

Sermon

Choices of Ordinary People Like Joseph

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This morning's Gospel is from Matthew 1:18-25. When Matthew begins his Gospel, he doesn't just say, "Here's the story of Jesus." He uses a word that would have caught his first readers' attention right away. He calls it the *genesis* of Jesus Christ—the beginning, the origin, the birth. It's the same word used as the title of the very first book of the Bible, the Book of Genesis.

Matthew is hinting at something big. He wants us to see that the story of Jesus isn't just another biography or another birth announcement. It's a new beginning on the scale of creation itself. Just as God once spoke light into the darkness, now God is doing something just as world-shaping through the birth of Jesus.

And with that in mind, Matthew invites us into the story of how this new beginning unfolds—starting with an unexpected pregnancy, a confused fiancé, and a God who steps in to bring hope where everything seems uncertain. Listen to our Gospel passage with this in mind...

Matthew 1:18-25

18 Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was

Inspired by workingpreacher.org commentary on Matthew 1:18-25 by Rev Eugene Park.

found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. **19** Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. **20** But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. **21** She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” **22** All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

23 “Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.” **24** When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife **25** but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.

L: This is the Gospel of our Lord.

R: Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.

Unlike the telling of Luke, in Matthew’s telling, the annunciation, that Mary had become pregnant, not due to adultery but by the Holy Spirit, is told through a dream, to Joseph. It is not clear if Mary already had been made aware of this from God but it is clear, until this moment Joseph was not.

He had indicated he would quietly dismiss her due to her presumed adultery rather than subject her to the usual punishment. Joseph had already made a significant choice even before he was made to understand just what

was happening to Mary and ultimately to him. Scripture calls Joseph “righteous man” due to his actions within this very delicate situation.

Joseph was a significant influence upon the birth and early life of Jesus. What must he have been like to even consider making this choice and then raising Jesus in such a way that he fought so passionately for justice and love of all. In this choice, it seems, Joseph was a just and righteous man carefully selected by God for the unimaginable task of first, believing that Mary’s pregnancy was not betrayal but Holy, and to be such a devoted Jew as to teach Jesus his humanness in such a beautiful and loving way.

Do we brush over Joseph too much or am I making more of this than it deserves in the story and life of Jesus? After all, Joseph was an ordinary man who made extraordinary choices. He believed despite all sense of reason and because of his belief, his faith not just in God but in humanity, we stand here today on the fourth Sunday of Advent speaking of this choice and the true realigning of creation that it led to.

You and I, too, are ordinary. We do not have exceptional influence or power in the world. We live simple lives in this small corner of the Universe called Western New York. We endure long, cold, snowy, windy winters as they blow off two “great lakes” and into our yards and driveways. We do not have a grand city to entertain us with endless opportunities of cultural experiences, though I think we have exceptional choices in our small city. Yet – do we not have influence? Do we not have the ability to change things to help others see the magical power of this beautiful story we celebrate this week?

I remember a day in December of 2020 when a young quarterback showed his determination and dedication to his craft by showing up to start an NFL game just after his beloved grandmother Patricia passed away and a community rallied around him raising so much money for Children's Hospital that a wing was dedicated in her honor and continues to receive sizable donations to sustain its importance to the care of sick children, even today. Ordinary people did that.

On June 5, 1989, an unidentified man stood in front of a row of tanks near Beijing's Tiananmen Square — and became world-renowned as the "Tank Man." One ordinary man whose bravery became an iconic symbol of bravery, single-handedly standing up to authoritarianism on behalf of his brothers and sisters.

A woman responsible for more jailbreaks, sabotage missions and leaks of Nazi troop movements than any spy in France. She was an American, Virginia Hall, but [the Nazis](#) knew her only as "the limping lady." Ordinary person.

Is there really such a thing as an ordinary person? How can there be if the divine is within us? Aren't these moments possible and probably in all our lives? Perhaps we won't have the opportunity to stand in front of a tank or become a spy to end an egregious war, but perhaps when we stand with and for one another – it is as life changing for that person we reach to with love – for them, it is like you are standing in front of a tank that feels like it's going to run them over.

