

Average Joe

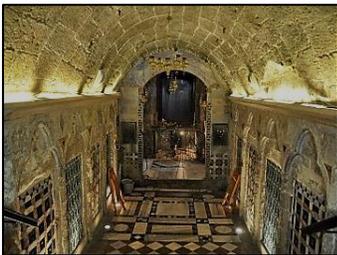
Stepdad of a Savior

December 18, 2011



I've always felt like Joseph gets burned a bit at Christmas. There's just not that much about him in the Bible story, and he pretty much misses out on all the extraordinary, spectacular stuff. The angel Gabriel appears to Mary.

The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored!" - Luke 1:28a NIV



The Catholic Church of the Annunciation, in Nazareth, claims to be built where this took place ... not to be confused with the Greek Orthodox Church of the Annunciation, in Nazareth, that makes the same claim.

The angel Gabriel also appears to Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, and says ...

... Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. - Luke 1:11-13 NIV

The lowly shepherds get a sky full of angels!

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest ..." - Luke 2:13-14a NIV

And Joseph gets to *hear* about all these extraordinary things. But, when his turn comes ... he just gets a dream.

... an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." ... and they will call him Immanuel" - which means, "God with us." - Matthew 1:20b-23 NIV

The name "Jesus" means "God saves", the name "Immanuel" means "God with us". "Jesus" is his mission; "Immanuel" is his identity!

Now, I don't mean to diminish the significance or validity of this event ... but *everybody else* gets an angel-angel! So *why* does Joe (who's being asked to do *quite a bit*) only get a dream-angel?!

“Hey! The weddings *on*; an angel spoke to *me too*.” “Wow, really?!” “Yep!” “When? Where?” “Oh, um ... in my bedroom, last night, while I was ... asleep.” “You mean, you *dreamt* it?” “Uh-huh.”

It just never struck me as fair! And I want some answers; so, let’s see what all we can know about Joe. He lived in Nazareth. This is how it looks now, but in Joseph’s day Nazareth was an obscure village 60 miles north of Jerusalem (like us and Seattle; with Bethlehem another five miles south).



Modern Nazareth



Nineteenth Century Nazareth



Jesus era House



The ancient city of Sepphoris

In December, 2009 a house was discovered in Nazareth that’s been dated to the time of Jesus’ childhood. Nazareth was so small that Jesus would have known, and likely entered, this house. Nearby Nazareth was the city of Sepphoris which was destroyed by the Romans in 4^{BC}, and extensively rebuilt during this time. Historians have long speculated that Joseph may have traveled daily to work here ... because we know that Joe was a carpenter.

Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? - Matthew 13:55a NIV

The Greek word, “tekton” [TEK-tone], refers to a worker of wood or stone, whether a master builder, craftsman, or construction guy. I think Joseph was a construction guy, because ... He was poor.



When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took [Jesus] to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ... and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “**a pair of doves or two young pigeons.**” - Luke 2:22-24 NIV

One was a burnt offering and the other had its neck wrung as a sin offering. Two birds is the *cheapest sacrifice* you can buy.

When the days of her purification for a son or daughter are over, she is to bring to the priest ... a year-old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a dove for a sin offering. ... If she cannot afford a lamb, she is to bring two doves or two young pigeons ... - Leviticus 12:6-8 NIV

The stepdad of God’s Son can’t even afford a lamb! Why aren’t these pigeons a part of nativity sets? One could look like a tiny, scorched, roast turkey. The other would just lay there with a limp neck ... head dangling ... the kids could *flick* it.

Ironically, poor Joseph was royalty. Matthew traces him to King David (Mat 1:6), Luke says he's of the line of David (Luke 2:4), and the angel greets him with the royal title "son of David". (Mat 1:20) So he isn't rich, he's an average Joe, but he can teach Jesus to build (Mark 6:3) ... and give him a legal right to the throne of David.

