Title: Joseph

Date: 12/21/25

Subject: Jesus provides joy.

Scripture: Matthew 1:18 – 2:23; Luke 2:1 - 52

This advent we're using stories to communicate how Jesus Christ brings hope, peace, joy and love into our lives. Today's story is about joy.

Before we get to it, here's a description of joy: "Joy is a feeling of inner gladness, delight or rejoicing. Joy in the New Testament is virtually always used to signify a feeling of *happiness* that is based on spiritual realities (and independent of what *happens*). A deep-seated pleasure. It is a depth of assurance and confidence that ignites a cheerful heart. It is a cheerful heart that leads to cheerful behavior. Joy is not an experience that comes from favorable circumstances but it is God's gift to believers…(Gal 5:22, Acts 13:52, 1 Thess 1:6). Joy is the deep-down sense of well-being that abides in the heart of the person who knows all is well between himself and the Lord" (preceptaustin.org/joy_-_chara).

Also: "Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life, the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be all right, and the determined choice to praise God in every situation."

The stories about hope and peace were in the first person. If I were to speak in the first person today, the character would come across as boastful. Therefore, I'm not going to use first person. Also, today's story is about a person who was real. The Bible gives limited information about him so we'll use our sanctified imaginations to flesh out our person of interest.

Joseph may have been so named because his family highly regarded Joseph of the OT, the young man who was his father's favorite, was sold by his brothers into slavery, wrongly imprisoned but eventually rose to become second to Egypt's Pharaoh. He was the instrument of salvation to deliver his family from famine by providing a safe place where the people of Israel would grow into a mighty nation. Joseph would be an honorable and challenging choice for a name to live up to.

We're introduced to the Joseph of the Christmas story in Matthew 1. Other places in the Bible tell us he was a carpenter. Most likely his daddy, granddaddy and great granddaddy were carpenters. Skills and jobs were handed down from generation to generation. He spent his life around tools and wood. He was a hard-working, skilled tradesman who was economically stable and could provide for a wife and children.

It was the norm for Jewish people to know their entire family history. Joseph could trace his heritage through his father, grandfather and great grandfather but also farther through the kings of Israel like Hezekiah, Solomon and David…and all the way back to Israel's patriarchs – Jacob, Isaac and Abraham. This wasn't unique as all Jews could trace their ancestry back to Abraham through his son Isaac through whom the nation came.

Joseph came from small town Nazareth. It was viewed as being on the backside of nowhere populated by a bunch of rejects. People made fun of it by saying things like "Can anything good come from Nazareth?"

The Bible is silent about how old Joseph was, yet people are curious. Customs allowed men to enter a marriage promise at 13. They were deemed adults because they'd gone through a bar mitzvah. Betrothals were more than an engagement. The couple was legally bound. Betrothals were at least a year. The young man would then be 14, but he also needed to be able to support a family, something 14-year-olds in any society can't do.

Joseph apprenticed as a carpenter. It's possible by his late teens or early 20s he was financially stable enough to provide for a family. Others think he was much older than Mary - in his 30s or older and she in her teens. The important thing is God brought these two together.

Like any engaged man, Joseph counted down the days - 255, 254 - until Mary truly became his. All he could think about was Mary. Stars twinkled like her eyes. The wind rustling leaves reminded him of her laugh.

He hoped God would bless them with children, lots of children. The bottom line was they'd have at least one boy. Joseph had nothing against females. His mother was one and Mary was one. But having a son was different. He'd carry the family name, ensure it wouldn't die out, at least for one more generation. A son would work beside him in the carpenter shop. Joseph would teach him how to use the tools, how to judge the quality of wood and above all, how to follow the Lord.

Like any prospective dad, Joseph tried out names: "Moses. No. People will think we're trying to show off. Might as well pick Abraham, Elijah, David. We'll come up with a good name, one full of meaning. It will be good to have a son that will bring honor to the family as the son of Joseph. We have plenty of time."

