

A kindergarten teacher tells her class the Christmas story of the Shepherds and the Three Wise Men. At the end she asked them, "Now tell me, who was the first to know about the birth of Jesus?" A little girl shoots up her hand and answers, "Mary." How could anyone miss that. But adults miss that because adults tend to expect more complicated answers. The child's answer is so simple and obvious that we miss it! We have this tendency to associate God with the spectacular, such as the host of angels or the guiding star, so much so that we fail to notice God's presence and action in the ordinary and normal things of life, such as in pregnancy and birth.

As we approach Christmas, our focus is really on Jesus, then Mary and then Joseph. But there is another personality who plays a vital role at Christmas and that is the angel. We are all aware of the annunciation of angel Gabriel to Mary. When we think of annunciation, we only think of the annunciation to Mary. It is interesting to note that there are at least two other annunciation stories in the gospels, prior to the birth of Jesus. These two stories are about annunciation to two men. The first is the annunciation to Zachariah of the birth of John. The second story is the annunciation to Joseph. It is this story that we heard read in the gospel of today.

Joseph is told by the angel, "Joseph, Son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary, your wife into your home." **Do not be afraid**. These words occur over and over in scripture whenever a human has an experience of the Divine.

- Gabriel told the priest Zechariah, John the Baptist's father, not to be afraid.
- Those were also angel Gabriel's words to Mary.
- The shepherds were told by angels not to be afraid.
- And in today's gospel, again, Joseph is told "Do not be afraid."

What was he afraid of? **On the human level**, there was the fear of what others would think when a baby was born four or five months after their marriage. Joseph was worried over what this Mary was really like. After all, she was a young girl, and she was already with a child before their marriage.

On emotional level, did he really want to risk the heartbreak she would inevitably bring upon him. How could he love the child as a father. It was not his child.

On religious level, Joseph's fear was provoked by the religious authorities. What if he got caught protecting Mary and was accused of joining her in violating the Law of Moses? Wouldn't he also be punished for protecting an abomination to God's law and thus cooperating with the sin?

And the angel tells him "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid, **Have faith in God.**" And Joseph put his complete faith in the angel and in God. God would figure out how to deal with

the gossip, how to deal with the Law of Moses, how to deal with Joseph's concerns for the child. God would give him the ability to love the child as a father.

All of us are afraid like Joseph at various levels. Human, emotional or religious. The fear that leads one to hopelessness and despair. Lack of faith in God and in his mercy. Fear comes in so many ways. Mostly it stems from the past. And it irritably leads to doubt. We doubt God. Will God ever forgive me my sins? How can I make a good confession? We doubt other people. May be our in-laws, will they forgive and accept me, or can I forgive and accept them? We doubt our own abilities. How can I go back to the church that I abandoned 10 years back? Will anyone throw me out again? Will the church receive me again after all that I have spoken against the Church? There are many things we do, and refuse to do, out of fear. We are afraid going too close to God will cost us time, change of values, change of priorities, change in lifestyle.

Christmas is not a time for fear. It is a time for faith & love. Not much is said about Joseph in scripture. He never uttered a word that was quoted in the bible. However, from the Word of God and Christian tradition, there is a whole lot that we can say about St. Joseph. His life really speaks volumes to us about the role of husbands and fathers. For instance:

- He gives us a great example of taking seriously the duty to protect and lead Mary and Jesus in the fulfilment of the salvific plan for humankind.
- His interior life teaches all of us about the need for silence and humility.
- His profession as a carpenter says something profound about the dignity of work and the duty of husbands to provide for their families in submission to God's plan.

"What makes a real Christmas?" Look at what Joseph did. it was the theology of Joseph which made possible the first Christmas. If Joseph had not cooperated with God's action in human history, the birth of Jesus would have been quite different. The witness of Joseph calls us to cooperate with God's work in today's world. It calls us to respond to God's action among us. Joseph, not having all the evidence and knowledge of the future, decided to do more than law and custom required. He went beyond what was expected of him. **He let justice and compassion guide his decision.** He was pulled, not by the strength of custom, but by the law of love.

Joseph had to make a daily response, much like we are called to make a daily response to God. Get up every day and just do it. Say daily with St. Joseph, "Okay, I believe God is leading all this – I believe that I have a mission here. I'm called to bring the Son of God into this world! I'll embrace this task! I trust." Like Our Blessed Lady, St. Joseph said yes to God's plan in all its uncertainty, we are invited to accept with courage the role we have been asked to play by God in our lives.

God Bless You.