

Message from The Nativity Service at West Kirby URC on Sunday 11 December

'Joseph – The stand-in Dad'

Today I would like to introduce to you – Joseph – the man who saved Christmas. An unlikely hero and the character from the nativity that is all too often overlooked.

But first – I want us to consider this question. [Pause]

Do you care what people think about you?

Put your hands up if you do?

Those with your hands up well done,

But there are some of you who haven't put your hands up simply because you care **too** much about what people would think if you did....

Being part of the younger generation – I am probably one of the worst culprits for caring too much about what people think of me. I've spent hours learning to the best angle for a selfie [take one], so my double chin is under control. I've worked out the best filters for Instagram and when I post I take notice of the number of likes I get. And I know I am not on my own in any of this.

If we are not careful we can completely manufacture our lives so that what is seen is far from the truth – the pressure to look a certain way and do certain things is just too much at times. The voices we hear in the world let alone social media is a real challenge. And the biggest challenge is hearing God's truth above all of that – here let me demonstrate – Rosie and Hannah can you come here please. Hannah, you hold this here – you represent the world. Rosie you come over here, you represent God.

So here [walk to one side of stage towards Hannah] is the world and all its expectations and voices saying [Hannah releases the words – read them] you are not good enough, pretty enough, rich enough, smart enough but over here [walk to opposite side of the stage to Rosie] is God – who [Rosie releases the words – read them] calls us his child, his princess, his prince, he calls us forgiven, wanted, known and seen.

So we have a choice – we can stand too close to the world, which is cold without God's love in it – like going to England got your holidays! – we can join in the world's ways and care too much about what the world says about us – and forget what God says. Or we can move our position in life and deliberately walk away from all these lies and stand close to God, basking in his love (like going to Spain for a holiday – much better than cold England) – and this close to God we will hear what he has to say.

AND when we do hear him - what will he say?

He will say to us to - go into the world and rescue the lost and bring them to him [walk over to the Hannah and bring her back to God] – pull them out of the not 'blank' enough life to a life of abundance [Hannah turns her paper round] – abundant acceptance, abundant grace, abundant forgiveness and abundant love.

SO what's that got to do with the nativity and the character of Joseph?

Well quite clearly Joseph was a man who truly didn't care about what people thought of him but he **did** care for Mary, and he certainly cared about what God had to say.

Joseph was a carpenter, a skilled man who no doubt was never out of work. But he wasn't important and he clearly wasn't rich.

The Bible tells us he was of the line of King David.

The reading from the book of Matthew tells us that Joseph was faithful to the Law – so he was a good Jewish man. But this good Jewish man was faced with a big problem; the young girl he was engaged to was pregnant!

Joseph would have been very embarrassed by the whole thing. Because he would have known full well it wasn't his baby – but what about the rest of the town? You can bet that tongues were wagging furiously with the news. Mary pregnant! Couldn't Joseph and Mary have waited till after the wedding? They should have known better! The shame of it! Her poor parents!

The only conclusion Joseph could have reached was that Mary had been unfaithful. And in that was a big no no. Mary being pregnant put her at risk of;

- Being rejected by Joseph, she surely couldn't expect him to understand or marry her now?
- At worst she could have been stoned
- At best she and her child would be shunned and treated like outcasts
- No other man would marry Mary because her reputation would always be as the woman who was unfaithful to Joseph, an adulteress
- There would be no refuge for Mary, no one would give her a job; she would be forced on the streets or worse.

So you see this is why we wrote the play you saw earlier – Joseph was obviously handpicked by God not just because of his ancestor David – but because he was a **good** man with a **good** heart and he loved well. He clearly loved Mary; the Bible tells us he planned to divorce her quietly because he did not want to expose her to public disgrace.

He didn't put himself or his hurt pride first – he modelled forgiveness even before Jesus had come and taught us all what forgiveness looked like. And even though the Law would have allowed him to walk away from Mary or even throw the first stone – he didn't.

This made me think about how Jesus treated the woman caught in adultery, Jesus chose to forgive / show grace / instead of following the law – and here we see 30 years before that happened/Joseph his adoptive Father modelled the same grace to Mary – even before Joseph knew the whole truth.

Joseph was a strong character, he knew what people would be thinking but that didn't sway him – he decided do the decent thing, not the expected.

Joseph lived close to God – because when he had the dream and an angel of the Lord spoke to him – Joseph knew God had spoken and he believed the message. You see, when we walk with God we learn his ways and we know his voice, we recognise his messengers. Joseph clearly walked with God and not with the world. In doing so Joseph saved that first Christmas and all that had been prophesied happened – Jesus, born of a virgin in Bethlehem.

But as was said at the end of the play earlier Joseph also had a hand in saving Easter – because when the next message came from God again in a dream – he believed and he acted on it; taking Jesus and Mary into the refuge of Egypt and waited for King Herod to die. Joseph is the hero of our story today. Joseph, an ordinary man, who walked with God and acted when God spoke. He didn't ask for other signs or confirming witness – he knew God's messengers and he acted with obedience immediately. Joseph, a normal man who did an extraordinary thing. He said yes to being the stand in Dad to Jesus and he listened to his heavenly Father and together they raised the saviour of the world.

So let's not get too busy with pleasing people, following the world and its lies; let's take some time to remember Christmas is when Jesus came to be with us – you and me - ordinary everyday people. Joseph stands out in the Christmas story because he put God and Mary first and didn't care about what anyone else thought. We need to do the same and make this Christmas about the Gift of Jesus Christ. Not the gifts under the tree.

If Jesus Christ isn't your personal friend – don't wait for a friend request on Facebook or Instagram – it just won't happen. Jesus came, he died and he rose again that we might have everlasting life with our father in heaven. Don't keep losing out to the ways of the world – turn away from all the world can and can't offer and become a personal friend of Jesus today.

Maybe for some of you - maybe you have been a friend of Jesus in the past but you've been walking more with the world – then reconnect with him today! Here and now.

Shall we pray?

With every head bowed and every eye closed – if you want Jesus to be your very own personal friend for the first time or you want to recommit your life to him right now just stand. Or if you are unable to stand just raise your hand as a sign of your commitment to him.

This isn't a time to care about what anyone else thinks – this is a time to stand up and say your yes to Jesus.

[Prayer]

Lord Jesus we come to you a fresh this day.

We say sorry for the times we have lived our lives selfishly without thinking of you or others.

We thank you that you came as a baby and walked the earth, so that you could die for us on the cross and be raised to life washing all our sins away.

Lord may salvation bubble up from the very ground of this church today and may angels sing as people say there yes to you for the first or one hundredth time today.

Thank you that you come and make a home in us Lord God, and we ask that you would fill us and seal us with your Holy Spirit.

I pray a blessing in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ over every person here today Lord that you would make your very presence known to all.

Amen