



**Joseph**  
**An Unsung Christmas Hero**  
**Pastor Mike Fabarez**

Well there is no doubt that the birth of Jesus the Messiah is an amazing event. The most profound birth in all of human history. The most theologically significant period of time when God steps into time and space to single handedly solve our most profound problem. It certainly has captured our attention, it grabs our focus, even our culture every December, helps direct our thoughts back to the incarnation of Jesus Christ, it's well worth our attention, our respect, our allegiance. And there are several other things about the nativity scene in the Scripture as it's laid out for us that helps to capture our attention and rightfully so. Many significant things taking place, many important players in all of this. Mary, of course, captures a lot of our attention. We think about her devotion, her humility, her example of worship and praise to God, just the important role that she played. Come Christmas time we even turn our attention to the shepherds as they're out there as the common man, so to speak, in the fields watching over their flocks and here comes this angelic chorus and we think about the significance of all that. The intrigue of the wise men certainly captures our attention as we think through the Biblical story and, I mean, who can't but wonder about these guys and where they're from, these kings from the east, as they're called, and we learn about the Magi and we're fascinated by it.

Even Herod, the great antagonist of the Nativity story. I mean I've preach sermons over the years on that, on him and what he's all about and how he plays in and what we can learn from that antagonist of the story of the Nativity.

But much like a husband who may feel like an extra in the delivery room of his child, there's this guy, Joseph. Joseph, not even responsible for the conception of the baby. Talk about feeling like a third wheel in all this, he's just there, a bit player, a supporting role at best. Yeah, you have this figurine in your nativity set at home, I'm assuming he's there, but, I mean, what to think of this guy and who is he and what's this all about. Well, we don't give it much thought. That may be understandable just in the sense that we don't seem to have a lot of Biblical information about him. Not a single line of text recorded regarding what he ever said.

Joseph, the forgotten figure in all of this. And yet, at least in the spectrum of what we're looking at in the structure and organization of this home that's going to raise the Messiah, I mean, you'd think he'd be significant and the more we give it thought, we think, well yeah, he must have been. I mean even up through that scene that we studied in Luke about that time when Jesus, at least from Mary's and Joseph's perspective, gets lost in the temple. Remember that? After the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover? You see that scene and all of that discussion with the word parents, parents, parents, throughout that narrative and we recognize his role in raising the young Christ. It's significant, particularly as that passage ends with those words in Luke 2:52 that "Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man."

And if you think that just after we've had this whole scene about dad leading his family to Jerusalem and doing what the law required and having this interesting encounter as Jesus displays his divine wisdom before these rabbis and teachers and scribes, it is interesting to think about the fact that, yeah, he's 12 years old in that scene and he's been growing in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man. And I know God could have fed the Messiah in a lot of miraculous ways, but you assume, as I do, and rightly so, that he was probably nourished the same way we all are. He ate the bread of his mom in the kitchen and you had, you know, food and real caloric intake fueling



the body so that it could be said of him that he grew in stature.

We don't think that he got manna from heaven or ravens fed him and we know that came through the normal means of domestic life in the first century. But I wonder if we think about it long enough, wouldn't it be true too then some of that wisdom that he is credited with continually increasing in his childhood, in that favor with God, in that favor with men, I mean, was that not probably through the normal means of what we see in a first century family or any family today, that dad was not only dragging him to church and not only making sure he understood the Scripture and not only walked him through his prayers but imparted to him parental wisdom and taught him his trade and made sure that he thought about the future. I mean, yeah, we understand he's all God and he's all man and that gives us some pause about how all that worked when it came to things like wisdom and favor with God and men, but we understand that Joseph had to have played a significant role in his childhood, and he does. I think the problem with most of us is we rushed to the most luminary and interesting and attractive parts in the nativity scene and Joseph gets little of our attention and I'd like to change all that for you this morning. I'd like to rethink his role.

I think it's just helpful to complete our whole historic view of what's going on there and then maybe even just to speculate a little bit about what is really not going on the limb but what all of us would have felt if we were in that situation. And try and put ourselves in his sandals and see if we can't leave this morning, not only with a better educated look at the nativity story but maybe having a challenge in our own lives that Joseph isn't someone we should just pass over in our minds or quickly recognize, "Yeah, he had to have someone, I suppose, lead the family for that young Christ, but that he was a really significant, impressive, respectful model of what I think we're all hoping for in our Christian lives, to live a life that is pleasing to the Lord.

So open your Bibles this morning and turn to Matthew Chapter 1 and let's remind ourselves a little bit about Joseph. Now before we start to fill in the gaps about what we read here in this text in Matthew 1, I'd like to ask you, if I were to say what are the two or three things you could tell me about Joseph. "Well, some things, Mike, you've already mentioned and that is, of course, he's the step dad to the Messiah, he's married to Mary and betrothed when this all goes down," but you would probably throw in one other thing. Right? You'd say I know his occupation. Joseph was a... carpenter. That's what all the paintings in the Louvre or all the drawings we have or depictions on the Internet, show him in a wood shop. Right? He's there with a planer, he's, you know, crafting something or maybe even as a little kid, they show him in Joseph's workshop, because Jesus is going to grow up the son of a carpenter. Well, we need to be careful about our image of that and all the paintings shouldn't inform us. We should really go back to what the text means when we read that and if you were to study the language of the New Testament, Koine Greek, you'd come across that word that translates carpenter and you'd see the word "tekton," Joseph was a tekton.

Jesus grew up the son of a tekton. Tekton is a word that makes its way into English, maybe you remember back to your geology class in high school or in college and they talked about plate tectonics, tectonic movement.

We learned a little bit about tectonics, which means the crust of the earth, the rocks of the earth, the things that make up these plates that cause all this volcanic activity and the stressors and all the things of the fire ring in the Pacific, there are lots that relate to that but we're always talking in terms of seismic activity, volcanic activity and plate tectonics, tectonics. Tectonics, the building of the crust of the planet. That word tekton, if you were to literally translate it, would be translated "to build."



