

**Sunday, December 21, 2025**

**Sermon: "The Quiet Saint"**

**Matthew 1:18-25    NRSVUE**

Where we're going in today's sermon: Joseph of Nazareth is spectacularly ordinary, but there's something special about this "average Joe."

There's a placeholder we use in our culture to describe an ordinary man: "average Joe." It's a phrase that rolls off the tongue easily, a way of describing someone who is unremarkable or an "everyman."

When we talk about "the average Joe," we may picture a face in the crowd, blending into the rhythm of everyday life. But not all Joes are average. Take Joe DiMaggio, for example, whose 56-game hitting streak still stands as one of baseball's records. He wasn't just another player. He was a legend who left an indelible mark on the sport.

He's not the only Joe who transcended averageness and occupied space in the stratosphere. Think of other "Joes," like Montana, Biden, Louis, Namath, Cocker, Frazier, et al.

When we talk about "the average Joe," we're not referring to these guys. Instead, the image in our heads is someone who clocks in at work each morning, makes small talk by chatting about the weather, and swears that NFL refs are lousy. He likes an occasional beer and drives a dependable car that's not flashy but gets him where he's going. His name doesn't make headlines, and his posts aren't going viral, but he's steady, reliable and quietly faithful to his responsibilities. He is the neighbor who waves from his driveway, the dad in the bleachers cheering on his kid's Little League team, the guy who mows his lawn on Saturday and nods politely at the mailman. The average Joe doesn't seek the spotlight. He just gets the job done. And in his ordinariness, there is something beautifully steady - an unspoken faithfulness that often goes unnoticed.

But maybe the average Joe isn't average at all. He's even special in a way. It might be hard to put into words, but you can spot it in a New York minute when you meet him. He's quietly magnificent ... like, for example, the average Joe of our text, Joseph, the young fellow engaged to Mary. This Joe is spectacularly average. But

through his treatment of Mary, he was honored by Catholic and Orthodox traditions as a saint.

He's not the only Joe in the Bible. There's Joseph, the son of Jacob - a dreamer thrown into a pit, sold into slavery, and later raised to prominence in Egypt - who managed to save not only his family but a nation. And then there's Joseph of Arimathea, who, with his friend Nicodemus, boldly stepped forward when others had fled to claim the body of Jesus and give it a dignified burial.

But Joseph of Nazareth - perhaps the most overlooked average Joe of all - is the earthly father of Jesus. We hear so little about him, and he never speaks a recorded word in Scripture. To many, he seems like just another "Joe" in the margins of history. A quiet figure standing beside the radiant light of Mary and the splendor of the Christ child.

Joseph was far from ordinary. This quiet saint - this forgotten man of faith - was handpicked by God to be the protector and provider for the Savior of the world. Though his voice is silent in the gospels, his actions speak volumes about courage, obedience and faithfulness. Let's take a closer look at Joseph, the quiet saint.

"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 found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit" (v. 18).

Mary gets all the press and rightly so. But in Matthew 1, we get the Incarnation from Joseph's point of view. His is the story of a good man caught in an impossible and painful situation. And it is a story of quiet courage, radical obedience and unshakable faith.

He's the good guy. His girlfriend gets pregnant. She tells him a tale that stretches credulity. Joseph is hurt, heartbroken and confused, but he chooses compassion over punishment, mercy over pride. He decides to let her go quietly, protecting her dignity even in his disappointment. Yet, after a night vision, he stays committed to her. He plans to adopt this child and raise him as his own. And in the meantime, no sex until after the birth (see v. 25). He's devoted to Mary. He's obedient to God.

Joseph listens when God speaks. Joseph was going to deal with Mary privately to minimize any embarrassment that might come to her, "but just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord

appeared to him in a dream ..." (v. 20). God interrupts Joseph's plan, and the message is staggering: "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. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (vv. 20-21).

Joseph doesn't argue. He doesn't delay. He doesn't wake up and say, "Wow, that was just a crazy dream." He believed. "When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife" (v. 24). He obeyed. He changed his whole life because of what God said.

Joseph is the quiet hero of the Incarnation. Let's not rush past this:

Joseph stays.

He takes Mary as his wife.

He embraces the shame and whispers from others.

He raises a Son who is not biologically his.

He teaches Jesus the trade of carpentry.

He protects his family when Herod threatens.

