

West Valley Presbyterian Church
Light of the World
What Happens When We Give The Light
Rev. Dr. Kim Engelmann

Some of us are back row kind of people
I just want to acknowledge for all of you sitting in the back row today
That I am a back row person too...

Its one of those things – you want to go to church but you don't want
to be right up in front where every one can see that back of your head
You kind of want to hide in case you want to text or fall asleep during
the message...

Friends, know that no matter where you sit in here, if you do fall
asleep I can see you – this is not that large of a room...
But no matter...there is a certain security in the back and I
understand that

But if you are a back row sort of person, who likes to stay sort of
behind the scenes you are in good company
Because that's the sort of guy Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus was
too

A stay in the background kind of a guy – didn't really look for attention
or a lot of recognition...
And he is sort of in the back row in terms of the whole traditional
Christmas story buzz too.

We think a lot about Mary, the shepherds, the angels, the wise
menbut Joseph just sort of stands there...in our crèche scene and we
don't really think about him that much

So I want to give some attention to Joseph today – the earthly father,
of Jesus
Because I think **Joseph was a light to the world** – because he did
some pretty remarkable things...and gave some amazing gifts...Now,
In actuality, historically

We don't have a lot of information about Joseph
Mark and John's gospels don't even mention him
But, we can infer a lot from what *is* written down in Matthew and Luke

So for instance, I have done many memorials for people I didn't even know

And I will sit down with the family and say "tell me something about this person" – and often they will have a couple of stories, or an anecdote, but from maybe just a an hour of a conversation I can usually piece together the kind of person that this was, without a lot of information...

And I am able to do a service

In the same way by inference, or by reading between the lines
Given the limited information we have, we can piece together a pretty amazing human being.

How many of you have a Nativity scene of little figurines at your house?

OK. I want you to go back home today, and take a look at Joseph in that scene. See if he is a younger man, or an older man.

There are two traditions of thought in Christian history

One is more Catholic – and that tradition says that Joseph was in his 80's when he actually married Mary...

And this whole idea springs up from ancient texts that are not Biblical/canonical in the first and fourth centuries that indicate that Mary was raised by priests in the temple and she was such a wonderful girl that when she was 12 years old the priests wanted to give her more of a father figure than a husband so they found Joseph – who was in his 80's – and who had been married before...and had children from his previous wife –

So this explains how Jesus had brothers and sisters...but not from Mary.

And Joseph the older man takes Mary as his wife, and the story unfolds

Now the Protestants at the Reformation had a phrase called "**sola scriptura**" which meant ONLY SCRIPTURE – so anything that wasn't

in the scripture they considered legendary and did not use in their understanding of Jesus' life.

So if you have a Protestant Nativity set at home...you will have a younger Joseph; and if you have a Catholic Nativity scene at home you will have a much older and maybe wiser Joseph. And that is just a point of reference for you in all of this

In the movie that we are showing after the service today, Joseph is young, not old – so the Protestant view prevails in this movie

And as the scripture tells us, Joseph is portrayed as a just and honorable man.

I am going to show you a clip from the movie THE NATIVITY
This scene is right when Mary's parents and Joseph find out that she, Mary is pregnant, and she has no husband yet – she is engaged to Joseph – not married –and everyone assumes she has been with another man

She has just come back from a trip to visit her cousin Elizabeth who is pregnant with John the Baptist, and Mary arrives home after a 3-4 month visit and she is showing.

This horrifies her parents who are scared because public humiliation and stoning was the punishment for a woman who was unfaithful or who was loose like this...

No one believes Mary when she tries to tell them that she was visited by an angel and that this child is from God

Watch this clip – I think this whole movie is very accurate in depicting the scene...Mary's parents have just finished reaming her out, and now Joseph steps in...

(MOVIE CLIP- THE NATIVITY)

Joseph brought grace into the situation didn't he?
And that's the first point I want to make –

1. Joseph was a light because he extended the gift of grace

As I said, Joseph and Mary had not been formally married at this time; but back then engagement, or betrothal was like a marriage.

You can see in the scripture, its on your bookmark, that Joseph had decided to divorce Mary quietly... *Why divorce when they were only engaged?*

He had to divorce her because **engagement** back then was much more serious and **was legally binding** even though the marriage was not consummated during this one year engagement period -

You can see how hurt Joseph was, can't you in this clip?

Does Joseph believe Mary's story? No way!

Her story was just as unbelievable then, as it would be now.

And I just want to say, **if you are a doubter today so was Joseph.**

And God used him anyway.

Some of what we talk about here on Sunday – you may be sitting there thinking – I am not sure I can believe that. I am not sure I can fully take that one in.

You know its OK. Sometimes people have a hard time with the virgin birth for instance – I believe in it because I figure that if a scientist can clone from a single cell – God ought to be able to do even more.

But if you aren't sure, if you doubt some things, know that God will use you anyway.