And even as we took that word and use it for what we understand about the crust of the Earth, we recognize that that Earth is built by rocks. Right? "Lithos," rocks. Well, in the first century if you want to think about a builder, if you said he's the son of a builder and Joseph is a builder and you even, in your mind, go to Israel, some of you've been there, some you've seen, certainly, movies and pictures and documentaries about it, well if you were to take that image that you have of Israel, of Jerusalem, and you were to go back in time, it would look much the same. I mean it's a city full of dwellings and buildings and marketplaces built out of stone, mostly limestone, and you'd realize that if you were a builder and you had a business card or you told someone you were a builder, you'd recognize what kind of builder that is. And that isn't that there wasn't some wood involved, but wood was not the plenteous material in the first century, nor today, nor in the 10th century B.C., because if you go back far enough in your mind, you'd think about the big building projects where we needed some big beams like you might have today, those lam beams, we don't have steel girders or beams. If you're going to build a big building like the Temple of Solomon, well Solomon is going to need some timber. To go to get that timber to hold up that stone building you're going to have it imported because, as you might remember, famously said, Solomon goes and gets those ships out of Joppa and sends them up to Lebanon to find the Cedars of Lebanon so he can build his big building. Why? Because there's not a lot of forest, there are not a lot of trees there are not a lot of wood to deal with, so if you say you're a tekton in the first century, if you say you're a tekton even in the 10th century B.C., you're probably talking about a stonemason, somebody who's building things with stone.

And so we meet our guy, who's a builder, much like you might see today equated with the framers, some guy who says, "I worked in construction." Right? You're not the foreman and you're not the architect and you're not the land developer, then you are the worker, you got the calloused hands, you're probably, you know, chiseled yourself, you're built and certainly if you're chiseling literal stones, I mean, these guys are hardy workers. They worked with their back, not with their mind.

They didn't make a lot of money. Of course, the architects made more, the developers made more, the guys giving directions made more, but the tektons, the workers, the builders, well they're working most of the day in the heat with stone. Joseph, you might remember, along with Mary, they were from Nazareth, just three and half miles north of Nazareth is one of the biggest rock quarries in Israel. It's been there and archaeologists have gone into that place, Zipporah, and they've looked at that city, they've uncovered how significant it was that this building center, basically, because all the quarried rocks that came out that place, was a place where you would naturally have a lot of stonemasons working throughout Israel. As a matter of fact, the government did a lot of work, even in the first century under Rome, to develop that and use it as a resource hub for the building projects all over Israel. That stone quarry, that stone work, gives us a little sense, maybe, of what Jesus grew up with and maybe why, when he enlisted illustrations, he often brought those illustrations back to... stones. He liked to quote that Psalm 118 reference in the Old Testament about the stone that the builders rejected became the capstone, the cornerstone, you know, the archway stone that holds it all together. That concept of building, I think makes a lot of Biblical sense, it certainly makes historical sense and it does give us a sense of that some of these pictures you have in your mind maybe wrong of, you know, little Jesus whittling in a woodshop while his dad's making a chair. I'm not saying there wasn't wood being used in ancient construction but really the focus on a builder would be someone who is good at working with stone.

It also gives us a sense of his socio-economic status in the country and it's that guy that God, by his providence, chose to have raised the Messiah and it takes place this way, if you drop down to verse



18, as we have a picture of Joseph and start to put ourselves in his shoes. It says, "The birth of Christ," verse 18 Matthew 1, "took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph," there's our man, "before they came together," OK, that's, of course, the expectation, I hope, for your children and so it was in the first century, you don't have sex before marriage, "was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit." Now, that's a bizarre mind-blowing sentence that, if you weren't with us last year, 52 Sundays ago, I preached the sermon on the virgin birth of Christ, we took this same passage and all we did is thought about it genetically, we thought about it physically, biologically, we thought about it theologically, we focused on the necessity of it, the importance of it, that would be a good sermon to review. I think I listed it on the back for your reference. But in this case, I just want to think about Joseph being betrothed, being engaged.

I don't know how long your engagement was if you were married, but in the ancient world, in the first century, it is probably about a year. A year would go by when they would have this time for the husband to go out and establish his home, oftentimes building his home, which would have been right up the alley of Joseph the builder, the mason, the construction worker. They enter into a contract and they say, "You are going to be my wife." The family has agreed to it. He says, "Now I'm going to go and set up a place for us to live. I'm going to come back and I'm going to receive my bride." Even that picture is one we can start to see parallels with the theology of Christ coming back to receive his bride in the New Testament. Well, that's the picture and Joseph's working hard, sweating, calloused hands, not only at the job that he works all day long, but to set up a home for his future bride, who is already in contract with. And maybe you've heard this from Sunday school stories or sermons in the past, if you wanted to get out of that you had to actually issue a certificate of dissolution, a decree, a divorce submittal, because this was said to be a done deal. Because all this work was going into what would end up being the consummation of the covenant and the relationship when marriage came along twelve months later. He's out there busy doing his work. He, of course, as we'll learn, as a just man, described as a righteous man is faithful not to have sex with his fiancée and the Bible says yet she's found to be with child.

Now, forget the last four words of that sentence "from the Holy Spirit" that was not on his radar at this point. That's the narrative description, that's the commentary from Matthew. You got to know what a painful thing that must have been. I don't want to make this too personal or uncomfortable for you, but if you had found out that your fiancée was cheating on you when you were engaged, particularly in a culture where you had signed some kind of contract, you'd already basically filled out the marriage license, you'd already signed your name and you were all committed to going to do everything you could to prepare for this marriage, doing all you could in selfless love to build for the future, and now, all of a sudden, your fiancée is found out to be a cheater. That is devastating.

And it says in verse 19, "Her husband Joseph, being a just man." That word translated "just" is the same word translated "righteous" he's a righteous man, a just man, because to be just is to be righteous, a just man wants to do the right thing, the just thing, a righteous man. "And then unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly," because that's what was expected. It's one thing for you to consider whether you're going to dump your spouse when they cheat on you after you've consummated the relationship, but the rabbis made clear in the first century that you dump that girl if you're in a commitment, a promissory situation and you haven't come together and consummated the relationship. If she's a cheater, she has to be exposed, brought out, divorced and you want to have, as they said in the first century, have her carry the label "prostitute" from that point on because she's a woman with no moral fiber. That was something he, as you can see with a little conflict here in verse 19, was willing to proceed with, though in a way that says something about his character. Verse 20, though, says, "As he was considering all these things, behold an angel



of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife.'"