He moves his household to Egypt in obedience to another dream. In a culture where honor, bloodlines and male pride were everything, Joseph lays all that down to do the will of God.

That is sainthood. That is discipleship. And that is why Catholic and Orthodox traditions revere him as Saint Joseph, a spiritual father, a model of masculine humility and a protector of the Holy Family.

We don't hear Joseph's literal voice in Scripture. Not a single word of his is recorded. Contrast this to Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist. He could hardly stop talking after his son was born (see Luke 1:67-79). Joseph slips silently into the background, and as he does, his faith speaks louder than words ever could. Joseph is a role model not because of grand speeches or dramatic miracles, but because of his quiet, steady obedience. He teaches us what real faith looks like, and his example is powerful in its simplicity:

Faith that obeys when it doesn't make sense. Joseph faced an impossible situation. He was a rookie father. Think of Georgie in "Georgie & Mandy's First Marriage." But he was also a righteous man. By all accounts, he had every right to walk away to clear his name

and avoid the shame. But then God spoke through a dream, revealing that this child was conceived by the Holy Spirit. The message didn't come with proof, only a promise.

How often are we asked to step out in faith when things don't make sense? When the path isn't clear, the diagnosis is grim, the job is lost, or the relationship is strained? Real faith obeys even when the pieces don't fit together, the world says it's foolish, and the heart struggles to understand. Joseph's faith was not passive; it was obedient action. He married Mary, protected her and raised Jesus as his own. He didn't need all the answers to follow God's leading.

Faith that chooses mercy over judgment. Before the angel appeared, Joseph had already decided to divorce Mary quietly. In his culture, he had the legal right to expose her, to bring her shame, even to demand her punishment. But Scripture says he was a "righteous" man (v. 19), and his first instinct was mercy. He chose to protect her reputation, even when he thought she had been unfaithful.

This kind of mercy is rare today. In a TikTok world that is quick to judge and slow to forgive, Joseph stands out as a model of grace. How many of us, when wronged, instinctively seek retribution or rush to judgment? Joseph reminds us that faith chooses mercy even when judgment seems justified. His quiet compassion reflects the heart of God, who delights in mercy.

Faith that is strong enough to be gentle. Our culture often equates strength with dominance - with loud voices, firm stances and unyielding power. The rise of "mean men" has not gone unnoticed. On the world stage, mean men dominate leadership roles, often at the cost of democratic values and institutions. The ugliness also invades our domiciles, as victims of domestic abuse can testify. But Joseph is not a mean man. He models a different kind of strength: the strength to be gentle. He protects Mary, journeys with her to Bethlehem and cares for the Christ child with tenderness. Later, he would uproot his family and flee to Egypt to keep them safe, trusting God every step of the way.

True strength is not always loud; sometimes it is whispered in quiet acts of service. Joseph shows us that to be strong in faith is to be gentle in spirit. It is the father who stays up late to soothe a crying

child, the friend who listens when others dismiss, and the believer who prays in silence for the good of another.

Faith that steps into the background so God's plan can come forward. Joseph is often seen in the background of the Christmas story - literally and figuratively. He is there, steady and faithful, but the spotlight falls on Mary and the Christ child. Joseph's role is essential, but he never seeks attention. He's not concerned about who gets the credit. He's content to let God's plan unfold, even if it means fading into the periphery. Joseph's faith is a reminder that the truest measure of devotion is not how much attention we receive, but how much glory we reflect to God. Faith doesn't always need a stage. Sometimes, its greatest work is done behind the scenes.

So, one could say that Joseph is the patron saint of the quietly faithful. Maybe that's why we overlook him - because in a culture of shouting, shoving and arguing, Joseph whispers. In a society that celebrates the spotlight, Joseph stands in the shadows. But in doing so, he shines with a different kind of glory - the glory of faithful obedience. It's no wonder that in addition to being the patron saint of the quietly faithful, he is also known as the patron saint of fathers, workers, refugees and those who quietly serve behind the scenes. His life reminds us that faithful obedience is its own kind of greatness.

His is a faith that speaks in silence. Although Joseph's voice is never heard in the Bible, his life is all the sermon we need to hear:

Trust God, even when the path is unclear.

Choose mercy, even when you're hurting.

Be faithful, even when no one sees or applauds.

As we approach Christmas Day, may we remember not just the manger, the star and the shepherds - but also the man who quietly stood beside Mary, held the child in his arms, and said with his life, "Yes, Lord." Alleluia, Amen.