

"A Man After God's Own Heart"

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Matthew 1:18-25

A Great man.....Missouri farm...work/chores....sang with his family at County Fairs....Corporal in the Army Air Corp in WWII....married....four children....no college but all four children graduated from college...worked three jobs to support family....neighborhood handyman.....local school board...served as Elder/Teacher/Leader in his local church....he sought to practice what he believed and taught....love God and serve family, neighbors and community....known as a warm, kind, fair, steady, soft-spoken man, who was quicker to listen than to speak.

He would never be considered great by the world's standards.....not much money....no awards or trophies.....not listed in "Who's Who"not recognized as a mover and shaker....not sought out by the rich and famous....no headlines, articles or books written about him but, from my point of view, he was a great man. I am speaking of my father, **Harold Fred Wade**. While Dad was certainly not perfect, I believe he was a *"man after God's own heart."*

That's how I would define a great person.... *" a person after God's own heart."* A great person reflects God's heart....a great person seeks to be, as our youth stated in today's Call to Worship, a "Carrier of the Light"reflecting God's grace, compassion, mercy, love, forbearance. A great person is a *"person after God's own heart."*

Since leading the Advent study this year, I have come to appreciate Joseph as a *"man after God's own heart."* I've always pictured Joseph behind the scenes....teaching Jesus the skills of a carpenter and that's about it....after all, the Bible records no words spoken by Joseph....it is most likely that Joseph died before Jesus began his ministry and we have only a few references about him. He is very easy to over look. I've not thought a whole lot about Joseph but have come to see him as a great man....a "man after God's own heart."

Read Matthew 1:18-25

"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 with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰ **But**

just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "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. ²¹She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²²All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³"Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." ²⁴When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus."

--use our imagination to picture the story between verses 18 & 19

--Joseph learns that Mary is pregnant....he did not learn this in the dream....she must have told him.... "I'm pregnant by the Holy Spirit"*would he have believed Mary? I think not!*.....he must not have believed her but instead thought she had been unfaithful to him....otherwise he wouldn't have been looking for a way to break off the engagement

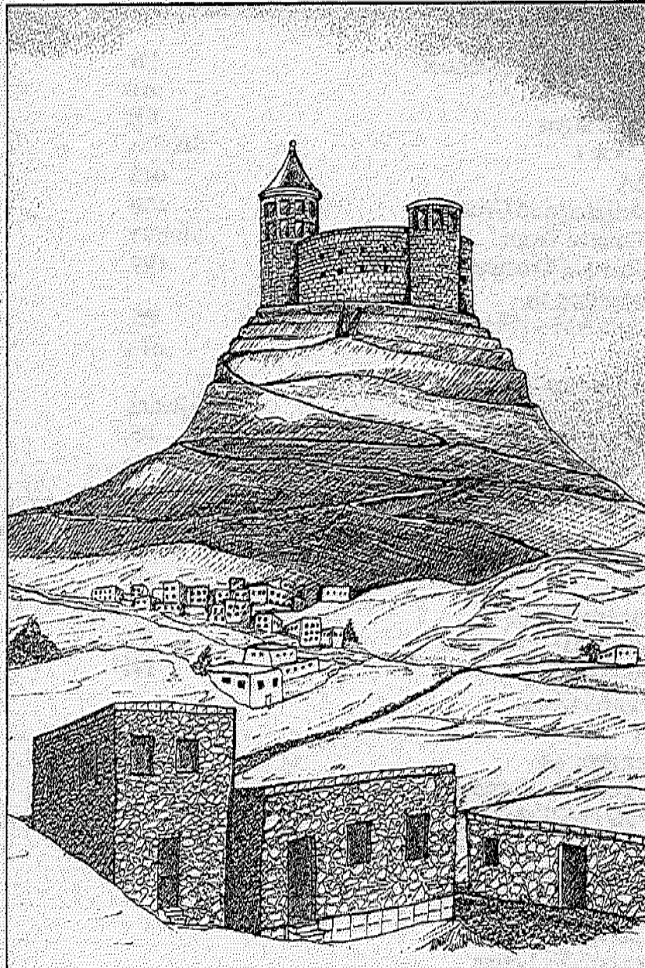
Our Advent study book The Journey: Walking the Road to Bethlehem written by Adam Hamilton sets forth a very real possibility about this moment when Joseph learned that Mary was pregnant.