He now gets the 411 that we learn from Matthew in verse 18 and that is "for what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. That's unprecedented and not yet ever repeated and something that is just as odd for you to hear from your fiancée as it was for him to hear from his and a mind-blowing situation for him to be in. The words "Do not fear." What would make a strong, work-with-your-hands kind of guy be afraid to take her as his wife? Well, it would be disappointing, certainly for sure. Would there be fear involved? Of course there would be fear involved.

There is fear of what people would think. There's fear what my mother, my father, my grandparents, my uncle, my aunt, what people would think I'm doing to settle for a gal who can't even keep her act together while we're engaged. I mean, there's a lot involved in this that's not going to go well. Not to mention what most people mention and that is the gossip and slander that's going to be about our lives. Not to mention the fact that this girl clearly is pregnant not by me. I'm going to end up being the step dad right out of the gate. This is not good.

There's a lot of things to be afraid of in terms of my future if I proceed with this and yet the Bible says, here comes a word from God, "an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream." Now by the way, we just finished our Old Testament survey on Thursday and we ended with a quote from the Babylonian Talmud that made it clear that the Israelites understood very crystal clear in their mind that when it came to the end of Malachi, here's how they put it in the Babylonian Talmud, the "Holy Spirit took leave of Israel." We were done with the revelation of God. It closed down. We didn't have God now, breaking into time and space, sending his messengers or prophets or anyone else to give messages. As a matter of fact, it ended, as you studied with me, if you were here on Thursday or you listen online, it ended in Chapter 3 and 4 of Malachi as saying when God comes and speaks again it'll be through a forerunner, it'll be because there's someone who we now know of in the New Testament is John the Baptist, who's going to come and prepare the way for the Lord. And sure enough the first break into time and space with God's message came to Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist, who was a hill-country priest who had a once in a lifetime opportunity, as happened to those village priests, to come to Jerusalem and burn incense in the altar and it was his turn and he went in there and he had a vision. This angel appeared and told him you're going to have a child.

Then to Mary, same thing. Angel breaks in, you're going to have a child. 400 silent years. Now the observant Jews and the Orthodox Jews think that silence has yet to be broken. But according to God's plan it's been broken in the first century with the angelic message coming first to Zachariah, to Mary, now to Joseph and God is speaking again and just like it was predicted in Joel, you got "old men seeing visions, young men dreaming dreams," you have all kinds of things now preparing the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. And if you look carefully at all those situations, you know what you'll find, people being told things that are very hard to believe, just like this, with Zachariah and Mary both saying, "What are you talking about?" I told you there's not a single line of text given from Joseph coming out of his mouth. Well there's plenty for Mary and plenty from Zachariah.

We learned it in Luke when we studied the narrative of the nativity in Luke, we find Zachariah saying, "What in the world are you talking about? I'm old, my wife's past childbearing years, there's no way this is going to happen." Matter of fact, he talked back so much, God disciplined him, remember he couldn't speak until the baby was born?



Now Mary is not held to the same high standard as a working Levitical priest, but she says the same thing in essence, "What are you talking about. I mean, you're saying something miraculous. This cannot be. I'm a virgin. I can't be with child, I can't bear a child, I'm not pregnant."

You know what's interesting here and I don't want to make too much of an argument from silence but there's nothing going on here other than Joseph getting the word that he should take Mary as his wife, and drop down to verse 24, after all the message from the angels, it says, "When Joseph woke from the sleep..." Now this happened in his dream just like his namesake back in Genesis, Joseph has a dream, a prophetic dream and in this case the angel speaks to him and says, "Take her as your wife, it's OK, this is the Messiah." When he woke up, the very day he woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded. Where's the dialogue, where's the, "I can't believe this," where's the "I'm not sure you got your information straight or give me more clarity or I need a sign like Gideon. Give me a fleece moment to make this clear to me."

And yet you'll find a lot of Godly people acting like that, won't you? They'll find what God says and they'll say, "I need to be sure." Gideon did it. Why? Because God said you need to go fight the Midianites. He goes, "I'm not a fighter. How can I do that? I'm from a small tribe, I can't go out there and be a military commander." Well, that goes all the way back to Moses. "Hey, Moses you're going to lead the people out of Egypt." You know this story. And what does he say? Does he return from the burning bush and says, "OK, fine?" No, he argues with God. "Me? I can't do it." After argument, argument, argument, he finally says, "I can't. I'm not even a good speaker. How am I going to do this?" And it says, "The anger the Lord was kindled against Moses."

Jeremiah, you're going to preach, you're going to tell these people in Judah we got problems. "How am I going to that? I'm too young. I can't do all that." All that ink spilled by the Holy Spirit to say, "Well, wait a minute."

Not a word of that with Joseph. You've got it all over the Bible. Good and godly men who end up doing the right thing. But there's a bit of a stutter step there. You know why? Because they're afraid. "Do not fear to take Mary as your wife." And he goes, "OK."

If I were to say what do I learn about Joseph in this little narrative here, I would say, well, I learned he's an obedient person. But greater than that, I learn that he's willing to not fear, and to trust what God says. Let me put it that way for you. The Bible says anytime you see an example of faith like that you ought to imitate that kind of faith. I want to put it this way, number one, you ought to imitate, number one, Joseph's courageous faith. Now, you want to put an asterisk by that? Right? What I mean by that is whatever God says he's going to be gutsy and bold enough to trust that God knows what he's talking about and he's going to do it.

And this was secondhand through an angelic being, as strange as it might have been, I'm still going to think, "Well, what did I have for dinner last night. Maybe this dream was based on something, I don't know. I'm not sure, I need a fleece moment. No, no, none of that for him.

"Well maybe there's just not enough space to add his dialogue." Well, I don't think so. Let me prove it to you. Go to Matthew Chapter 2 verse 13. After the wise men had departed it says, "Behold an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream."