And if he was a common construction worker, you know the guy had to be strong. Everything was done by hand, no power *anything*. God needed someone *tough* to protect young Mary and little Jesus on their dangerous escape into Egypt (2nd dream-angel command), and the return trip home (3rd dream-angel command). (Mat 2:13-23)

But, he was also tender and compassionate and caring. A betrothal was so binding that a divorce was required to break it. And infidelity when betrothed was regarded as adultery. And even though Joe thought Mary had been unfaithful, he remained kind and gracious and concerned for her honor and suffering.

Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. - Matthew 1:19 NIV

Oh, and we know Joe "was a righteous man". Scripture may not record much about Joseph, but it does record that he was godly.

Fathers play such a crucial role in shaping our perception of God. So, it stands to reason that God would've chosen a man who best reflected His character and nature and heart of compassion. And the little we know about Joe certainly bears this out.

And he was obedient when it was *most* difficult. Again and again he says, "Not my will, but *Thy* will", when it goes against everything he desires for himself. He had been eagerly anticipating three big blessings associated with marriage in his culture: honor, sexual fulfillment, and a son of his own to carry on his name.

Then the angel says, "Um, God's gonna need three things, Joseph: Humiliation instead of honor. You have to let everyone know that you know you're not the father, and that God is. And, uh ... no sex, until *after* the boy is born. (Mat 1:25) And you can't give him your family name. In fact, you're going to mark him with a name that'll invite ridicule and scorn and brand *him* as illegitimate and *you* as an idiot.

In those devastating moments when it suddenly becomes clear that life as I envisioned it is no longer possible, it's tough to trust that God is *really* in control and able to redeem it. But, try to remember that *nothing* takes God by surprise!

What do you suppose was going through his mind at the temple as he spent the *last* of his money on those pigeons? You know it was his last, because if he had more he would've bought the lamb. It was 40 days since the birth (Lev. 12:2-4 sets 40 days as the "time of their purification"), what little traveling money he had is gone and he uses the last to say, "Not my will, but *Thy* will." He has no idea the Wise Men are on their way with *gold*!

We know they hadn't arrived, because if Joseph had a box of gold when he took Mary to the temple, they wouldn't have been "keeping with what is said in the Law" by offering a poor man's sacrifice. God just *loves* that kind of faith!



You want to know why Joseph "only" got a dream? That's all he needed! It's a testament to God's confidence in Joseph's faithfulness. Thirty-some years later, Jesus would say ...

... blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. -
John 20:29b NIV

God is in the habit of using the softest tool he can. He'd much rather whisper than shout. He'll do what it takes, but less is more.

Mary was "greatly troubled" by her angel (Luke 1:29), Zechariah doubted his and was made mute for nine months (Luke 1:18-20), and the Shepherds were *overwhelmed* with fear - but Joseph said his prayers, went to sleep, and the Lord whispered in his ear, and ...

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. - Matthew 1:24 NIV

He put his feet on the floor, stood up, stretched, and said, "Not my will, but *Thy* will!"

The last time we see Joseph is at the same temple when Jesus is twelve and goes missing. Luke (2:46) says they frantically searched the city for three days. If you've ever had a child wander off in a crowded city, you can imagine Mary's tone.

His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." - Luke 2:48b NIV

And you can imagine Joseph taking Jesus aside and saying, "Son, you gave *your mother* quite a scare; for *three days* she thought you were dead! Don't ever do anything like that again, okay?"

Joseph apparently died before Jesus began his public ministry. And we can only imagine what profound heartache and grief the death of his tough and tender earthly dad must've caused. Maybe this was Joseph's final call, to personalize in Jesus' human heart, the agony and tragedy that comes with the curse of death ... and to galvanize him as he prepared to conquer it.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus was nearing the end of *his* journey and intensely feeling his human nature, I wonder how much of an inspiration his *earthly* father was, as he said to his *Heavenly* Father, "Not my will, but *Thy* will."

God calls average Joes to extraordinary assignments. It's just hard to recognize 'em when they're offered sometimes. So, be strong and compassionate and faithful and obedient.