

Fourth Sunday of Advent "A" Corpus Christi 2010
Matthew 1:18-24

A Monologue from St. Joseph

"I hope you can hear me across 2000 years. I will share my experience with you, because no one was affected by that first Christmas in the way I was.

As you know, for me it began in great darkness when I received what seemed to be the worst possible news.

"You may believe this or not, but I was never fully persuaded that Mary had betrayed me. Of course I was devastated, and I did not know what to believe. I became like a sinking ship in search of a harbor.

At times I found temporary mooring in my work. Busy hands provide the troubled mind a brief reprieve. Still, I was not certain Mary had betrayed me, even though I could not accept her story.

We ancient folks may have lacked your scientific knowledge, but in some ways we were more in touch with the world than you are.

I knew that no one would believe Mary's preposterous story. Why else would I have decided to divorce her instead of marrying her?

"Does the language confuse you? You know about marriage and divorce in your world so far from mine. But there is something new to you: divorce before marriage.

Respectable Jews of my time had a period of betrothal prior to marriage. It was something like your period of engagement, except it was more serious. Betrothal was tantamount to marriage, but without sexual union.

For a Jewish maiden like Mary, betrothal lasted a year. During this year she was as much mine legally as if we were married. If I had died during that year, she would have been considered a widow.

" I decided the best thing for both of us was a quiet divorce. This would protect my own honor, and might save her life. A Jewish woman convicted of adultery could be put to death by stoning.

We had very different laws for women than for men. Since only men were thought to be members of God's covenant with Israel, women had the legal status of property.

This does not mean there was no love between husband and wives, although often there was not. But I loved Mary. How I loved Mary!

I had lived a solitary life and had never opened my heart to another. Then in the middle years, this beautiful girl became a miracle to me. I did not know I had such depths in me as she uncovered.

Her face, her voice, and her eyes penetrated to the center of my being. I found missing parts of myself in her. Our life together would be a true marriage.

How do you take one who possesses your very soul and condemn her to die? We would part and pray that God would grant each of us grace to begin again.

" Then my world was transformed by a dream. Anyone who knows me can tell you, I am no dreamer. I am a carpenter, a practical man. I had never dreamed of angels. Even now I have no words to describe it.

An angel from God came to me, and assured me that Mary's story as true. I have never known such relief, and the storm in my heart was stilled. Could it be?

God was giving Mary back to me! Perhaps the greatest happiness we can know is the joy of restoration, of having some lost treasure returned to us. When the dream was over, I could not stop weeping.

" It was a while before I remembered the rest of the angel's message. "You shall call his name "Yahweh is salvation," "Jesus," for he will save his people from their sins."

The angel used words I had heard all my life from the great Isaiah, 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel [God with us].'

Recalling this, I assure you, had a sobering effect on my excitement. Having Mary returned to me was not the only gift I was given. The child Mary was carrying was the long-awaited Messiah.

The angel had said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home.' Did the heavenly Father want me to serve as the child's earthly father?

" All this is why I play a major role in your observance of Christmas. I was midwife to Jesus' birth in that little shelter in Bethlehem, and greeted the shepherds, and later the wise men.

In your nativity scenes, I am somewhere close by. Imagine what it means to me when someone says, "Mary and Joseph"!

You know very little about me beyond this. But I was there to watch him grow.

I taught him to use his hands and my tools. I gave him some of his first lessons in the ways of the world--- and perhaps a few lessons about the ways of God. I was there to hear them call him 'the son of Joseph.'

" Yes, it was all a sacred honor. With every blessing of God, however, comes an equal portion of responsibility. Like my Hebrew kinsmen, I had looked for the Messiah to come as a new King David, a warrior-king.

We watched the horizons for this magnificent figure. We listened for the victory cry from the temple in Jerusalem. We expected the Judean highlands to reverberate with the thunder of his coming.

We would never have sought him where I found him on that night of nights. Nothing is more awkward, traumatic, or hazardous than the process of human birth.

We enter the world so vulnerable! What deity would condescend to such a demeaning ordeal? In the pantheon of the gods, no deities forfeit their transcendence to become infant mortals.

Would the Lord of the universe become as weak and exposed as Mary's newborn child? Could God love us enough to join us in our humanity, to become one of us?

" As dear as these memories are to me, we must not stay long at the manger. The word became flesh and was placed in these rough hands, but Christmas in no destination.

It was the nestling for a moment of the incomparable life God would reveal to the world--a starting point. You must go to the Jordan where at his baptism his Father spoke a blessing over his head

You must follow him to Galilee and sit at his feet and listen. You must go to an upper room in Jerusalem, to dark Gethsemane, to darker Golgotha, and to the borrowed tomb of another Joseph.

You must stay until you see how empty the tomb became. Then you must let his Spirit lead you all the days of your life.

Wise Augustine wrote these, my last words to you. 'Pass by him the man, and you will come to God. Do not seek for any other way to come to God, for if he had not vouchsafed to be the way we should all have gone astray.

Therefore, I say, do not seek the way. The way has come to thee. Rise and walk"

Find us ready Lord... as you have found Joseph ready to be your earthly father, when you came to us as a baby.