Now, this was probably about 18 months, pushing two years later. "Rise, take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt." Now, you tell the Bethlehemite who's now trying to raise this kid in



Bethlehem, in Judea, to go live now in Egypt. Now I'm talking about back in the day, or even today, go to Jerusalem and find a good observant Jew and say, "You going to live in Cairo now."

Do you think that's a good move for him? No way. Not in the first century, not in the 15th century B.C., not today.

"Now, I need you go to Egypt." Of all places, Egypt? Could have gone a lot of places. "No, I want you to flee to Egypt. And I want you to remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." Verse 14. Joseph said, "Why Egypt? Can't I go somewhere else?" Is that what it says? Are you looking to your Bibles? Correct me if I ever read the Scripture wrong. "And he rose and took the child and his mother," now underline these two words, "by night and departed to Egypt." In the middle of the night. "OK. You want me to go to Egypt, then to Egypt I'm going."

Drop down to verse 19. Herod the Great dies and "an angel of Lord appeared to Joseph again in a dream now in Egypt." He's living in Egypt. How many months he was there, we you don't know for sure. But we get another message now, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel."

"Oh, brother! Back again?" "Yeah, because the guys who sought to kill the child are dead."

"So he rose and took the child and his mother and he went to the land of Israel." This is the third time now. God says it, he responds, no dialogue, no excuses, no fleeces. "OK. Yes sir. I'm on it." "But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father he was afraid." Do you see the battle that goes on in your life and mine when you open up the Bible and it says, here's what you're to believe, here's what you're to advocate for, here's what you're supposed to do. The battle is really at the level of our faith. You want to talk about obedience, I can say, "Go obey the Scripture." What I really need to do is to deal with that sub-surface level debate in your heart and that is fear. What is it going to cost me to obey God? And you need to recognize that and see what I need is courageous faith. I need to be resolved like Joseph to say, "If God says it, I'm going." He was afraid and God said, "Well listen, Israel is a big place. Let me clarify now." "Being warned in a dream" a fourth time now, God's adding further clarification, "Let's take you to the district of Galilee." Wow. You want to talk about a pawn on the chessboard of God. God's moving him all over the place. "He withdrew and went to the district of Galilee." He did it. He did exactly what God said. Why is that? Because he understood who God was.

I guarantee you this godly, just man understood who God is. Let's look at verse 15, go back up to verse 15. "And he remained there until the death of Herod," he was in Egypt "to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'"

Drop down to verse 23. Why did he go up to the northern region of Galilee? Well, he was originally from there but he's getting pretty comfortable in Bethlehem before he got kicked out. But he went back to Nazareth. "So that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene."

All I'm saying is this: God's got a plan, he's going to work out a plan according to his sovereign plan and what he needs is people like Joseph who are willing to go, "I'll be the pawn on the chessboard. Fine. Because I'm not going to be frightened by any fear. I know in my flesh there are things that make me afraid, but my faith is going to be stronger than my fear."



I wonder what you fear you will lose if you do what you know the Bible says. This sermon, by the way, does you no good if you cannot identify, right now, a few things in this first point that you think, if I were to do what the Bible says, if I were to believe what the Bible says, if I were to adhere to and advocate the things the Bible says, here's what I'm afraid might happen. What it will cost me in terms of reputation, in terms of time, in terms of resources, in terms of money, in terms of the perfect Norman Rockwell family that you want to have, in terms of your future, in terms of your money or your security, whatever it might be, you've got to think of those things and say this: what God wants you to do is to be a lot more like that very enigmatic figure in your nativity set that you don't give much thought to, Joseph, who four times now we've looked at real quickly, said, "Yes sir. Yes sir. Yes sir."

And what God will do is fulfill his purpose. It may not be a purpose that you feel like you're all at the center of, it may not be, as a matter of fact, it probably won't be. We talk about things working out for good to those who love God and are calling... It doesn't say your good. Who knows how you're connected to the good God's working out, but God's going to do good. He's got a plan. He's working it out. He needs people like Joseph.

Well, maybe Joseph was the Indiana Jones type. Maybe all this travel, he had some money, an inheritance. I already told you he's a working man with calluses on his hands. Now he's trying to do work in his field four-days travel away, 80 miles from his home in Nazareth. I mean, this guy's probably struggling for money. Let me prove it to you. Turn over to Luke Chapter 2. I can tell you without really much doubt at all, that as we go to Luke 2 and back in time to the first week of Christ's life, that Joseph was a poor man. And yet it didn't matter, he was going to do what the Lord said. And the Lord had said in Leviticus 12 and in Exodus 13, that when you come to the week of your child's life, your boys should be circumcised, you should have a purification offering for the mother, you are to come and present the baby as the first born and give a sacrifice of redemption in case of his life. You are always to exchange a sacrifice for the first of that child's life.

Look at verse 22, Luke 2:22. "When the time came for the purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord." So he just a little baby now. We've gone back in time from two years, back to a little one week old infant. Then he quotes Exodus 12, "Every male who opens first the womb shall be holy," or set apart, "to the Lord." And what did he come to do? In parentheses, verse 24, "and to offer a sacrifice according to what the Law of the Lord said." It is not just dreams that he's following. They call Joseph, his namesake and in Genesis, a dreamer. I mean, he's about the Word of God.

Of course God was presenting new truth to that first generation but here we have him saying, "Oh, let's look at what God said through Moses 1400 years ago." And if he said you're supposed to come and redeem the first born, I'm coming to redeem the first born. He offers what is called for according to the Law of the Lord, now he quotes, "a pair of turtle doves and two young pigeons."

The reason I'm going to bring you to this to tell you something about his checkbook is because to have this, look at this phrase, "two turtle doves and two young pigeons," which, of course, he is just a traveler there, he was there for taxation, he's not even probably got a job yet. It's only a week into the life of his own son.

But he goes there and has to, as most people do, exchange some money to buy those sacrifices somewhere near the top of the Temple Mount so he can bring these sacrifices and he's exchanging his money for these things. But if you were to look at Leviticus Chapter 12, you know what it says





you're supposed to bring? A lamb. He can't even afford a lamb. Now they're selling lambs, I'm sure. Outside the gates there, up on the Temple Mount, somewhere near the portico, you can buy a lamb, but he can't afford it, because in Leviticus 12 says if he can't bring the lamb, you can bring, as it says here, a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons. That's a lot cheaper.

