

Food for Thought from Sally: Joseph, Foster Father of Jesus



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Earlier this summer, we celebrated Father's Day, and when we look at Joseph (of Nazareth), we learn what sort of things God valued in a father. God Himself was Jesus's father, yet he still chose Joseph to serve as Jesus's earthly father. What sort of person did God choose for this momentous job? When we meet him in Luke's gospel, Joseph is in the process of making a decision of mercy. We meet him when he has learned that his fiancé is pregnant (and not by him), and he is thinking about what to do. A proud man or even just a hurt and disappointed man could've had Mary publicly dishonored or even stoned. Joseph, however, was planning to put her away privately, sparing her any further humiliation than she was already assuredly undergoing. So we see that he was a man with a heart of mercy.

When Joseph married Mary, furthermore, we see perhaps his greatest quality—self-sacrifice. He knew that his marrying her would make everyone believe that the child was his and think that he had been philandering with Mary (even though he was not that sort of man at all). When he married her, he took it on the chin for Mary (and for Jesus), allowing his reputation to suffer for their sake. Joseph was self-sacrificial. Jesus would be as well.

Joseph was also a man who recognized God's voice when He spoke to him—first when he was told to marry Mary and that the child was of the Holy Spirit and again later when God told him to take Mary and Jesus and flee from Bethlehem because King Herod would hunt the child down. On both occasions, Joseph recognized the voice of God. He also acted upon God's instructions immediately. Joseph is a humble man. He is (as is Mary) a descendent of King David, yet he lives the life of an ordinary man (as will Jesus, the King of Kings). He does not speak of his royal blood, neither in pride nor in self-pity (he could've brooded upon the fact that he was of royal blood but had no throne and lived in an era in which Israel was a conquered and occupied land). Joseph is also an honest and skilled worker and teaches Jesus to do the same as the lad grows.

Joseph is also willing to make changes. After the birth of Jesus, Joseph seems to have successfully made a new life for his young family, staying on in Bethlehem. Then he later bravely makes an even greater change—travelling to and settling in a foreign country (Egypt) to protect the young Jesus—revealing that he is willing to make changes and face long journeys and the challenges that go with living in a place far from the culture he has known and been comfortable in.

So...what does God look for in a father? A person who is merciful, who is self-sacrificial of his own reputation when he has to choose between his reputation and doing what is right, someone who is sensitive to recognize God when He speaks, and quick to obey Him, someone who is humble, an honest and hard worker,

and who is willing to make changes. If God chose a man with these traits to serve as the foster father of Jesus, it tells us that these traits are of great value in God's eyes and ones He'd like to develop in all of us.

--*Sally Mahoney (nee McKenney)*