How can we truly say we are ordinary? We are all called to do extraordinary things – every single one of us – no matter our station in life, our age, or our bank account. We all have Jesus within us to help us make incredible choices...to change lives, including our own. To stand with others against evil and bring love to the forefront in every situation. When our small donation makes little difference, matched with hundreds or thousands of others it builds a medical wing that serves and changes lives.

The world is overwhelming with its need and seems to grow daily lately. But don't be distracted – just because we can't do everything doesn't mean we should not do something and perhaps that something is what turns the tide.

You see, our savior was raised by a man – an ordinary man – who showed Jesus how to be righteous, not just as a divine entity, but as a human. He raised a man who stood up to political power, who questioned the priests and temple leaders, who cared for the lowly and the poor. Joseph raised a man who flipped tables and challenged evil. Joseph raised a human man who would stand, not in front of a tank, but on a cross, to save all of us.

And friends, when we talk about ordinary people doing extraordinary things, we're not just talking about Joseph. We're talking about us—this little church, this ministry we share. Because the truth is, our church is hurting right now. This past year was financially difficult, and we ended the year in the red—more deeply than I've ever seen since I've been here. It's not sustainable, and it's important that we name that honestly.

But I'm not telling you this to discourage you. I'm telling you because this is something worth fighting for. This church has stood here for more than a century. It has shaped our lives, held our families, baptized our children, buried our loved ones, and carried us through seasons of joy and heartbreak. It may be God's church, but every one of us has been blessed by it in ways that can't be measured.

So I'm asking you to pray with your family. To talk together about what you might be able to give to support this ministry. And please hear this: no gift is too small. When ordinary people offer what they can, God has a way of weaving those gifts together into something extraordinary. That's how this church has survived for 100 years—and it's how it will continue.

And as we look ahead, we're also taking practical steps. Beginning in January, we'll shift to "Chapel Church" for the winter months, gathering in our newly remodeled chapel. It will give our worship a more intimate feel, let us use the technology we have in that space, and—very practically—allow us to turn the heat down in this large sanctuary and save significantly on our gas bill. I'm genuinely excited about being closer together as we worship and share the Gospel each week.

I'd love to hear your thoughts, and so would our worship committee—Ron Clements, Bill Springer, Maureen Kwiatkowski, and Barb Logar. And if you'd like to help shape this new worship experience, we would be thrilled to have you join us. We meet once a month on Zoom; just let me know, and I'll make sure you get the link.

So as we step back into Joseph's story, we remember that God has always worked through ordinary people who choose faith over fear, compassion over convenience, and courage over certainty. Joseph didn't know how everything would unfold. He didn't have all the answers. But he offered what he had—his trust, his obedience, his willingness to say yes—and God used it to bring Christ into the world.

And that is still how God works. Through people like us. Through churches like ours. Through small acts of generosity, quiet decisions to care, and everyday choices to show up for one another. We may feel small. We may feel stretched. We may feel unsure of what comes next. But God has never needed a perfect situation—only willing hearts.

This is our moment to be Joseph people. To listen for God's voice. To trust that our gifts matter. To believe that what we offer—our prayers, our presence, our resources, our hope—can become part of something far bigger than we can see.

May we step into this season with that same courage. May we give with that same trust. And may we discover, as Joseph did, that when we say yes to God, even in uncertain times, God brings new beginnings to life.

Amen.

Benediction

As you go from this place, remember Joseph—an ordinary person who trusted God enough to take the next faithful step. May you go with that same quiet courage. May you offer what you have, trusting that God can make it more. May you see your small acts of generosity, kindness, and hope become part of God's extraordinary work in this church and in this community.

And may the God who brings new beginnings, the Christ who is Emmanuel—God with us, and the Spirit who strengthens and sustains us, go with you and guide you, today and always.

Amen.