I don't think this just and righteous man was holding back, it's just it shows us that he could have said, probably, very conveniently like we say, "I can't afford to obey you this time, God. If I lose this job, if people don't like me, if I lose this account, if I stand up for what's right, if I share the Gospel here, if I give my money here, if I support this thing here, if I make this move here, I just can't afford to." He was willing to obey. Resolve to do what God said fearlessly, whatever it might cost.

Dropped down to verse 39. That's the kind of guy he was. He was going to cross his "T's" and dot his "I's" when it came to doing what God's Word said. When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee. Now, you've got a lot going on in that little phrase because what we don't see here is the story in Matthew that we have that they go down to Egypt, Herod dies, they come back, Archelaus scares them, they go back up to Nazareth. So it's a little circuitous route to get to where he's going but eventually ends up there to the town of Nazareth because we're just trying to identify Luke as an historian, that's where he grows up. And there at Nazareth, when he finally makes his way to the hometown of Mary and Joseph, "the child grows, becomes strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him. Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover." That should ring a bell in our mind again and go "ding-ding." Wow, really? I told you that when it comes to these festivals or feasts you're supposed to come and pilgrimage to Jerusalem, three times a year if you lived anywhere near the temple, for the feast of Passover in the spring, for the celebration of the feast that you have in Pentecost, your fields being harvested. the first harvest, early summer, and then in the fall for the Feast of Booths. If you didn't live near by the rabbis would let you come to one. In other words, you could say, "OK, it's too far to travel, you can just go to one." The average ancient could travel about 20 miles a day. So to get from that 80 miles, 78 miles from Nazareth where he lived with his young family, down to Jerusalem, it says he did this every year and we learned that he had more children with Mary, had brothers and sisters and so you've got a big family, at least six kids you've got and you're pulling them down here every single year.

Now if you only travel 20 miles a day you can see this is the four-day journey. It's like you saying, "Every year I've got to go to Chicago just for a church event, so that I can lose more money and give my offerings to God and travel and all the time, taking time away from my building work and my building projects and all the houses that I've got to build. Now I've got to go to Chicago," and drive there and spend places every night along the way and work all that out, he's doing that every year, because he does everything according to the Law of God, including take his yearly pilgrimage. How many do you think in Jerusalem chose not to do what they knew the Bible said to do because they said, "Well, I can't afford to do it. It's not convenient." He was going to make sure he raised his son and his daughters and his other sons to do exactly what the Scripture said at great personal cost to himself. I'm just, again, saying this sermon does you no good unless you can identify in your life whether there are some things in your heart that you're afraid to do even though you know they're the right thing to do that God is leading you to do that, that the Scripture says you should do, but you're afraid. Let's step up and be like that enigmatic figure in your nativity set named Joseph who was quick to do whatever it took to do what's right.

Let me say this about ambitious faith. If you're sitting here checking this all out and you don't even



know where you stand with God and you think I don't even have faith, I'm just looking at you guys who have faith. Listen, the first act of ambitious, courageous faith for you is to simply start to agree with the diagnosis of God in his Word regarding who you are. That's the most ambitious, godly, courageous, brave thing you can do is to believe God's assessment of your life, which isn't as good as what the world would like you to think about yourself. Everyone wants to say, "You're OK, I'm OK. God loves you. I'm sure he created us," like most dads or grandpas, "he's old, I'm sure he loves us all, it's all great." The Bible says that you're at enmity with him, that according to the decree of God in what he says, he has a standard that you've fallen short of and because of that you stand before him as someone who needs his salvation. Unless he somehow fixes the problem of your deficient righteousness, and a matter of fact, exchanges all of your righteousness for the righteousness of Christ, then you've got no standing before a holy God. And all that sin that you've done and all that sin I've done, it needs to somehow be settled, satisfied, the Biblical word, propitiation, there has to be a satisfaction of God's justice somehow. It starts with you saying, "Yeah, that's what I need." You know why there are a lot of people who think they're Christians and are not Christians, because they've never courageously accepted by faith the diagnosis of a holy God regarding their lives. You non-Christians, that's where you start. You start there, you need to think differently about you. God has spoken and like Joseph, maybe it's time to say, "He says it, I'm going to believe it."

By the way, this is not a leap in the dark. I bet your conscience attests to the thing that I'm saying. Depending on how much you've worn your conscience down, if you stopped long enough and looked in the mirror of God's Word and allowed your conscience to be awoken to the truth of what it says, I guarantee you, you're going to start to feel the fact that this is right. I do fall short of the glory of God. I am a sinner. I don't deserve heaven. I do deserve justice. That's a good place for you to start. And then you're going say, "Well, what does God tell me to do?" Two words, Repent and Trust in Christ. Repent of that sin, put your trust in Christ. And if you do that the Bible says that will not only be a working gift of God but he's now going to invade your life with himself in such a way that you'll never be the same, but you're going to be a lot like us. The rest of us Christians every morning have to get up and you will too in a long series of daily experiences with God's Word. You open it up like we all do every morning and we see what it says and then we courageously have to make decisions about whether or not I trust him enough to do what he says. He didn't want you to do this in a foolish way just like builders should do, Luke 14, Jesus loves those building illustrations. Who's going to build a tower who doesn't sit down first and calculate the costs. Count the cost.

I'm not saying Joseph was impulsive, I'm sure he's not. It says in verse 19 of Matthew 1, he sat there and thought about it, resolved to do this. He considered it. He was thinking. So you need to think before you accept what God says but as you think those things through, I challenge you to have that ambitious, courageous, brave faith to accept his diagnosis and follow his instructions. And then you'll be with the rest of us, every day, having to read his instructions and ask ourself whether we trust him or not. Imitate Joseph's courageous faith.

