

**A sermon preached on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2019**  
**at St. Michael and All Angels Church, Sandhurst**  
**by Emma Hodge**

**May the words of my lips and the thoughts and meditations of all our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight O Lord our strength and our redeemer.**

*If you like short sermons then you are in luck – today's sermon is short so that we have plenty of time for the 6-minute Nativity which the Kidz Church are putting on towards the end of the service.*

Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent and we are looking at Joseph. Joseph, betrothed to Mary is often overlooked but his role was very important. Betrothal was the second stage of courtship and lasted a year, the next stage would be marriage. Betrothal, just like marriage, could only be ended in divorce.

But first, I want you to take a couple of moments to consider **what three words or phrases you would use to describe Mary** and **what three words or phrases you use to describe Joseph** – but don't worry, won't be expecting you to share your answers. If you want to chat to the person next to you, you can do.

**silence**

*Were they the same words or phrases or different?*

Mary is often described as chosen by God, visited by an angel, obedient and mother of Jesus.

Joseph can also be described as chosen by God, visited by an angel, obedient and the earthly father of Jesus.

1. It is easy to cast Joseph in the role of Mary's betrothed but Joseph, like Mary, was **chosen by God**

If we had read the start of Matthew's gospel, which is the genealogy of Jesus (OK admit it who skips over this part?! – It's easy to do and yes I have been known to skip over it) you would notice that one of Joseph's ancestor's is King David. This is one of the important ancestors listed in Matthew. It is through Joseph's great (24 lots of great) grandfather that the prophecy in Isaiah is fulfilled – as we heard earlier in our Old Testament Reading.

*“<sup>13</sup>Then Isaiah said: “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? <sup>14</sup>Therefore*

*the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel."*

**2. Joseph is compassionate.**

According to society's customs of the time, Joseph had every right to end his betrothal to Mary for unfaithfulness, and it would not be unusual for him to do this in a public manner putting her very life at stake. However from the bible we know that Joseph is described as "just" or "righteous" (depending on which translation you are studying) however he doesn't want to do this and was only considering a quiet divorce so that Mary would not be put to shame or face death; but then things change;

**3. Joseph is visited by an Angel,** and receives marriage advice from the angel – this is not the normal way to receive marriage advice, either then or now. However unusual it was and is, Joseph didn't reject the angel's visit. He keeps his Betrothal to Mary

**4. Joseph is obedient.** He obeys the Angel's instructions and does not divorce her.

This is not the only time where Joseph's obedience is shown. Later on in the nativity story, in Matthew Chapter 2, we read that Joseph is the one who has a second angelic visit, this time in a dream and is warned to take his family and flee to Egypt. He obeys and leads his family to safety in Egypt which fulfills a second Old Testament Prophecy which is mentioned in the book of Hosea that God will call his Son out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1) and there is a similar prophecy in Isaiah 19:20

**5. Joseph was the earthly Father of Jesus.** When Jesus started his earthly ministry, he is sometimes referred to as the son of Joseph the Carpenter (Matt 13:25). Joseph's role of being the earthly father of Jesus is not something to be overlooked. Joseph was trusted by God to be the father of Jesus, a task that is not small and yet Joseph took this on when he obeyed God.

### **What does it mean for us?**

Just like Joseph we need to be compassionate, especially to those who are young and vulnerable. Compassion is one of the key aspects where we care about others in our society.

Today as we think about Jesus as a young child and the pressures that his earthly parents faced, including spending years as a refugee in Egypt. We can also reflect on the pressures that children and families face today. Today, there are

pressures on families, they may be different to the ones Mary and Joseph faced but they still face difficulties and pressure. Some families are also refugees.

Our charity of the month is the Children's Society and they work for children and young people's well being, including supporting children and young people who are at risk of abuse, exploitation, trafficking as well as working with young people who are refugees or migrants.

As a church, we recognise that local families also need support and this is why for the past few years we have employed a part-time family worker whose role includes supporting families in our parish with various problems. Our vision will see this role expand from 1<sup>st</sup> January to a full-time position. This role is funded from a specific restricted fund and is funded through donations from members of the church, the extension of the full-time role is being partly funded by a grant from the diocese.

Being compassionate doesn't always mean action, we can also financially support those who provide, what is often specialist support, by supporting charities such as the Children's Society or the family worker fund, but we are also called to pray for the work of the Children's Society and family worker.

A startling statistic from Children's Society is that this Christmas over 40,000 children and young people in the UK are at risk of abuse or neglect.

We are called to be obedient to God. We don't need to be visited by an angel to obey God. God speaks to us through prayer, through the bible and even through worship. We need to listen and obey God's word. We will not be asked to obey God by being Jesus' earthly father, but we will be asked to obey God by following Him.

It is easy to overlook God in our busy lives, especially at this time of year when we have presents to buy, cards to wrap, people to see, however the greatest gift we have ever received is the gift of God's son, Jesus.

To close, I want to leave you with this quote that is attributed to James Irwin who was the 8<sup>th</sup> man on the moon, "*the biggest event in history is when God put his foot on earth when his Son became Man*". In the form of his son Jesus Christ - Immanuel – God with Us.

Let us pray for Jesus, the son and his mother Mary and his earthly father Joseph. As we pray for families and children today. Amen