

**MESSAGE: “Joseph’s Song”**

**Text: Luke 2:-1-20**

***Purpose:*** the purpose of this message is to enter the Christmas text through the reflections of Joseph.

**It is Christmas Eve. All over the world people have gathered in churches and chapels to remember and reflect upon the birth of a baby boy in a Bethlehem stable. We, too, gather together, searching for a moment of Christmas truth, grace or miracle. Some are excited, anticipating the moment when someone we love opens the gift we worked so hard to procure. Some are weary, relieved that Christmas has arrived and the preparation frenzy is ended. Some are lonely, saddened by loss of family through death or distance. Some yearn for yesterday’s Christmas—holding in memory a magical time which may not have been recognized as such when first experienced. Some are determined to stay awake for the jingle bells of Santa’s sleigh. All seek a moment of authentic Christmas joy.**

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**If you visit the traditional place of the nativity today, you will find a cave over which a church has been built. That is what we do with places of spiritual significance. We replace the simple with ‘elaborate,’ polish the spiritual shine and make it impressive to view. We layer so many traditions onto Christmas that it becomes hidden in plain sight. So let us strip away the poetry and focus for a moment on the prose of the story.**

**Joseph has returned with Mary to Bethlehem, the town of his ancestry and perhaps his own hometown, to register for a Roman census and pay a tax. Notice that I said ‘Roman.’ It is not a Jewish census that prompts this homecoming; it is a ‘Roman’ one. Folks are restless, crowded, tired--worn out from an ill-timed, unwanted journey which will relieve them of hard-earned wages.**

**We sometimes picture Joseph dragging Mary from door to door, looking for shelter, a place to rest and a place to deliver her baby. The Greek word often translated ‘inn,’ *cataluma*, is perhaps more accurately translated ‘guestroom.’ It may be that Joseph returned to his family’s home, but because there were so many relatives returning to register for the census, the guestroom was too crowded for Mary to deliver there. Furthermore, if she had, the room would be ritually unclean for an extended period and rendered unavailable for use by anyone.**

**Whatever the reason, Joseph and Mary are sheltered with the animals, perhaps in a stable-cave beneath the house, as was common, for when Jesus is born, he is wrapped in bands of cloth and placed in a manger.**

The stars gleam in the heavens; one star shines more brightly than any of the others. Nothing seems remarkable really, yet there is a pensive feeling, as if creation is holding its collective breath...waiting. It is a holy night, for though the people of Judea toss and turn in their makeshift beds, it is the night of Jesus' birth and the world cannot help but sense the nearness of its Creator.

Some have said that the animals spoke that first Christmas night since no one else was present to celebrate the moment of the Savior's birth. Later, shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night would visit, but there were at least two present to hear the baby's first cry. Mary was there. And Joseph was there. Much has been said about Mary's thoughts as she celebrated that first Christmas. This was her firstborn and the labor must have been difficult. From her words in the biblical text called 'The Magnificat,' we know that she understood quite a bit about the significance of Jesus' birth.

But it is not Mary whom I speak for tonight. It is Joseph. What do we know of Joseph? Precious little, really. He was a righteous man with a courageous heart. Perhaps, he took on the role of mid-wife to deliver the infant king. What were his thoughts? How might he have felt on that first Christmas night?

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I am Joseph, son of Jacob, from Nazareth in Galilee. I am no prophet or king. I am no priest or Pharisee. Why, Lord, have you chosen me for this task? How can it be that your parental privilege should become mine? Father to the Son of God. Imagine that! He is a miracle in our midst, for your Spirit is upon him.

Lord, you know I have two loves. You are the first. Ever since my youth, I have filled my heart and mind with the lessons of Torah. Your Law is better to me than life and your promises invest my soul with hope. Through your steadfast love, you planted the seed of love in my heart for Mary. I knew she was special from the first moment I beheld her face, but I never dreamed you would gift her with the offspring of your Spirit.

The birth of a child is a most wonderful thing at any time or place, but who could ever hope to witness the birth of Emmanuel? He looks so helpless lying there. Yet I know that if needed, all the hosts of heaven would descend for his protection. That may be, but if he is cold, I am the one you have charged with fetching his blanket. If he cries, Mary and I are the ones you have called to bring him comfort. How strange that sounds. It is he who comforts me—not the other way around.

When Mary told me she was with child, I was afraid. I knew what your Law required of me, yet I could not expose my beloved Mary to public disgrace. I was confused, heartbroken even; I could not understand how this could happen. I prepared to divorce her

quietly though it broke my heart to do so. Then your message came. I knew in an instant that the words of the angel were true. I felt such joy! But what truly amazed me even more was the remarkable way you prompted Ceasar Augustus himself to voice your providential will be calling for a census which would bring us to Bethlehem!

Now we are here. The shepherds you sent have gone and the night is quiet once again. Mary is sleeping and so is Jesus. Jesus... my precious little boy. (picking him up) Son of the Living God, yet curiously, my son, too...how can I be your Daddy? (cue music) Yes, you have ten fingers and ten toes... I know...'cause I counted them. You have a strong grip for a little one....

“Joseph’s Song”