

**Address – 21/12/25****'Joseph'**

Once again we have told the ancient story of the birth of Jesus that lies at the very heart of our Christmas celebrations. Although the story is very familiar to us and has its different phases – the announcement to Mary and Joseph, the journey to Bethlehem, the birth of Jesus, the sharing of the news with the shepherds and the wise men – and although I have been leading Christmas services and looking for ways to shed light on the story for more than 40 years, every year I find that there is a slightly different angle to take.

This morning I want to encourage you to think about Joseph who sometimes gets pushed to the side in the Christmas story.

Put yourself in his shoes for a minute. You are engaged to be married and plans for the wedding are at an advanced stage when you are given reason to wonder if your fiancé(e) has been entirely honest with you and that they might even have been cheating on you. At the very least you are going to be confused.

In our Bible reading this morning we learn three things about Joseph. Firstly we discover that Joseph is the sort of person who wants to do the right thing. By the standards of his time that would mean reporting Mary to the authorities and possibly seeing her not only publicly shamed but perhaps even sentenced to death.

Mary has told him that the baby she is carrying is the Son of God, conceived by the Holy Spirit, and although it sounds like a very tall tale, the kind of story someone might make up to try and cover up something bad that they have done, Joseph is the sort of person who wants to take her at her word and trust her.

Most importantly of all, Joseph is open to God and when he has a dream in which an angel tells him not to call off the wedding and even tells him to give the baby the name Jesus (the Hebrew name Joshua, which means Saviour), he is quick to trust God and to play his part in the working out of God's plan.

It couldn't have been easy for Joseph to make that decision and it made for some very difficult times for them as a family but it proved to be absolutely the right thing to do not only for Mary and him and the baby but for the whole world. It allowed what we celebrate at Christmas to happen and it paved the way for God's salvation plan to be worked out for you and for me.

This Christmas, let me encourage you to learn something from Joseph. Learn to do what is right; learn to trust those who are seeking to do God's will even if sometimes it can sound a little crazy; and above all be open to what God is saying. God speaks to each of us as we read the Bible and pray; God speaks to us by angels and in dreams; God speaks to us through other people – in what is said in church and by members of the church family; God is working His purpose out through ordinary people and in fact He relies on each one of us to be open to Him and to trust Him and to go where He is leading in order to fulfil His plans in the world.

What is God saying to you at this time and what are you going to do about it? If you think God is prompting you, don't just dismiss it, seek the advice of trustworthy fellow Christians. It may not lead you down a comfortable road but if it is the way God is leading you, it is the way that you must take – just ask Joseph.