The course of Joseph's life and the couple's lives changed radically when Mary became pregnant. That's always the case isn't it? Things change in the relationship, in the dynamics and the schedule. If they don't....

Here's what happened. After the angel Gabriel visited Mary, she hurriedly left her hometown and went to her relative Elizabeth's home in the hill country of Judea, a trek of 60 to 100 miles depending where in the hills Elizabeth lived. When Mary entered the house, the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaped and she exclaimed, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!" Elizabeth and her unborn child (John the Baptist) rejoiced at being in the presence of the unborn Savior.

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months and returned home. She had plenty of time to think on the trip down, three months with Elizabeth and the long walk back to Nazareth. It seems her return was when she told Joseph her news. "Joseph. I was visited by an angel." It would have gotten his attention even if was only partially tuned in to what she was saying while thinking about his next carpentry project.

"Angel? Mary! Did you say Angel? You saw an Angel? Did he hurt you?" Most people thought if they saw an angel they were going to die. And yet Mary had survived. She assured Joseph she was okay, but she had more news. "Joseph, the angel had a special message: "You will be with child and give birth to a son.""

Mary continued talking but that's all Joseph heard. He was going to be a dad...once they were married. What great news, and an angel had come with the message she was, they were, going to have a child, a son.

Mary may have grabbed Joseph's face and looked him square in the eye and said, "Joseph. There's more." "Mary, what else can there be? I mean, this is fantastic news."

“Joseph. I'm already pregnant.”

Joseph had had his hands on Mary's and his grip tightened as she spoke. He pulled her hands off his face, maintaining eye contact, now with an intense stare. His impish grin turned solemn, with the slight downturn of a grimace beginning to form.

Joseph's heart was breaking into a million pieces. His mind raced with a 1000 questions: What have you done, Mary? How could you be unfaithful and break our pledge to one another? With whom? Why? Do I mean so little to you? What about our plans? How dare you?

But all he could say was, “Mary.”

She was still giddy with excitement. “Joseph. There's something else you need to know. The child is from the Holy Spirit. We’re to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, the Son of God.”

“Mary. Now you're being beyond ridiculous and silly.”

He walked away from Mary. As a typical guy, he was trying to figure out how they were going to solve the problem. He knew the normal reaction from people would be she deserved to be punished. He pondered the options - public stoning, shunning by the community, forcing her to have an abortion, beat her till she revealed the party who was responsible, throw her out in the street. Pregnancy, normally a joyous event of bringing a child into the world to have as one's own, suddenly wasn't such a joyous occasion for Joseph.

Here's where, if the story were told in first person, Joseph could come across as boastful. The text says Joseph was a righteous man. It would be bragging to say, “I'm a righteous man. Look at all the wonderful things I do to show how good, holy, upright and godly I am.” He'd sound like a proud Pharisee.

Joseph was righteous and it's God who points that out. Joseph desired to follow God and do what pleased him. Because of who he was and his love for Mary, the option that jumped to the forefront was to divorce her quietly, sign the necessary papers without exposing Mary to public shame or judgment. Hopefully, the dust would settle soon and people would forget the episode. He could find another woman.

Then came another plot twist. One night - we don't know if it was a typical dark and stormy night where impactful moments occurred - the angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph in a dream: “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

The angel confirmed Mary’s story. The baby growing in her womb was a supernatural conception and would be no ordinary child. Joseph would have the privilege of being in the position as the human father but it was crystal clear the Almighty God was the father. The child would have a strong name, Jesus, the Lord saves.

The irony and seeming absurdity of the entire situation probably hit Joseph like a ton of bricks. It had looked like all his dreams were like sawdust blown by a strong wind, but his dreams would be fulfilled, not just his dreams, but the dreams of all people throughout the entire world. A Savior would come. God himself would come to men to deliver them from their sins.

Joseph took God at his word. He expressed faith, had confidence, trusted, relied upon what God said. What had been a cause of gloom, darkness and despair became a cause of immense joy.

