

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 18

DO YOU SEE JOSEPH?

Mary gets a lot of attention during Advent; John the Baptist gets his fair share as well. Joseph, for whom so many of our facilities are named, seems oddly absent. He is overlooked in the Sunday lectionary cycle and neither does he show up in many of the Christmas hymns. He is mentioned in the Annunciation as Mary's betrothed and we know he is the reason the Holy Family was in Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus, but beyond that, he isn't featured much.

Yet, he remains steadfast, sure and supportive in the background, the perfect picture of an expectant father. Staff in hand, he seems ready for whatever is to come.

Perhaps we ignore Joseph out of a desire to clean up the story, to romanticize and soften the challenging edges of a scandalous beginning. The facts were that Mary, engaged to Joseph, was pregnant and he was not the father of her child. The claim of divine conception must have seemed farfetched, when infidelity was a more obvious answer. The law allowed for a woman found in Mary's situation to be stoned to death. Joseph neither wants to take her and her child into his home nor does he wish to see her killed. He decides to call off the marriage quietly and let her lot fall as it may.



A child conceived out of marriage. A broken betrothal. The circumstances of Jesus' birth are confusing and questionable. Our lives are full of such stories, our families are mixed and blended in beautiful, painful ways. God speaks into this confusion and tension, sending Joseph an angel in a dream who assures him the child does belong to the Holy Spirit and is the fulfillment of ancient promises.

The nativity does not show a picturesque nuclear family gazing upon their first-born child. It shows a family blended together by God and by faith. Consider what questions, fears and doubts may have played in Mary and Joseph's minds. This Advent, as we navigate our own families — with all their challenges and brokenness — let us remember that the family we celebrate this Christmas is just like ours.

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