

Year A – Advent 4 – December 21, 2025

Pastor Megan Floyd

Matthew 1:18-25

Grace and peace to you from God and the Holy Spirit, and from Jesus Christ, our savior, who is God with us. Amen.

There is this beautiful portrait of the Holy Family by Matt Chinworth... it's called *Newborn King*. I saw it for the first time a few years ago... and it was so different and gorgeous, it took my breath away.

Instead of the typical depiction of Mary and Joseph looking clean and serene, both gazing down at the child Jesus between them... this one is more real.

In Chinworth's *Newborn King*, Mary is exhausted... and resting in the background... She is not the main subject of the image. This portrait... is of Joseph... calm and steady, gently holding the newborn Jesus... and loving him, the miracle that he is.

In his face, you can see amazement and awe...

...It is the look you have when you are overcome with love.

Joseph's quiet devotion... and his attentiveness... is such a pure expression of love... love for a child that he had chosen to accept as his own.

And yes, it was a choice... a very difficult and complicated choice... for this righteous man.

If he had called attention to Mary's pregnancy, she could have been stoned to death... that is, after all, what the law prescribed.

And if he dismissed her quietly, she could have been shunned and left to beg – or worse – just for her and her child to survive.

And yet, even the choice to marry her is not without complication, for in doing so, his reputation could be marked by scandal. Her child would become his heir, and he would relinquish his lineage to a child who is not his blood.

So, he decides the most righteous thing to do is to dismiss her quietly, but then God shows up... and turns his life upside down.

The angel of the Lord appears to him and says...

Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife... you have a role to play in God's plan, so have courage and trust in God's word.

What is a righteous, God-fearing man to do?

Given the circumstances, I think his trust and faithfulness to God are remarkable... he is the model of quiet obedience and commitment.

And yet, it must have been terrifying, despite the angel's opening instruction not to be afraid.

Being a new parent is scary enough... but to take on the parentage and protection of God's divine presence in human form... well, I expect that adds to the pressure.

But Joseph is steady, and he obeys God's command, even though he only knows the next step... and not where it will all eventually lead. He trusts God.

It's easy to trust the process when you know the end of the story... but Joseph... kind, supportive... righteous Joseph... is a model of courage and strength in the face of the unknown... in the face of the preposterous.

But Joseph, this compassionate, earthly father of Jesus... only gets a few mentions in our Bible, and he never speaks a single word.

He is there with Mary at the birth of Jesus, and later, under Herod's threat of violence, he takes his family, and they flee to Egypt as refugees... ever the protector.

His last appearance is in the background when Jesus is 12 years old and has wandered away from his family, only to be found teaching in the temple.

That's all we ever hear about Joseph... but it is enough to know his character, and to honor him for his steadfast and faithful support of his wife, Mary, silently supporting her in following God's call on her life to bear the child of God.

And in that moment... in a dream... in humble obedience, he chooses to trust in God's word and call for his own life... to stay with Mary... to claim and name the child Jesus, meaning, *God saves*.

He chooses to claim the child as his own, adopting him into his family lineage and thereby fulfilling what was foretold.

The Salt Project commentary said this:

“The angel calls Joseph to a love that doubles as a kind of courage. Courage to commit – though the neighbors may whisper and judge. Courage to nurture – though the child you raise is from the Holy Spirit. And courage to love – though the child you love is none other than Love personified, none other than *'The God Who Saves is With Us.'*”

We often think of Christmas as a time to celebrate Love becoming incarnate in Jesus. But the season is also a time to celebrate how love becomes incarnate in Joseph, acting with compassion, courage, and grace.

And what is the source, the wellspring of such courage, in Joseph... or in us, today? ...It's none other than God's love... the love made flesh, the love that came to dwell with us, and save us... and love us back to life.”

This righteous man from the line of David trusted in the whispers of God's holy word and allowed those words to alter the course of his life... to take on the holy and challenging task of being a father to Jesus...

a choice that continues to shape our lives today... through a love that endures forever.

Joseph's trust in God inspires us to trust in God... he teaches us to listen to the whispers of Love in our lives, calling us to seek the good and to allow our lives to follow paths of righteousness...

Meaning... allowing our lives to follow along paths that lead to being in "right-relationship" with God and with all of Creation, paths walked in humility and marked by God's justice and mercy... that is righteousness.

And Joseph chose to adopt Jesus as his own... to embrace him as his own child, doing for the Christ child what God had first done for us, indeed, for the whole world... embracing us... and claiming us all as God's beloved children.

This is the holy family to which we belong... a family bonded by God's love and trust... the kind of love that casts out hate and fear.

This is the love we, who are followers of Christ, have the joy to share, even though we do so imperfectly... when we get it right, this love changes the world around us.

So, hear now the angel's words for yourself...

Do not be afraid, for you are children of the most holy, and the God who saves is with us, now and always. So have courage, like Joseph, to love others as Christ loves you. Amen.

View Matt Chinworth's work, *Newborn King*, here: <https://www.inprnt.com/gallery/mattchinworth/newborn-king/>

Commentary citation from the Salt Project Blog: www.saltproject.org