

Matthew 1:18-19  
A Righteous Man  
Joseph Series Week 2  
Sunday December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017

A story is told of a little girl who walked up to her parents and asked, "Where did I come from?" Well mom immediately thought here is that dreaded "birds and bees" question that I have been preparing for years to give her, and so mom launched into a monologue of the biological processes of human reproduction.

When she ended the little girl just stood there wide eyed for a moment and said, "Well that's good, but where did I come from? Sally said she comes from Detroit, where do I come from?"

Another story is told of a 7 year old girl who came home from school and proudly announced to her dad that in school today she learned how to make babies. "What!!" said dad? You learned in school how to make babies?!!!"

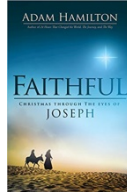
"Yes dad," she replied, "Mrs. Brown our teacher taught us how to make babies." Well thoroughly incised the dad, despite the mom's objections called the teacher Mrs. Brown on the phone and began chewing her out. "How dare you teach a 7 year old how to make babies!" he began. "That is the parents place to tell children about how babies are made. I am going to place a complaint against you with your principal, the school board and the state board of education!!"

Well there was a surprised silence on the other end of the phone, and the teacher then very calmly said, "Why don't you ask your little girl how I taught her to make babies today and then call me back."

The father slammed down the phone, composed himself, his mind flooded with all the things he was going to need to say to straighten things out, and then finally he asked his darling little daughter, "In school today they taught you how to make babies right?" His darling daughter replied, "Oh, yes, it's really easy to make babies. You just drop the "y" and add "ies".

James 1:19-20 says, “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.”

Today is the 2<sup>nd</sup> in a 5 part series on “Joseph the forgotten man in the Nativity story.” It is inspired by the book by Rev. Adam Hamilton called “Faithful Christmas through the Eyes of Joseph.”



Rev. Hamilton is a UM minister of the Church of the Resurrection in Kansas City the largest UMC in the United States.

Today we are looking at Joseph as a righteous man who lived out the above verse. Joseph proved his righteousness BEFORE he believed Mary’s story of how her baby was made, and his example can help us all live lives of righteousness, lives full of “Graciousness, mercy, kindness and forgiveness.” These four Christian virtues are what distinguished Joseph as a Righteous Man.

To clearly see this, we need to understand the marriage customs of Jesus’ day. ‘In Joseph’s day marriages were arranged often times when the bride and groom were still children as a sort of non-binding agreement. When the woman reached puberty the agreement was formalized with the father of the groom paying certain sum of money to the father of the bride.

This “bride price” called a “mohar” in Hebrew was a considerable amount of money often times enough to buy a small one bedroom home in that era. Now the purpose of the “mohar” was not just to “buy a bride”, and pay the father of the bride for the loss of her services at the family home. A large portion of the “mohar” would be set aside for the bride to function as savings account and an insurance policy in case the husband died or divorced her. It wasn’t all for the father of the brides use.

Now the husband would also give his bride a sum of money called the “**Mattan**”. This also was for the bride to keep if the husband died or divorced her. At this point in the engagement process a legally binding document called a “**ketubah**” was prepared with the husband making certain promises to care for his bride to be. This all happened before the couple married and in some cases could be a considerable amount of time before the marriage.

Once the “ketubah” was signed the husband and wife were legally married, BUT could not sleep together until after the actual wedding ceremony. So if either of them slept with someone before the wedding ceremony it would be considered adultery.’ Joseph... pages 46-48

So, as you can see when Mary told Joseph she was pregnant it was really big deal with lots of consequences for Mary. Joseph could have publically divorced her and shamed her in the village square announcing why he was doing what he was doing. She would have been forever branded a harlot, her child illegitimate. He also could have asked for her to be stoned, but that was a custom that was rarely followed in that day, especially under Roman rule.

Worst still, Joseph and his family could also have demanded and gotten back the “mohar” and “ketubah” gifts leaving her and her family shamed, penniless, with a baby to raise. Forever in their small village she and her family would have had to bear that shame.

But, “**Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly.**”

Joseph was a righteous man on two levels. He wanted to do what the Law required and that is put out an adulteress, but he indeed was a righteous man who practiced **grace, mercy, kindness and forgiveness**.

**Joseph by divorcing Mary quietly would be taking on all of Mary’s shame.** Let that sink in for a while. Everyone would assume that Mary’s baby was his. He probably would have left her with the “mohar” and “ketubah” to take care of the baby, but he would carry the shame. He would be seen as the cad who abandoned his pregnant wife.

She would be seen as the victim, which held out the possibility of remarriage at some point in the future.

Joseph was willing to take on another's sin and shame for he was a righteous man: gracious, merciful, kind and forgiving. He raised a Son to do the same? Where do you think the earthly Jesus learned to take on the sin and the shame of us all? It was Jesus' destiny, but he also had a great example.

Do you ever wonder if Jesus had a conversation with Joseph and Joseph told him, "Jesus you may have wondered about this because you know you are so gifted and so forth and I'm just a carpenter, but you are adopted, and let me tell you that story." It would have been a story of grace and forgiveness and kindness for it probably would have started, "You see Jesus; I didn't believe your mom at all when she told me she got pregnant through the Holy Spirit..."

You see Joseph acted as a righteous man before he had the dream where God sent an angel to confirm Mary's story. Because as verse 20 says, which we didn't read today, **"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."**

Joseph wanted to do the right thing according to his faith and according to who he was a man, a father made in the image of our God who is gracious, merciful, kind and forgiving.

A side note, you can see that Joseph was the original doubter in the Virgin birth of Jesus, but in this world there are "some species of fish, some lizards, a variety of insects, and at least one species of snake the reproduce sexually that have also been known to reproduce asexually." P. 49.

So is it that big of a stretch of faith to say that the God who created the universe and dreamed up DNA could provide half the DNA necessary for Mary to get pregnant?

For me it is an easier belief to follow than the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead, which is the core of our faith, because I have seen so many dead in all states of decay.

*A story is told about little Billy...Little Billy was sitting at the kitchen table doing his school homework. He had a puzzled look on his face as he considered the assignment that was due--writing an essay about his origin.*

*He turned to question his mother. "Mama, where did Grandma come from?" he asked. "The stork brought her," answered mama. "And where did you come from?" asked Little Billy. "The stork brought me," his mother answered.*

*"And where did I come from?" Little Billy inquired. "Well, son, the stork brought you, too," she replied. With a scowl on his face, Little Billy picked up his pencil, and began writing his essay: "There have been no natural births in our family for three generations."*

My friends, the righteousness that Joseph displayed, is something you grow and mature into. It isn't something that comes "naturally". It comes from effort on our part and is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

To be righteous comes from being quick to listen (to a person, to God, to the Bible), slow to anger, so you can listen. Being calm in the face of what you may think or actually is deep betrayal. It may simply be misunderstanding, or coming at life and situations with certain preconceived notions.

Joseph had to have the calm of sleep to really hear God. I believe he also had to have the reinforcement of the angels the night of Jesus' birth, the shepherds and later the 3 Kings to truly grasp in the depths of his being that Jesus was the Son of God and he, Joseph, was the adoptive father with a tremendous mission to fulfill.

So my friends, be righteous like Joseph, **live grace, be merciful, practice kindness and be forgiving.**

When you practice forgiveness you set yourself free. If you hold onto your angers and your hurts you are forever held captive to them.

Remember Joseph the righteous man and seek to be righteous in your life.

What is God saying to you and what are you going to do?

In Jesus' name amen.