today, we come to my favorite part of the Advent narrative...the story of a simple carpenter from Nazareth named Joseph who was to become Jesus' earthly step-father. I've always been mesmerized by this man of whom not much is said but so much is implied. A man who was within his God given rights to reject this calling, but who willingly accepted the weight and role as the step-father to the Savior of the World. Could you imagine such a calling?

In antiquity and particularly in Jesus' age of patriarchy, who your father was was one of the most important identifiers. That unique relationship spoke of the privilege, wealth, and character that would be passed down from one generation to the next. Interestingly, when we look at Jesus' genealogy as transcribed in Matthew's gospel, we indeed see Joseph's lineage but with a break at the very end.

After a long list of generations from Abraham to Jesus we get to Jacob who was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called the Christ. So in reality this was Joseph's family tree, but not Jesus'.

Remember the prophecy from Isaiah that said, "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him - the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, The Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord - and he will delight in the fear of the Lord."<sup>1</sup>

Jesse was the father of King David from whom we are told would come the Messiah.

So while Jesus' may not have inherited his DNA from Joseph of Nazareth, he was certainly blessed with so much more. That is what we will explore today.

But first let us hear more of words from the Prophet Isaiah that would have been implanted in Joseph's heart and the story of how his special calling came to be in the Gospel of Matthew.

Isaiah 41:5-10

5 The coastlands have seen and are afraid;  
the ends of the earth tremble;  
they have drawn near and come.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 11:1-3

6 Each one helps the other,  
saying to one another, "Take courage!"  
7 The artisan encourages the goldsmith,  
and the one who smooths with the hammer encourages the one who strikes the  
anvil,  
saying of the soldering, "It is good,"  
and they fasten it with nails so that it cannot be moved.  
8 But you, Israel, my servant,  
Jacob, whom I have chosen,  
the offspring of Abraham, my friend;  
9 you whom I took from the ends of the earth  
and called from its farthest corners,  
saying to you, "You are my servant;  
I have chosen you and not cast you off";  
10 do not fear, for I am with you;  
do not be afraid, for I am your God;  
I will strengthen you; I will help you;  
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.

Matthew 1:18-35

**18** 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 pregnant from the Holy Spirit. **19** Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. **20** 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. **21** She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." **22** All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

**23** "Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son,  
and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." **24** When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife **25** but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

I'm curious this morning to hear from you about your fathers, adoptive fathers, step-fathers, surrogate fathers or step-in fathers? What is or was one

characteristic that you appreciated about them most? What mark did they leave upon you? (Pass the microphone)

Thank you for sharing that.

This morning we are going to look at Joseph, Jesus' earthly step-in-father, and see what we can learn about him. We'll consider what character traits can we see that might have been passed down from Joseph to Jesus? We'll also ponder how is God calling us today to have similar impact upon the young people in our lives? And finally, I'll share why Joseph's story is so deeply personal to me and my family tree today.

Very little is said in scripture about this man, Joseph of Nazareth. He is mentioned just a few times in the gospels. In Matthew and Luke at Jesus' birth.<sup>2</sup> In Luke as Jesus was presented in the temple eight days after his birth.<sup>3</sup> In Matthew two years later when Joseph was called to flee with Mary and Jesus to Egypt to escape King Herod's murderous plots. In Luke when Jesus was twelve years old and Joseph and Mary left Jesus behind in the Temple following Passover.

Thirty some years later, he was also mentioned in John at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry when he calls his first disciples. Philip told Nathaniel, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote - Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."<sup>4</sup> Again as Jesus taught in his home synagogue on the Sabbath, people asked, "Isn't this the carpenter's son?"<sup>5</sup> And finally as people discussed who Jesus was and where he received such profound wisdom, they asked "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?"<sup>6</sup>

Scholars assume that Joseph's obvious absence from Jesus' life story implies that he must have died sometime after Jesus' was twelve years old.

But what we can clearly surmise is that Joseph was a known entity in and around Nazareth.

These few interactions actually tell us a lot about Joseph and his character that he would have passed down to his son, Jesus.

Joseph was a man of few words. In fact nothing is recorded of him saying anything at all. That doesn't mean that he wasn't a man of great faith. He was. We'll get to that.

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 1:19-25; Luke 2:1-20

<sup>3</sup> Luke 2:21-40

<sup>4</sup> John 1:45

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 13:55

<sup>6</sup> John 6:42

Joseph was a carpenter, woodworker, or builder. The word used for carpenter in Greek was tektonos. It's where we get the words technician or architect. It meant artisan, craftsman, or one who did woodworking. So Joseph worked with his hands, crafting things. The few carpenters that I knew were pretty quiet people, really good at fixing things and getting things done. Not so much about expressing their faith.

Two fathers of our church were like that. Dorman Holcomb and Lon Allen. Dorman and Sue ran a successful remodeling business here in Clark County for many years. Dorman was a charter member of the church and was always willing to step in to serve. His response to anything, was "Not a problem." Sadly, Dorman passed away in September 2020.

The other one was Lon Allen. Lon was a big teddy bear kind of man. He was a logger earlier in his life. In his younger days, he could scale and level a tree in no time flat. He made delicious beer bread. Lon passed away shortly after Dorman.

To get either of them to talk about their faith was like pulling teeth. Usually Dorman would hmm and haw, maybe grunt a little bit, and then say what he thought. Lon would always preface his words with "Now I'm just an old logger and don't know anything...but..." And then he would share his heart, and you could hear a pin drop.