Just keep following him, keep seeking, and keep serving

And some of the things that maybe don't make sense now will eventually down the line

In his doubt, Joseph is hurt, angry, disappointed, embarrassed; he knows the

Law of Moses: **Deut 22:23,24 – You shall bring both of them (the man and woman) and stone them**

Nothing ambiguous about that

Yet even though he is feeling so down, and betrayed instead of publicly humiliating Mary and bringing charges against her, he is going to take the blame instead.

It would be his fault – he would be the foolish one.

He would pull out of the relationship and it would allow Mary to marry the young man who got her pregnant and there would be no shame or embarrassment for her...

Joseph was a light because he extended the gift of grace.

Foreshadows a little bit about what Jesus did for us on the cross, and also hearkens back to Joseph of the Old Testament (the Technicolor dream coat Joseph) who forgives his brothers and does not press charges.

(There are many parallels between the OT Joseph and the NT Joseph...The first time the word forgiveness occurs is when the OT Joseph forgives his brothers...now the NT Joseph does not press charges against Mary...and he is the foster father of the greatest forgiver for all of humanity for all time.)

Josephs grace towards Mary, tells you a lot
About Josephs heart of mercy and compassion, doesn't it?

Especially in the midst of his hurt and disappointment

When I am hurt and disappointed, that's the worst time to expect grace from me.

Who do you need to give the gift of grace to today? Is it the person in the cubical next to you who is driving you crazy? Is it to the spouse who has let you down? The person who has lied to you? See grace givers prevent the behavior of others from hardening their heart. Whoever it is, **the world longs for grace, and you can give that gift this Christmas.**

2. Joseph was a light because he gave the gift of Gods guidance

Joseph was able to give guidance to his family because he was so in tune with God's guidance

That night – in a dream the angel comes to him – and says “**Joseph, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. The child that is**

conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a child and you shall call his name JESUS or YESHUA, because he will save his people from their sins.”

Here is another parallel to the Joseph of the Old Testament. God speaks to both the Joseph of the OT and the Joseph of the NT in dreams.

Now dreams are weird things

Sometimes when I have a dream, I can only remember certain details of it. ***The guidance comes while Joseph is sleeping, and yet he never rationalizes this guidance away.***

He never says “*Oh that was a just a dream*”; Or *that was just my imagination...*He doesn’t even ask questions or say “*I can’t do this!*” – *this is crazy!*

Instead he immediately takes Mary to be his wife – even though she is already pregnant and he knew people wouldn’t understand and it would expose him to a lot of shame and gossip.

Many people say to me “*I want to do the will of God but I wish he would make it clear.*”

Well, God’s guidance is not always clear.

You know, in the movie The Nativity you will hear Jewish children reciting a story that happens to Elijah on a mountaintop. And it’s a story where God comes to Elijah and speaks to him...but he doesn’t speak in the wind, or the storm, or the earthquake (he doesn’t speak to Elijah in loud overwhelming events)– he speaks to Elijah in a still small voice.

And that’s usually how guidance from the Lord comes
It doesn’t come with a huge booming voice, or skywriting from one horizon to the other

It is often a quiet thing, in a dream, or in something someone says, or a desire of the heart, or a sense of call, or a scripture that we keep seeing again and again...

Usually, it is something *we can ignore if we want to.*

That's why its important to learn to listen and take what we think we are hearing from God - even if it might not be totally clear – take it seriously

And after praying about it take a step in the direction you think perhaps God is calling you to go, even if you are not sure

Pray about it more then, trust God, check in with other Christians and get their prayer support, and move forward again

Gradually it will become more and more clear, as we move in faith, and the Holy Spirit will convict our hearts about what is right
As we learn to decipher and trust that still small voice

Joseph, then, to his credit, does not ignore the dream

He could have...

It was a pretty dicey situation he was committing himself to
But immediately without question he takes Mary as his wife

Joseph has two more dreams in the birth narrative that you can read about that give him guidance

And each time he follows the guidance offered in those dreams completely and saves his family from being destroyed

Give the gift of following God's guidance this Christmas. The world needs it!

Maybe its someone who is seeking advice from you. Maybe you are being asked to go somewhere or do something that is out of your comfort zone. Joseph was certainly asked to do that. Give the gift of God's guidance either by following yourself or by advising someone else, and watch God work.

3. Joseph was a light because he gave the gift of himself in complete surrender to God's purposes

I am sure many of you have heard the term "winning hands down". It has come to mean winning by an enormous margin.

It is thought to have evolved from racetrack culture.

When a jockey was so far out ahead of his competition that it was impossible for any to overtake him, he would drop his hands and let

go of the reins, letting the horse finish the race without being spurred on.

Hence the expression, "**He won that race hands down.**"

It's when we drop our hands and let go of the reins of our want for control, allowing God to take over, that victory is assured.