"It's easy to imagine that Joseph, upon learning this news, left Elizabeth's home, heart-broken and unwilling to speak to Mary. I can see Mary weeping as he walked away. At some point during Joseph's ninety-minute walk back to Bethlehem, his anger must have given way to concern for Mary's life. If he told others what had happened, that Mary was pregnant with another man's child, Mary would be stoned to death. Mary's life was in his hands. Joseph was hurt, but he did not want to see Mary die. He began to develop a plan to break off the engagement formally and legally, but to do so without explaining the reason why. Joseph knew that after he ended the engagement, everyone would soon discover that Mary was pregnant. They would naturally assume that Joseph was the father and that he had slept with her while she was in Ein Karem, then broken off the engagement. The shame would be his, not Mary's." --Page 44

"It was not his obedience to the law, nor his pursuit of justice, that defined Joseph's righteousness. Instead, it was Joseph's compassion and mercy that led Matthew to call him righteous." Page 45

--Luke 2:52 *"And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in divine and human favor."* How did Jesus grow in wisdom?

--think of the ways Joseph taught and guided Jesus.....think of how he was a participant in helping Jesus to "increase in wisdom.".....Joseph, faithfully parenting according to God's ways.



Herod's massive Herodium, as seen from Bethlehem

²⁵But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. ²⁶It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, ²⁷and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; ²⁸just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:25-28)

One of Herod the Great's major building projects. He named it after himself....it was a man-made mountain like the Egyptian pyramid.

--his winter palace and fortress....he was ultimately buried there

--400 feet in the air, 50 feet taller than the Great Pyramid of Giza

--at the base he built villas for friends

--theater seating up to 900 people

--a palace fit for a king with pools, Roman spas, grand hall, bedrooms with views of the valley below.....including the little town of *Bethlehem*... Joseph's town. Joseph grew up in the shadow of Herod the Great's *Herodium*.

I can picture Joseph taking little Jesus and telling Jesus about Herod the Great and his palace called the Herodium....a symbol of a man who thought he was great and certainly was great by the world's standards. Herod had it all..... power of life and death, by Roman authority ruled a territory with utter control, wealth, prestige, he was, after all, Herod the Great!

I can imagine Joseph teaching Jesus that Herod's greatness was not the way God measured greatness.....teaching Jesus about Abraham, Moses, David, Esther, Deborah all the great men and women of faith who sought to do God's will and serve God's people.

I can imagine Joseph describing the Herodium and teaching Jesus.....*You know the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave.*"
(Matthew 20:25-28)

At some point along the way God's Spirit would have revealed to Jesus that he was the anointed one who was called by God to give himself for the salvation of the world. I wonder how much of a role Joseph played in helping Jesus to increase in this spiritual wisdom and come to a clear understanding of who he is and his unique calling?

Here's the catch.....there's a mix of Joseph *and* Herod in all of us. Adam Hamilton asks some very important questions: ***"Who will you choose to be? Will you be Herod, who spent his life seeking to win the praise of others and pursuing wealth, power, and material possessions, and who by his actions seemed to say, 'Here I am, notice me!?' Or will you be Joseph, who was a humble servant of God, who never sought the limelight, and who was willing to say, 'Here I am, God. Use me.'"*** (Page 55)

How do you define greatness? Herod the Great *or* Joseph a man after God's own heart? May God empower each of us to choose, each day, Joseph....as man after God's own heart!

Amen