Both lived out their faith by what they did.

James, the brother of Jesus, another one of Joseph's sons, linked the importance of faith and deeds saying, "Some will say, You have faith; I have deeds. [Well I say] show me your faith without deeds and I will show you my faith by what I do...faith without deeds is dead."<sup>7</sup>

Joseph was man who connected his faith by what he did.

Joseph was righteous, the same word used to describe Zechariah, John the Baptist's father. This meant that he observed the Old Testament Law blamelessly. Tried to do what was necessary to live a holy life according to God's commands.

But though he was righteous, he wasn't so tied to the Law that he was heartless. No, we see this when he discovered that Mary, his betrothed fiancée, was pregnant by some other means than him.

Joseph was compassionate, caring, and grace giving. Though he lawfully could have subjected Mary and her unborn child to public shaming or worse yet, stoning. He wanted what was best for everyone. For him, Mary, and Jesus.

John's Gospel describes Jesus as "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who

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<sup>7</sup> James 2:14-26

came from the Father, full of grace and truth...for law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”<sup>8</sup>

Who do you think Jesus learned from? Yes from his Heavenly Father. But he must have seen it modeled for him from his earthly step-father, Joseph.

Joseph was considerate and thoughtful. He had prayerfully considered his plan to quietly divorce Mary. The Greek word for considered is *enthuomai*. It means to ponder, to reflect, or to think deeply. So this was not a decision that he took lightly. He prayed about it. Perhaps his dream with the Angel Gabriel was an answer to his prayers.

Joseph was a man of peace. He must have known that Mary and her child were both created in the same image of God as he was. And he wanted God’s true Shalom for them as well as him. Notice in the story when Jesus was left behind at the temple as a young preteen, that Mary is the one to fly off the handle at Jesus’ apparent thoughtlessness. Joseph was quiet, calm, and at peace.

In our story today, Joseph was afraid. Naturally. He was human! Put yourself in his sandals. The woman that you have been pledged to be married to is now pregnant. And you know beyond a shadow of a doubt that it’s not by you. Going through with a marriage could have brought all of the shame, and scorn, and danger upon him as well as them. This was not how he imagined his life to be.

But Joseph was open to God’s plan B.

Joseph was immediately obedient to follow through on what the Lord commanded him. He took Mary home as his wife. Did not have marital union with her until after she gave birth to their son. And he had the privilege of naming Jesus, which means “He saves.” The faster he would marry Mary, the less people would question the means by which Mary had conceived.

All of these character traits Joseph passed directly down to Jesus as the only example of an earthly father that Jesus would every know.

Can we see why I love Joseph’s story as much as I do?

Joseph provides an example for us all of how Godly men should be. Whether we are grandfathers, fathers, adoptive fathers, step-fathers, surrogate fathers, or step-in-fathers. Men, we have an incredible opportunity to mold and shape impressionable lives around us. Let’s not take that charge lightly.

Joseph took it very seriously.

The Apostle Paul admonished the Colossians, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or in

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<sup>8</sup> John 1:14, 17

deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”<sup>9</sup>

Men, we don’t have to be perfect. But we do need to have hearts that are open to being used however and with whomever God sends our way.

It could be our children, grandchildren, or their friends. It could be youth here in the church. Our prayer partner ministry is a very important way to make these kinds of connections of trust and faith with children in our church.

Or maybe there are children in our neighborhoods. Karen and I have adopted several kids in our culdesac as our surrogate grandchildren. Now that we are empty nesters, we’ve got relational energy, time, space, and bandwidth that we can invest in now.

I know we need more men to step up to the plate to do children’s messages from time to time. This is SUPER simple. We give you the script of what to say and even how to pray at the end. All you need to do is read it, make it part of you, and share from your heart. God will take over the rest. Talk with Janet Lind about how you can be involved.

Or maybe there are other ways that God might be bringing to mind today?

Could we pray about it? But don’t take that as an excuse to not act.

Remember, Joseph acted immediately upon the plans that God put in his heart.

My grandfather (my dad’s dad) passed away long before I was born. I wish that I could have gotten to know him. But my grandmother remarried a man that I grew up with that I knew as Grandpa Dean. Grandpa Dean was my step-grandfather. But he was my grandfather.

He loved us grandkids as his very own. He was so loving, kind, and playful. We’d ride around on his lawnmower, plant and harvest potatoes. He would take us by hand and walk us around his garden to see how things were growing. He loved to joke around and say goofy little things like “Do you think the rain will hurt the rhubarb?” And then see how we would respond. Which would give him a great laugh.

As an adult, I’ve come to learn that Grandpa Dean was not perfect. He had his grown up struggles. He was human. But as a kid, I thought he could lasso the moon. And he always made us feel super special.

I loved him so much. And I am deeply grateful that he said yes to being my step-grandfather when given the chance.

There is a song by Mercy Me called *Joseph’s Lullaby* that we will hear shortly. It was written as if Joseph were singing it for Jesus as he fell asleep. It is such a beautiful portrayal of this man’s heart and how he loved this child he was called to raise.

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<sup>9</sup> Colossians 3:15-17

So may we take seriously the roles that we get to play in the lives of young people. May we not brush it off as someone else's responsibility but take to heart as our own. And we may trust that when we are afraid or uncertain of what to do or what to say or how to be, that God will take our hand and faithfully lead us forward. Just watch Joseph. Amen.