A couple verses, really one in particular, that we started with, verse 19 of Matthew Chapter 1. Would you turn back there real quick? We read over it but I didn't much comment on it, but I need you right now to think of it grammatically for a second. It creates a great little paradigm for us that will be so helpful to learn something that most people miss when it comes to Joseph, the unsung hero of the Christmas nativity. Verse 18, that's the establishing statement of how "The birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they had come together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband, Joseph," here



it is, underlined this, highlight this, "being a just man," and I told you the word "just" is the word "righteous" you're righteous if you're a just man, you want to do the just things, the right things, the appropriate things, "and" there's a conjunction, what we often miss is what we're doing here now is trying to show you something else he was. And it doesn't give us a word like "just" or "righteous," it just says what he was, "he was unwilling to put her to shame."

I just want you to see what we've just built there. He's "a just man AND he's unwilling to put her to shame," COMMA "resolved to divorce her quietly." I want you to see the structure of this. Righteous, just, unwilling to put her to shame, divorce. Divorce her quietly. Do you see the columns we've built there? He's a just man. What does that mean? I what to do the right thing and the right thing to do and any rabbi would tell you, you've got a girl who cannot stay faithful to you before you've consummated this relationship, then dump her. That's the right thing and in the ancient culture you have to write a certificate of divorce, even if you're just engaged, you haven't consummated the relationship. Dump her. Matter of fact, you should be able to go to the streets in which she grew up and tell everyone she is of the level of a prostitute, you ought to publicly shame her.

He, though, was unwilling to put her to shame. He didn't want to do that. So, he was going to do the right thing to divorce her, but the way he did it was... quietly. Do you follow that paradigm?

I want to show you there's Biblical tension in a lot of things God calls us in our character to be. He wants you to be the just man, the righteous man. He'd like you to do what is right. Do not fudge on what the Bible says, biblically do the right thing, but it be good for you to have this character of Joseph. Because I'm going to suggest to you it's not just Joseph's character, it's God's character to do the right thing but how you do the right thing is tempered and flavored by a Biblical word that might be helpful to you. It's the word mercy. Number two, it would be worth emulating because it's a Biblical, godly characteristic. We see it in Jesus and we see it in Joseph, and that is that you emulate his merciful compassion. Compassion. Compassion.

I have a feeling with you. I can sit in my mind and get in your sandals. I can feel a bit of what you must have felt in this case when you did something wrong. Here's a guy who could mercifully respond to a sinning fiancée, but do it in a way that was flavored with mercy.

If you did study the minor prophets with us recently, you remember Micah, who came on the scene in Chapter 3 and said I'm filled with the spirit of God and here's what I'm here to do. And he said it, here's his statement. "I'm here filled with the power of the Spirit, with justice and might to declare to Jacob," nickname for Israel, "his transgressions and to Israel his sins." I'm going to tell you guys what you're doing wrong. And of course it came with all the statements of God's justice and the judgment that was coming.

Four chapters later, after laying out all the justice of God, he then says something, which is a bit of play on words, we miss it in English, but in Hebrew his name Micah means "who is like God." He says, "Who is like God," in Chapter 7. Why? Because in pondering how God deals with his people, he says there is no one like you because when you are a just God and you see someone who's racked up all these penalties, you should punish them. But we're not like you. You're different. You "pardon iniquity, you pass over transgression." Why? You do it for the sake of your "remnant, your inheritance" for God does not, here's Micah talking now, "He doesn't retain his anger forever." Oh, is he going to punish? Yes, but he's going to restore because he's merciful. He delights in, now here's the word "Hesed" sometimes translated mercy. He loves mercy, he loves steadfast,



covenantal, faithful love and his faithfulness to you is, "I know you've been unfaithful to me, but I want to somehow reflect my merciful, kind, faithful love to you."

Habakkuk we looked at, if you were studying the minor prophets with us, Habakkuk has a complaint. Look how bad it is in Judah. I can't believe God you're not punishing them. There's violence in the streets and he cries out to God about this. And God says, "Don't worry, I'm going to punish them." Then he says, "I don't like how you're going to punish them because you're going to bring in Babylon and Babylon, they're a bunch of pagan idolaters. How can you use those people who are worse than us to judge us?" And God says, "Don't worry, I'm going to judge them. I will take care of it. Vengeance is mine. I will repay. I'll take care of it."

Habakkuk gets the point and then in the third chapter he says this. He said, "I know you're coming in just wrath," wrath means anger. In anger, you're going to deal with this. He says, "but in your anger I've now recognized, if I look at myself in the mirror, how undeserving of your mercy we are, but can you please, in your wrath, remember mercy?" Of course you don't have to tell God do what he's all about. That is God. He doesn't keep his anger forever. He is a God that is just and he'll do the right thing but his compassion and his love and his mercy. It means even when he has to deal with sin he does it in a different way than most of us would. Because, I tell you what, if you had a fiancée cheat on you and ends up pregnant and your first thought, again this is before any kind of clarification from the angel, I think you'd say, "They should pay. I want everyone to know about it. Let's post that on Facebook." Right? This is bad. And yet Joseph says no need for any of that. Why? Because I think maybe that compassion that he had going, "You know, I know what sexual temptation is about. I may not be the sinner in the same degree as you are, but I'm a sinner in the same category of course. I know it's hard. I know life's hard and the temptation is strong, I get that. So in my right, just, thing to do, there's going to be a way in which I do it with a great compassion."

In other words, he's kind to the unfaithful. And if you're kind to the unfaithful, if you're willing to be merciful, see, you're doing something they don't deserve by definition. When someone is asked to be merciful and people object that it's not right, they don't deserve it, then I understand they don't understand the word. That's what the word means!

I'm saying, be gracious to them when they don't deserve it. You've got to do the right thing. He was willing to do the right thing. Now here's the tension. I don't want anyone leaving here because a lot of Christians try to do this, "I want to be all about mercy and I'm not about God's truth. I don't want to obey God because I'd rather be merciful because that gets a lot of applause from the world."

Well, I understand that, but you're going to have to be faithful to the Word of God, but you're gonna have to temper that with mercy. There's a way to do that. And Joseph found that, even in his resolve before he was ever clarified about what was going on in this girl's life, he thought he was a person cheated on by his fiancée and he said, because of his character, I'm going to do the right thing, but I'm not here to settle the score. I'm not here to mete out every ounce of justice in this situation. And I find too many of us are.

