

***I'LL BE A STEPDAD?!*****Matthew 1:18-25****(Read Matthew 1:18-25)**

**Intro:** What ruins a day for you?

In the summer of 1976 I drove east in my VW Squareback which I had acquired during my 1<sup>st</sup> year, just completed, at Navajo Mission. I had traded in a beautiful 1963 Ford Fairlane because I wanted a more economical car than the Ford with a V8 had been. I was pleased with the 35-40 MPG I was getting in the VW and so I felt vindicated for trading my Fairlane.

That vindication began to lose its luster, when, on my return trip to New Mexico, in the mountains, of West Virginia, I heard something pop and there was a significant loss of power. I just kept driving, making for my Uncle's home in northern Arkansas as I putted along on 2 cylinders through Kentucky, Missouri and into Arkansas. I know, WHAT WAS I THINKING?!!! And I still ask myself that, but back then, at 19 years old, I just knew that if I could make it to Uncle Kenny's house he'd know what to do because he and his sons could fix ANYTHING!!

But I didn't make it to Uncle Kenny's. As I drove through Pocahontas, Arkansas, still 150 miles from his home, something popped again and the car shut down and at 2 AM I was dead on the road. Fortunately I broke down right in front of a little motel and I found lodging for the night and in the morning my Uncle and Aunt came a towed me to their home in Yellville.

I'm seriously cutting my story short because we're talking about Joseph today and not my teenage adventures. My uncle, my cousins, and I spent well over a week rebuilding the VW's engine. It was not a simple task with regular setback, but finally, I was able to resume my return to the Mission. There was something Native American about that trip. I was trying with all my heart to make it back to Navajo Mission when I broke down in Pocahontas, Arkansas, and then, 300 miles after leaving Yellville, I was driving past Shawnee, Oklahoma on Interstate 40 when my car died on the road again! A valve pushrod had come right through the valve cover and I was despondent! I was 5 hours into the final leg of my journey and I felt a thousand miles from nowhere. My day was ruined. My week was ruined. My summer was ruined! My bank account was ruined!

Joseph's day was ruined. My translation describes Joseph as a "just man" and another translation says he was a "righteous man." This is high praise. How many Bible characters are known as that? In fact we know very little about Jesus's step-dad, but we know that Joseph was a good man. So, imagine a guy who does everything right and he's looking forward to getting married to Miss Perfect before the year is out. I mean really, she was. She a beautiful person both physically, and more importantly, spiritually. He was going to marry a "keeper"! And then she tells him, Miss Perfect, breaks the news, "I'm pregnant."

Joseph's day was ruined. His joyful anticipation was gone, JUST LIKE THAT! Normally that announcement is a happy one, but in this case Mary, who was supposed to be a good girl, is informing her fiancé, who is a righteous man, that she's going to be mom, and he's not the dad. We've been talking all month about how a weary world rejoices. This is not what makes for rejoicing. This makes for an entirely different set of considerations. Jewish law for adultery, which is what this appeared to be, was clear – execution was the old response. By now it was divorce and banishment and then humiliation and poverty. And what of his own reputation? What would people think? They might think that he was the one who had committed premarital hanky panky. He had that to consider.

These may have been things that ran through his mind, and they almost certainly did. But what scripture tells us is this: because he was such a good man, and when he could have made a public spectacle about Mary's alleged sin, in an effort to preserve his own reputation, Joseph showed kindness by choosing privacy instead. He would divorce her quietly and that way, instead of shame for Mary, Joseph chose to take the path of dignity and integrity. In a case where reputation was threatened – Joseph chose love. He chose to do the right thing.

But all this heartbreaking thought just made him tired. So he slept and he had a dream. And in his dream an angel came to him. Now, I don't know about your dreams, but in my dreams, things happen in a way that, if I was awake I'd think I was crazy, but since it's a dream, it's all normal. I think this is what happened for Joseph when the angel of the Lord came to Joseph. So when the angel said "Do not fear . . ." it wasn't like Zechariah and Mary in their encounters with the angel. In those cases, and practically every other angel human meeting, the angel had to say "fear not" because the human were scared out of their wits. No, Joseph wasn't frightened

by the angel – he was frightened by the future. And the angel was assuring him the future was all sewed up by the One who’s plan was unfolding.

Yes! Mary WAS pregnant! But her story was true. Her baby’s father was the Holy Spirit. That made Joseph a STEPDAD?! That was what he was and he was going to love the gig.

I love this! Listen to it again, *“Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: Matthew 1:20b-21a*

Joseph chose to believe the unbelievable as he chose faith in God’s word over trusting the voices of his family, community, and culture. In fact it went against everything he ever believed. But Joseph was willing to lose a lot in order to follow God’s calling.

Joseph had joyfully looked forward to being the husband to sweet Mary. He could still be that husband – and he could joyfully anticipate it.

Joseph had joyfully looked forward to being a dad. And he still could be that dad – but in this case he was going to be a stepdad – and later he became a dad to Jesus’s younger brothers and sisters. And it would seem there were a number of them.

He did exactly what the angel of the Lord had commanded him because Joseph listened to God. He bore the questioning glances and the behind the hand and under the breath comments of people who impugned his character and that of his wife to be. Joseph took his wife with him as they traveled to the hill country of Judea for the purpose of registering for the census and there, in a stable, because he hadn’t called ahead for reservations, his stepson was born. His stepson who was also his Savior.

Joseph may not have much written about him but I think he holds the record for angelic encounters – because we read a little bit later in Matthew, *And then, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. Matthew 2:13b-15a.* and then again a few verses later, *But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.” And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. Matthew 2:19-21.* Joseph was on a first name basis with them by then.

And that’s a lot of sacrifice for a man who was a stepdad. But Joseph was a righteous man. And he was a good man. And he loved God and he did what God asked and without complaint, at that. We don’t know much about Joseph, but what we do know is he was a really good man. Worthy to share fatherhood with God the Father.

Let’s emulate Joseph. Even when our day is ruined – God had a plan to redeem it. Let it be said of us, as we read the word, which is the most likely way we will get our commands from God that we too, do exactly what the Lord commands. As we do it, even in the face of rearranged plans and seeming disappointments, we will enjoy the applause of heaven. That’s another way a weary world rejoices. Amen.