Can you imagine the conversation Joseph and Mary had? "Mary. Oh Mary. Guess what? I had a dream in which an angel of the Lord appeared to me. He assured me what you said was true. The child you have is from the Holy Spirit and we're to give him the name Jesus. Mary, we're going to be alright."

Joseph took Mary home as his wife. The Bible doesn't say if they tried to explain the situation to their parents, neighbors, friends or the religious leaders. I suspect most wouldn't have understood. After all, who would believe an angel appeared to both of them and their child would be the Son of God? It's easy to imagine the rumors, stares and pointing fingers: "They're just trying to cover their indiscretion. Miracle? Yeah, right. We've heard that one before."

The nine months of pregnancy can be a long time, an excruciatingly long time. Considering the circumstances for Joseph and Mary, time dragged as they waited for the child to be born. It was taking forever - to be done with being uncomfortable around people and physically uncomfortable, to have the baby born, to see what he would look like, to begin the new phase of their journey.

First, they had to take another journey. It wasn't a road trip to visit family or do sightseeing. The Roman emperor decided to take a census of his kingdom. Joseph and Mary had to go from Nazareth to Bethlehem, an 80 mile journey. We don't know how they got there. It's commonly portrayed as she rode a donkey. It's possible. It's also possible she rode in a cart or walked. The trip could be made in a week or so, but in Mary's condition, it took longer… long, arduous, dusty days and nights trying to find shelter. There were other travelers. They probably met kind people, sympathetic to the pregnant lady who tried to make the trip as pleasant as possible - offer food, engage in conversation, ask about baby names, say the typical things we say to pregnant women.

We don't know how far along Mary was in her pregnancy, when they got to Bethlehem or how long they stayed before Jesus was born. It was possibly months as they may have gone early to get away from the prying eyes and gossiping mouths in Nazareth. The most likely scenario is they made the trip during the late stages of Mary's pregnancy as the birth wasn't in the inn because there was no room in the inn. If they had been there for a month or more, they would certainly have been able to secure some sort of lodging.

Finally, the day came. The Bible condenses the story by saying the couple went to Bethlehem and while there she gave birth. Maybe someone helped Mary - fellow travelers or women connected with the inn. Maybe it was just Mary and Joseph. We logically presume the new parents experienced the normal joy of new parents.

They also had some non-standard, unusual and abnormal experiences of joy. They witnessed shepherds come to worship the Christ child and heard them express their joy as they repeated the message the angel proclaimed "Do not be afraid, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord."

Joseph, Mary and Jesus stayed in Bethlehem for a few days and went to the temple in Jerusalem where a circumcision ceremony was performed. There they heard Simeon joyfully praise God: "My eyes have seen

your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" and Anna give thanks to God joy as she had seen the Savior.

A few weeks later, Joseph, Mary and Jesus went back to the temple for Mary's ceremonial cleansing. After these things were done, they went back to Nazareth (Luke 2:39-40).

Then came another plot twist - unexpected company. Magi, wisemen, astrologers from the mystical east showed up at their house. It's often thought there were three wisemen because that's the number of gifts they brought. We don't know how many there were. There probably were more than three because three wise guys searching and asking "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?" doesn't send a king and city into panic mode. They might be written off as loony. But if 30, 40 or 300 showed up, Herod and the populace would have good reason to be disturbed. However many wisemen there were, they were overjoyed after leaving Herod's presence when they again saw the star that led them to Jesus (Mt 2:9, 10).

The wisemen worshipped the child and presented their gifts. After they left, an angel appeared to Joseph - again in a dream. This time he brought bad news. King Herod wanted to kill the child Jesus. To prevent that, Joseph was to take Mary and the child to Egypt. The overland route through the heart of Israel could be dangerous. Soldiers would be patrolling roads and villages, keeping a sharp eye out for their target. It's very possible the family made a beeline for the Mediterranean coast and took a ship down to Egypt.

