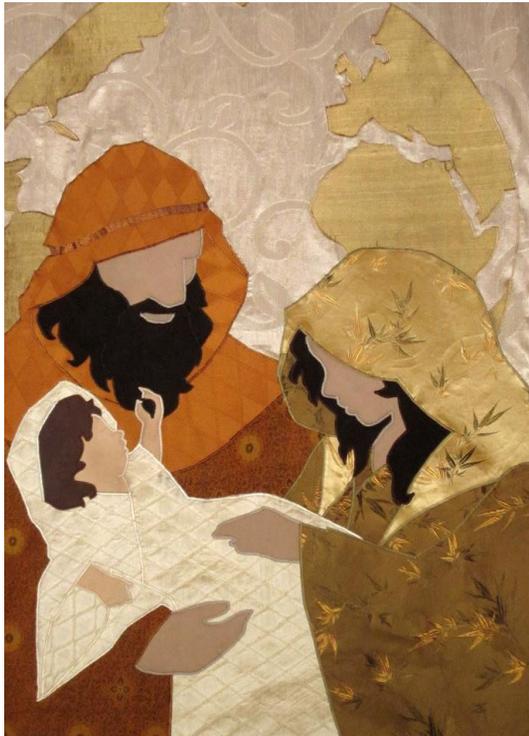


*“When Joseph awoke, he took Mary home,
she gave birth to a son and he named him.”*

Mt 1:24-25 (NJB para.)

“A Father’s Love”

Dec. 18, 2016



*Banner created by Katie & Elizabeth
Vlietstra, ...Christmas. 2007*

Today’s passage could simply be written off
as the 1st cy. version of a shot-gun Wedding,
God on the trigger; but that misses the point.

Joseph loved Mary, but he was also a man of his time.
His time - his context - was one of Roman occupation.

Unless one has lived under similar conditions
one cannot comprehend his personal struggle.

In occupied countries, there is invariably a subculture
of women who had given birth to ‘illegitimate’ children,
which children were fathered by the Occupation forces.

It’s like sex with indigent women is spoils of war,
the sad result being that they are forever spoiled.

They & their children were lowest of the low:
as deeply despised by their fellow Jews, as
they were disowned by their Roman fathers.

When he found out his fiancée Mary was pregnant,
Joseph had an extremely difficult decision to make:
He could disengage from the woman he loved... or
he could marry her, thus joining the lowest of the low.

If he disengaged from her, he could maintain his
status in the community... but he would lose her.
By marrying... he could be with her and her child,
but he would give up his status in the community.

Have you ever had that kind of decision to make?
One that preoccupied not only your waking hours,
but also the dreams and hallucinations of the night?

*“Joseph... do the smart thing, the right thing.
Joseph, I love you, I need you. But I cannot!
What of my business, my friends, my family?”*

Joseph this, Joseph that & Joseph the other.
Stop! Stop! Stop! Leave me alone! Let me be!

Then gradually one voice begins to rise above the others,
not a loud voice, nor a harsh voice... but a persistent one.

“Joseph - son of David - do not be afraid...”

Joseph, Son of David, remember who you are!
And remember all those who came before you!

This phrase connects today's passage
from the second half of the first chapter
of Matthew's Gospel to the first half of it.

The 1st part of Matthew Chapter 1 is Joseph's genealogy.
We are uncomfortable with those strange Jewish names;
but, imbedded within, is the hook for our Message today.

Joseph, you are not alone in this dilemma.
Things such as this have happened before;
and, would you believe it, in your own family.

1) Gr. grandpa David arranged for Uriah to be sent
into the fiercest of the fighting... where he died,
so that David could then take his wife Bathsheba,
who was mother of the great, wise King Solomon.

Later, the Queen of Sheba would visit King Solomon,
and take some of that wisdom back to her homeland.

Did she know that Solomon's mother, Bathsheba,
was also daughter of Sheba. That's what it means.
A daughter of Sheba, had mothered a Jewish King,

a scandal, difficult even for a king to survive.
I can hear Joseph's frightened protestations,

“I'm no king, just a peasant artisan.”

But the persistent voice does not give up on Joseph.

“Joseph - son of David - do not be afraid...”

2) There's also Gr. grandfather Boaz, who married Ruth
one of the accursed citizens of Moab, of which Torah
clearly stated: to marry one was to assume the curse.

Ruth and Boaz survived the curse and became
Grt. grandmother and Grt. grandfather to David.

*“So what, Boaz was a wealthy landowner.
I rent my little workshop, and depend on
my neighbours for the work orders I get.”*

But the persistent voice still refuses to give up on him.

“Joseph - son of David - do not be afraid...”