Romans 12 says don't be that way. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay says the Lord." As a matter of fact, when it comes to your enemies, can you recognize that I'm the scorekeeper, you're not the scorekeeper, why don't you focus on being merciful. Why don't you, if your enemy is hungry, find him something to eat. If he's thirsty, why don't you get him something to drink. Now you got to do the right thing, whatever that right thing is. Joseph knew the right thing to do and he's willing to do it, but he's not there to go beyond that because he's got compassion.



One of the verses I quote to you all the time, Psalm 103, is a good one because I think, when we think of our children, we show compassion in a way we don't for other people. And that's really the device in that passage where it says, "As a father has compassion on his own children," which, of course, becomes a template for us, but it's seen ultimately in God, "so God has compassion," a merciful compassion, "on those who fear him. And then he says because he knows they're just dirt. He knows they're not Michael the Archangel. They're just people. He knows their frame and remembers they're just dust.

I know you've heard that but maybe I haven't heard a passage that embellish that even further. Psalm 78:37, "The people's heart was not steadfast toward God; they weren't faithful to God's covenant. And yet God, being compassionate, he atoned for their iniquity and he didn't destroy them," he could have. Listen to this phrase, "He restrained his anger often." I just wonder is Joseph restraining his anger? Is it the righteous anger of Joseph to say, "You should bear the label you earned. You should be seen as that kind of woman and I'm going to put you to open shame. We're not doing this quietly." He could have. And I'll bet all he had to do is to think about that long enough, and anger could have led this decision, but it didn't. He was going to divorce her quietly.

Listen to the next phrase, Psalm 78:38. "And he doesn't stir up all his wrath." He doesn't stir up all his wrath. You probably have friends who are whispering in your ear who are stirring up your wrath toward people who have wronged you. And all I'm saying is it's time for you to shut that conversation down and say, I'd rather be a merciful person like Joseph.

And by the way, most the things that really get our anger stirred up are not because we are all that concerned about God's feelings in it, we're concerned about our feelings. In other words, we get most angry, bear those grudges and lack to be mercifully compassionate toward those people, not because they have offended God, and I know you can trace the line to that in most cases and you can focus on that, but in your heart, really, why is it that you lack mercy toward those people? Well it's because they've hacked you off, you're angry. Well, even if that's the case, Proverbs 19:11 says it really makes "Good sense to be slow to anger and it is a glory to overlook an offense." Just overlook it.

Go overlook it and your beauty goes up in God's eyes. Overlook it. Now he couldn't overlook this. He had to divorce her. But there's a way he can do it and still be a compassionate, merciful person. Paul looked at the Corinthians in the first century and they're dragging each other to small claims court. And he said just because you have all these lawsuits against each other, it's already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? Wouldn't it be better just for you to go home with a little bruise or hurt, not having the score settled, than for you to exercise this lack of mercy and compassion? Now, again this sermon does you no good unless you can think of situations where you're bearing that grudge. Maybe this Christmas you don't want to see that person, you don't want to drive there, you don't want them in your house, you don't want to have this part, why should I give them a gift, they didn't do anything last year. Stop with all of that, and say I'd like to be more like Joseph, emulating his merciful compassion. It's not yours to keep score. Let God keep score.

Now, I try to be a Bible teacher here at Compass Bible Church, that makes sense, and if you're looking through your outline, you found it either digitally online you get on your iPad or whatever or you got a printed one free bulletin you're looking at, you're looking at point number three on my outline, and I always put the verses next there, the references, well in this one we usually go verse



by verse but here I'm going all over the place, so I just want to know, you shout it out, what's the passage next to point number three?

Nothing. So now we get Mike's opinion. Right? No. Although I must be careful here and tread lightly because it is hard to make arguments from silence, my whole point is here that, that's all we got on Joseph. "Well, then the sermon should be done. We get out early." No. There's something about that silence. That's interesting that there's nothing else about him. What does that teach us? Well, it's taught a lot of people to imagine a lot of things about Joseph that I would say probably aren't true. I've heard people say he was probably someone who didn't believe that his son was the Messiah. He was a deadbeat dad. I mean look at the end of his life. Mary is there. Jesus is dying on a cross and he has to say to John, "John, take care of Mary." I know a lot of people think he's a bad guy.

Well there's nothing, nothing at all, no hint in Luke 2, no hint in Matthew 1, that this guy was a bad guy. "Well, he probably died then." That's what people say, he probably died. I mean, I know he's there at age 12 in Luke 2 but, I mean, somewhere between age 12 and age 30, 33, 34, then he probably died before the public ministry of Christ. Well, maybe. And if he did, I'm just wondering where are your beloved references to your earthly father.

Where's some discussion maybe of the poor departed Joseph. I mean, maybe some quote from the funeral or something, I don't know. There's none of that. And because of that I think it's the reason we don't have much to say about that enigmatic figurine in our nativity set because what do we say about him, because God didn't say much about him. "Well, he said a lot right here but we don't know much what else he did." No, we don't but that doesn't mean in any way this man was not a Godly significant role model for your life.

First Corinthians 12 says the problem we often have is, unless we see it in print, unless we have someone who's gotten an award, unless someone's got a microphone on, unless they're on a stage and a platform, unless they somehow are hailed as great in our celebrity driven society, they must not be that important or that good. In First Corinthians 12 he says don't look at the church that way. The thing that gets all the attention, the eyeballs, cannot say, cannot say to the hand, "Well I don't need you." The head that gets looked at all the time gets all the coiffuring every morning before you go to work, can't say to the feet that, "You just shove into those shoes, I don't need you." Listen to the logic here. "On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker," seems to be, "are indispensable and on the parts of the body that we think are less honorable," and this is going to get embarrassing now, "we bestow greater honor." Right? The part you're not showing off at church right now, I think you value a lot those parts your body.

So what I'm saying "Our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty," but we think they're important, "which are more presentable parts don't require." Matter of fact, he's flipping this on its head. "But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it."