It'd be a safe place as it was far from Herod's reach and many Jews had relocated to Egypt. They'd be able to blend in and not draw attention to themselves. Just another small family seeking to make their way in the world.

I imagine Joseph found work as a carpenter while Mary took care of Jesus. I doubt they talked to their neighbors about Jesus' identity. "Our boy is the Son of the Most High God and he will save people from their sins." That would be more than just a little awkward and met by quizzical looks. Sure, moms and dads want their kids to achieve great things, but claiming your toddler is the Messiah, that reaches new heights of audacity.

The trio stayed in Egypt until another angel appeared to Joseph to tell him it was safe to return to Israel. The man who wanted Jesus dead, was himself dead. They started out, but when they heard Herod's son was reigning in the province of Judea, they were afraid. Another dream of guidance from the Lord to go to Nazareth to live there.

They attempted to fit in with the normal activities of life. Each year Joseph, Mary and Jesus along with other observant Jews went to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover (Luke 2:41). That's the only thing we know about their lives until the trip they made when Jesus was 12 years old.

That year they went to Jerusalem, offered the necessary sacrifice, visited other people and then left for home. At least Joseph and Mary started for home, unaware Jesus had stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents thought he was with their relatives and friends. When they couldn't find him that, they went back to Jerusalem. After three days, they found him in the temple where he was listening to the teachers and asking them questions.

It was an unusual place for a 12 year old to be because he was only a kid. However, everyone who heard Jesus was amazed at the depth of his understanding, including his parents who were astonished.

Jesus responded to them, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" They didn't understand the implications of what Jesus said. They simply took him home to Nazareth where Jesus was obedient to them and grew in wisdom, stature and favor with God and men (Luke 2:52).

There are only vague references in the Bible to Joseph after this. During Jesus' ministry people viewed him as the son of Joseph. They were skeptical and spoke derisively as to how Jesus had gained so much spiritual knowledge and wisdom: "He's only a carpenter's son. How can he claim to be God? Who does he think he is? Why should we listen to him?" (Luke 4:14-30; Matthew 13:53-58; John 6:28-51).

We don't know how long Joseph lived. Did he die shortly after the temple incident when Jesus was 12? Was he there during the teen years? Did he see Jesus grow into young adulthood? Was he around during some of Jesus' ministry? If Joseph was alive up to this point, he would have found great joy in hearing Jesus describe himself and his relationship to God the heavenly Father.

This is the end of Joseph's story on earth, but not the complete end. The complete end is heaven where he's experiencing and will experience the joy of the Lord forever.

The Bible tells us that after the shepherds visited Jesus, Mary and Joseph at the manger, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart (Luke 2:19). Later, after Joseph and Mary found Jesus after he'd been missing and had returned to Nazareth where Jesus was obedient to them, she again treasured all these things in her heart (Luke 2:51).

I don't think Joseph was an insensitive, uncaring bump on a log. He didn't see all these things that were transpiring and respond, "Duh. I don't know what's happening." I think he found incredible joy in the journey he, Mary and more importantly Jesus was on. He could find joy in the dark times caused by the difficulties of life, like moving to protect their child. He would have found joy as "the child grew, became strong, was filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon him" (Luke 2:40). He would have found joy in watching the miracles and understanding what had been prophesied by the angels was unfolding before his eyes.

C.S. Lewis, "All things that ever deeply possessed your soul have been but hints of Heaven. Tantalizing glimpses, promises never quite fulfilled, echoes that died away just as they caught your ear...If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world...Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy, but to arouse it, to suggest the real thing."

We can have joy in our journey. It comes through our hope in Christ as the one and only Savior. It comes from having peace with Christ by being in a right relationship with him, having our sins forgiven, having received the gift of eternal life and the promise of a place in heaven. Though we can't manufacture joy, we are called to be joyful (Rom 12:12, 1 Thess 5:16), rejoice (Rom 5:2; Ph 3:1, 4:4; 1 Pet 4:13) as our joy is to come from and be in Jesus as we walk through life's journey with him.