3) Joseph... don't you remember who mothered Boaz?
It was Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute who harbored
the Hebrew spies who had been scouting out Jericho.

She and her husband survived, and so can you!

But Joseph, fully versed in Scripture, could cite it just as well as the persistent voice in his dreams:

*“The last line in the Judges Scroll tells us,
‘In those days there was no king in Is-
rael... and everyone did as he saw fit.’
Today we have an Emperor; we have Kings,
and soldiers. Surely, this is a different time.”*

But still the persistent voice will not give up on him.

“Joseph - son of David - do not be afraid...”

4) Surely you remember your great ancestor, Judah,
whose tribal name is given to the district of Judea.
Bethlehem is the village they settled, 1200 yrs. ago.

Do you not recall how his eldest son, Er,
took a Canaanite girl, Tamar, as his wife;
how he died and, according to the Torah,
his brother, Onan, then made her his wife;
then he died too and Judah banished her?

While Judah had promised to send for her
when his 3rd son was of age - he never did.

So when Judah and his men were returning home
from sheep-shearing, hungry for female company,
Tamar sat beside the road, dressed as a prostitute.

Judah solicited her services, but having no money
with him he gave her his tribal seal as a guarantee,
to be returned to him later - when he would pay her.

But he was never able to find her again...

Flash forward a few months... and Judah gets reports
that his Canaanite daughter-in-law Tamar is with child.
He sends for Tamar, and asks her who has defiled her,
so they can both be stoned to death, as per the Torah.

In front of witnesses, she pulled out Judah's tribal seal,
“The man who owns this is the child's father,”

and Judah takes her as wife to legitimize their son.

*“Joseph - son of David - do not be afraid
to take Mary as your wife; the child con-
ceived in her is from the Holy Spirit; she
will bear a son, and you are to name him
Jesus... he will be a saviour to his people.”*

At least one ancient manuscript - the Syrian Sinaiticus -
ends the Genealogy of Joseph with the following words:

*“Joseph - to whom was betrothed
the Virgin Mary - fathered Jesus.”*

It might have been a slip of the scribal quill,
but a Freudian slip that, in a way, got it right;
he fathered Jesus in every way that mattered.

And the sons born to Tamar, Rahab, Ruth & Bathsheba,
tainted with foreign blood, sexual scandal, you name it,
are no less conceived of the Holy Spirit than was Jesus.

They are all part of Bethel, the family of God;
and so Joseph - as fathers do - named Jesus,
the one for whom he was chosen to be father,
and the one who benefited from that fathering.

I don't know about you, but I find it interesting,
no - far more than interesting - I find it puzzling,
that Scripture, which usually emphasizes males,
largely ignored Joseph's part in the life of Jesus.

The role played by those other four males
in the risqué encounters with their women,
is to varying degrees recorded in scripture.

But Joseph's parenting is virtually ignored,
except for the "Freudian slip" I cited earlier.

Of course, by the time the Gospels get written they
are more interested in emphasizing Jesus identity -
as the one and only beloved messianic son of God.
How he learned to be a caring, compassionate man
from his father Joseph wasn't high on the to do list.

Nevertheless, in Matthew's story it is Joseph
who encounters God's messenger in a dream.

It is Joseph, affirming his role as Jesus' father,
who performs the tradition of naming his son.

Warned by God's messenger of Herod's wrath,
it is Joseph who takes them to safety in Egypt.

Only Matthew reiterates the names of four others,
who like Mary encountered difficult circumstances,
but were - nevertheless - very significant branches
on a family tree that would spawn another dreamer,
who - like his gr. uncle namesake - dreamed for God,
who played a role in God's dream for humanity.

And each of us can choose to accept a role in that dream.

PAUSE

Several Decembers ago, I was privileged to preside
at the Funeral Luncheon reception for Craig Ennett;
my role was simple - keep the proceedings on track.

Craig was young, barely in his 39th year.
The last two people to speak at the mike
were his wife Vero & her daughter Yvana.

I say her daughter intentionally, since she was born
before Craig and Vero met. And Yvana spoke softly,
but passionately about her father and his love for her.

It's obvious to me that Craig had accepted his role
in God's dream for his life and that of Vero & Yvana.

Some years ago, at Christmas, one of my daughters
gave me a book by Gwen Nowak - a Roman Catholic -
entitled, "*Miriam of Nazareth, Who Can Find Her?*"

I've loaned it out to several people, and some of them
have bought it for themselves to share it with friends;
some of my insights about Joseph are inspired by her.

But she feels unqualified to do a "full study" of Joseph.
Let me read for you what she says about it in her book:

"I look forward with anticipation to more scholarly and imaginative contributions of Jewish & Christian men to a composite portrait of Joseph."

"A Father's Love," would make a good title... Amen.