Every time we read about Joseph that was his posture all through the birth narrative of Jesus

It was a posture of surrender

I struggle with surrender; I want things a certain way; my way
And sometime our culture makes it seem that when we surrender we are losing or failing; but really surrender is more of an emptying out

A posture that lets God in, and a posture that is flexible and eager to bend to his will instead of holding onto my own.

And when I am surrendered I am dependent on God, and not myself and that's hard to learn how to do.

Its like a friend of mine who has a blind buddy whose name is Mike and every time they go anywhere Mike asks "WHAT IS GOING ON" and my friend tells him. But Mike is completely dependent on my friend to illuminate him cause he cant see.

We also cannot always see what God is doing in our lives.
We may pray that prayer many times in our lives "**God What Is Going On?**"

I am sure that Joseph did.
The girl he is engaged to becomes pregnant.

Don't you think Joseph looked up to heaven right about then and said "**God What Is Going On?**"

And God tells him... marry this pregnant woman – her child is of the Holy Spirit - and he does it – surrendering his will to God's will.
Even when he doesn't fully understand.

And when he takes Mary to Bethlehem for the tax she has this baby in a cave out back where the animals are kept– and Joseph must have felt incredibly responsible for this child spoken about by angels who is the Savior of the world– and he has to lay this child in a manger – a feeding trough for animals – cause there is no room anywhere else

I wonder what he felt like doing that...

I remember when Chris our oldest was born

We had been trying to get pregnant for years to no avail

And finally in our early thirties we had this beautiful baby boy
And I remember holding him and having this tremendous sense of responsibility

And we went home with him to our tiny apartment – we were both still in school

And I thought, I want to give this child everything possible
I wish he had his own room, and a huge yard to play in and the best education (and on and on)

I wonder if Joseph didn't have some of those feelings putting Jesus
IN A MANGER
He probably asked God then **“WHAT IS GOING ON?”**

Why couldn't you have come up with a better place than this?
He probably wasn't thinking at all about the fulfillment of the prophecy that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

And then Joseph about two years later is told in a dream to take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt to save his life.

Herod had heard that there was a child who was born, who would be King, and he has all the children under two years of age slaughtered.
(For those of you who know the OT story of Joseph this is also another connection – both of the Josephs bring their families to Egypt so they can find safety and help by making their home there)

And for the Joseph, Jesus' Dad, in the midst of that foreign land, Egypt, with a different language and culture, living in a place he hadn't planned to live with no relatives and no support; trying to survive as best he could with a young child and wife, I am sure many times Joseph asked **"GOD WHAT IS GOING ON?"**

When can we go home? I didn't know it was going to be this hard when I signed up for this...

I can't see what you are doing in the big picture

I am simply following you the best that I can

I have surrendered everything to your plan and purpose

It wasn't easy but the thing about Joseph was that he was faithful He was a light giver because he gave the gift grace, the gift of following God's guidance, and the gift of himself in total surrender to Gods plan...even when he couldn't fully see what was going on... We live in a dark world, and we can't always Gods plan

If you are in a situation in your life today where circumstances have not lined up the way you had hoped

If you are looking up to God and saying **"GOD WHAT IS GOING ON?"**

Remember Joseph and continue to give the gift of grace, continue to seek God's guidance, and continue to work on surrendering to God's plan...even when you can't fully understand it all or see it clearly

If you do those things and you

stay the course –if you become a Joseph – if you continue to give the gifts we talked about today in faith even when it seems very dark and confusing - God will be faithful to you

Being a light in this dark world is never easy but God will never let you down...

"The will of God will never take you where his grace cannot keep you."

Just to close up

Eventually Joseph in a third dream hears from the Lord and brings his family back to Nazareth – Mary's hometown and raises Jesus there

Joseph was a carpenter and worked with his hands and he taught Jesus how to do that too

He probably worked in a town called Sepherus, about an hours walk from Nazareth (lots of building projects there) and I can just imagine as Jesus got older and picked up this trade that the two of them would talk together each day as they made that journey back and forth (IMAGE)

Joseph taught Jesus about who God was; brought him to the temple and made sure he understood the scriptures
But it was a simple surrendered life...one that didn't particularly stand out as great or as noteworthy

Joseph never thought that 2000 plus years later people would be learning from his example
And I am sure that he never considered the fact that in his obedience to God's guidance,
in his pursuit of grace,
and in his surrender to God's plan he actually saved and preserved the life of the One Jesus who would save and preserve us all...

One more parallel to the Joseph of the Old Testament.
Joseph and his 11 brothers of the Old Testament were the beginning-the fathers of the 12 tribes of Israel. God's chosen people – his nation – bound to Yahweh by the covenant of the law.

For the New Testament Joseph, he was the father of the Messiah who would create a new people, called Christians who were bound together by the covenant of grace.

Every time you see a Christmas gift (IMAGE) this Christmas remember Joseph ...remember him as someone who gave away his light by giving the gifts of grace, guidance and surrender. Everytime you see a package declare ...(Bookmark - ????)