I know it's easy to look at the singers and the preachers and the missionaries and the professors and the leaders and people with degrees and people who have traveled. You know, most of God's heroes aren't in the pages of the Bible, you know that, right? Oh yeah, we have them there. But you know what their attitude is? "I'm just doing my job." And I would even venture to say, now this is the logic here, I'm not sure that I can prove this, but I would think that if Joseph had some kind of bad heart, we probably would have heard about him. Because when people want to be something that they're not, it's funny how they end up in the pages of Scripture. How often do we see these guys,



Simon Magus or Diotrephes, we just read in our Daily Bible Reading in Third John. He wants to be first, so I got to talk about him because he's a problem. You know all the guys who we don't have to talk about in Colossi or Ephesus, we don't hear about them. When Euodia and Syntyche you get in arguments and they want to fight with it, well, we hear about them. I'm just saying I think that Joseph probably finished his life the way he started his life in the pages of Scripture. It's just that the spotlight wasn't on him. Now he fades into obscurity in the pages of Scripture. But I would add this word, he probably humbly faded into obscurity.

Number three on your outline, that wouldn't be a bad thing to welcome in your life if that's, in fact, the kind of life God calls you to. I bet for most of us that's how God calls us, to live in humble obscurity, no missionary biographies, there will never be a Christian bookstore with a biography about you and I, and that's fine, it doesn't matter.

"Well, Mike you're known as..." You may not even be known, you may be invisible. You think you're invisible in your small group. It doesn't mean that God... Listen to it again. It doesn't mean that God hasn't composed the body giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it. I think Joseph made his mark even though we don't read about his life, his times or can even quote a sentence that he ever said. It was said of Martin Luther that he so struggled with his bad relationship with his dad, that he struggled in his adult life, as a great theologian and preacher, to ever call God his Father. That was hard for him because he just did not have a good relationship with his father.

Not only did Jesus, and again, I know he's divine but he's human. Human and divine. 100% human, 100% divine. But in his humanity, let's just recognize this, if anyone was quick to call God his Father, it was Jesus. Look it up in the Old Testament. That was not the way you referred to the God of the universe.

"Well, that's because he's divine, that's divine, divine, divine. Well, let me show you this passage. I don't need to take you there but maybe you should at least jot it down. Mark 14:36. In Mark 14:36 we have one insight into Jesus' prayer, and he prayed a lot of times, we don't have the record of his prayers. But in this passage it says he called God "Abba," that's the Aramaic language of the household. That's the household language Jesus learned as a little kid as he went off to work with dad to the stonemason shop or the jobsite. He called him Abba. Interesting that the word he learned to associate with his dad, Joseph, was a word he breaks out into in prayer to his God. Now I know you know it from Romans 8. We cry out "Abba Father." Well, you are only able to even think that's not blasphemy because Jesus used the language of his daddy to refer to God. You can focus all on the divine side, but I challenge you to think on the human side of that. That the hands that guided young Jesus to learn the trade of Joseph, the kind of prayers that Joseph had with Jesus as a little boy, the traveling day after day after day on the road to get to Jerusalem every single year as they went up to the Passover. I'll bet all that discussion, all that talk, all of those prayers, all that discipleship, all that discussion of Scripture, certainly led to what I think is an unprecedented and profuse kind of connectedness that God has in taking the analogy of a human son and a human father and laying that right on top of the relationship of the Messiah, to the king of kings.

While I was studying Joseph life, came up with eight or nine things I thought were of interest in his life and all the Biblical data I had, narrowed it down to the top three, I presented those to you this morning. This is the sequence, being transparent here, when I was done constructing the framework of this message and saying this is the thing I think is worth us imitating, emulating and being willing to accept in our own life, that humility and being obscure, I remembered a passage I quoted in our Old Testament survey between the two passages where Micah says, "I'm here to tell the sins



of the people" and then, "Oh God, no one's as merciful as you are." Right in between that in Micah Chapter 6, he says something and you may not remember the passages I quoted there Micah but you remember this passage, you've heard it. Verse 8, Micah says, "God has told you, O man, what is good; and what the Lord requires of you." Do you remember that? Smile at me, remember that passage? Then he gives three things: that you do justice, you do what's right. That you love mercy and that you walk humbly with your God. It's when I knew my outline was right. Oh that's it! Right?

Joseph is willing to do what is just and right. Why? Because he has a fearless faith, he loves mercy, he's compassionate. Look at the mercy of Joseph and that one little statement in Matthew 1:19. And all that obscurity, we don't know anything about him, and few people are going to be waiting in line. You don't say, "I can't wait to get to heaven to get in line and talk to Joseph." Well, maybe you will now. It will be a shorter one than it will be for Paul and Elijah. So it's probably a good line to get into. And just say, "You know what I appreciated about you, as my pastor helped to point out, you were committed to do exactly what Micah was telling the people they needed to do." If you want to boil it down, it is for you to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with God. I think he hit the target, don't you? Let's emulate that this Christmas.

Pray with me please. God, easy for us in this day to consider the nativity and focus exclusively on the incarnation of Christ and that's great and we should. It desires our attention, our respect, our worship, our allegiance, but as we do what we do every year is looking around at the whole historical setting of the incarnation of Christ, we're drawn into the Magi, by the shepherds, Mary, I pray that this year we think more about Joseph. Even if we have a nativity set or we drive past one the neighbors got on the lawn that we would say that guy right there, most people don't have much to say about him but, man, what a great example to us as to how we're to live.

God, I pray that we would see Joseph the way that your Word presents him, as a man who was fearless, obedient, merciful, compassionate and, I think, altogether fine with not being the subject of any of the passages in the rest of the Gospels or the New Testament. God, give us that kind of humility, please, as we go about our work this week in celebrating the birth of Christ, dealing with the people in our families, our neighbors, give gifts, as we gather for parties. Let Joseph be a faith that's worth imitating, a life that's worth mimicking, as the Scripture often calls us to, to follow Paul as he follows Christ, let us follow in the good and Godly faith filled example of Joseph this Christmas. Thank you so much for providing the little that we have in Scripture of him. Thanks for giving us a chance to contemplate it this morning. Dismiss us now with a sense of purpose and a challenge of this great man.

In Jesus name, Amen.