

When Jesus reached the age of 12, Mary and I took him along with us to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem. I found it interesting that he made himself right at home there. You remember what happened, right? When the festivities were over, we left Jerusalem with our family and friends who were going home. We thought Jesus was with the boys his age, but at day's end we couldn't find him. We hurried back to Jerusalem and, after searching for a whole day, found him in the temple. He was in the midst of the teachers of the Law, listening to them and asking them questions. And when we questioned him about his behavior, he gave us a loving reminder of who he was and why he had come by asking Mary, *"Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"*

I didn't live to see him suffer and die—and, to be honest with you, I have mixed emotions about that—but there were words spoken by a man named Simeon (from whom you'll hear next week) that haunted me for many years. He said to Mary, *"And a sword will pierce your own soul too" (Lk 2:35)*. One of your own artists has painted a picture of the Nativity. Superimposed on the manger is the shadow of a cross. What that means to say is that you cannot celebrate the birth of Jesus without also seeing his death on the cross. Jesus was born to die—and to rise again—to pay for the sins of the world, for your sins and mine. That was the purpose of his coming. And that's what gives meaning to your celebration of Christmas. When it comes to eternity, forgiveness, purpose, and truth, go to the manger—and to the cross. Celebrate the coming into the world of the Messiah, the Son of God, Immanuel, who came *"to destroy the devil's work" (1 Jn 3:8)*, who came to restore peace between God and the world, to reconcile you and me to God.

Incredibly, I've seen him again. After he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, he and I enjoyed a family reunion like you wouldn't believe. It was in his real Father's house, the heavenly home that he prepared for you and for me and for all who have loved him and believed in him throughout history. Because of Jesus' person and because of his work, there's a room reserved for you in the Father's house in heaven.

Take it from me, *the silent saint of Christmas*. You will be blessed, truly blessed, if you pause to ponder the person of this baby born in Bethlehem so many years ago. Take some time, some peaceful, prayerful time, to welcome him anew as your Savior and your God. Believe in him, rejoice in him, worship and adore him, and then live your life for him. For it is he who came to be like you that you might be like him—now and forever. Amen.

**Mt 1:18-25; 2:1-23; Lk 2:41-52** – St. Paul's, Muskego, WI  
12/25/16 – Pastor David M. Kuehl – 62, 63, 59, 35, 34, 65, 38,

This isn't how I planned it, God. My baby born in a barn, my wife giving birth with only the animals to hear her pain. This isn't what I imagined. What I imagined were family and friends standing at my side and clustered outside the door, the house erupting with joy at the first cries of my child, slaps on the back, and loud laughter. That's how I thought it would be.

Greetings! I'm Joseph. Because of my personality and the role God gave me, I've been called the unsung hero of the Nativity. Did you know that I'm never quoted in the Bible? But I'm not the hero in this story. That honor belongs to Jesus, the one whose birth you celebrate today. What I prefer being called is *the silent saint of Christmas* and, if it's OK with you, I'd like to tell you why.

### **Joseph: The Silent Saint**

It all began when I was a young man working as a carpenter in Nazareth in Galilee. I was engaged to a beautiful, young girl named Mary. Both of us had grown up in Nazareth, a place where everyone knew everyone else and what everyone else was doing. We were from ordinary, pious Jewish families and were waiting for God to fulfill his promise to send a Messiah. We were distantly related, as well, both of us being descendants of King David.

I had fallen in love with Mary long before we were engaged. But according to the custom of the day, our fathers would have to arrange the marriage, which—thanks be to God—they did. In our society, an engagement was legally binding and wasn't to be broken for anything. Mary and I were considered married, even though we were living apart. In fact, had I died before we began living together, Mary would have been considered my widow.

We were young and had our whole life ahead of us—a life filled with hopes and dreams, plans for a big wedding, visions of a big house with a whole brood of children. We had many of the same aspirations and dreams that you folks have today. Do you remember your hopes? Can you recall your dreams?

And then, then the bottom fell out! I discovered that Mary was pregnant. I can't tell you how painful, how disappointing it was for me to discover that. It was like someone had taken a sharp knife and plunged it deep into my heart. I knew one thing for sure; I wasn't the baby's father!

At first, I didn't know what to do. According to the Law of Moses, I could have charged Mary with adultery, which would have subjected her to all kinds of ridicule. In the old days she would have been stoned to death. But I didn't want revenge. I didn't want to do anything that would hurt her—I still loved her. But she had slept with another man; she had been unfaithful to me. I decided finally to divorce her quietly. That way, she could go away and have her baby. That would save her and her family the pain, the embarrassment, and the shame of the whole ugly episode.

It was then that God intervened. He sent an angel to me in a dream. *"Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife,"* the angel said, *"because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."* I'm so thankful that God the Holy Spirit gave me the faith to believe what the angel had said. It wasn't an easy story to swallow, even hearing it from the mouth of an angel. It went against every fiber of my human logic. But I believed it with all my heart and soul. And when I believed, oh, the feelings of joy and relief, wonder and excitement, that came flooding in over me. And, of course, a sense of great responsibility. Think about it. The Son of God was going to be born to my wife, and I was the one being charged with his protection and care. What an honor! What a joy!

But the Lord's plans for me were just beginning. The prophecy of the Messiah's birthplace pointed to the Judean town of Bethlehem, some 70 miles from where Mary and I lived. No problem for the God with whom nothing is impossible. Luke simply writes, *"In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world."* The God who governs and guides all the events of history used an ungodly and unsuspecting emperor to carry out his plan at just the right time. As Paul the Apostle would write after the fact, *"When the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive adoption to sonship" (Ga 4:4, 5).* What a God who controls even the actions of emperors to accomplish his plans for our salvation!

So Mary and I made the trip to Bethlehem. When we arrived, we found the city crowded with people and NO VACANCY signs posted at all the inns. Thankfully, there was an innkeeper who was sensitive to our situation. He said we could use the barn out back.

And so it was there that my son was born. Oh, the thoughts that raced through my mind that night. A barn for Mary's baby? A stable for the Son of God? But that's the way it happened. The Son of God and the Savior of the world was born in a barn and laid to rest in a manger. Later on Paul the Apostle would express it this way: *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9).*

When the baby came, I was so caught up in caring for him and Mary that I was totally caught off guard when some shepherds from the fields nearby poked their heads into the stable to see if there was a baby in the manger. "Look!" they said to each another. *"It's the sign the angel gave us. We've found the Christ, the Messiah God sent to save the world."* And they shared with us their spellbinding story of seeing and hearing angels in the sky.

As our baby grew, we did everything the Law of Moses required. When he was eight days old, we circumcised and named him Jesus, as the angel had told us to do. And when he was forty days old, we presented him to the Lord in the temple at Jerusalem. When Jesus was just a toddler, another incredible thing happened. A caravan of men came to the house where we were living. They talked of a bright star in the sky, which they had seen in the east, which they saw as a sign that a new king had been born. They followed the star for many months and many miles—right to our house—where Jesus was. Then they bowed down to him and gave him gifts of gold, incense, and myrrh, gifts fit for a king. Let me tell you, we were nonplussed by the coming and conduct of this caravan of strangers.

When they had gone, God warned me in a dream that King Herod, fearful for his throne, planned to search for Jesus to kill him. Mary and I quickly packed our things and fled to Egypt, as the angel had commanded me in a dream. And so, for a couple of years we lived in that foreign country until God again sent his angel to tell me, *"Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead."* So, once again we packed up our things and hit the road but, because Herod's son was now ruling in Judea, we headed farther north, back to our hometown of Nazareth. It was there, as Luke records, that *"Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man."*