

January 3, 2021
Jeremiah 31:7-14
Ephesians 1:3-6,15-19a
Matthew 2:13-15,19-23
Psalm 84 or 84:1-8

*God be in our mouths and in our speaking.
God be in our hearts and in our understanding.*

We're coming to the end of the Christmas narrative. In three days, the Church will celebrate The Epiphany – when the wise men came to pay homage to Jesus, and then we'll say goodbye to the characters we know so well until the Church year starts again next Advent. Over the past weeks, we've talked and thought about Mary, the angels, the shepherds, the animals at the manger, maybe even the innkeeper who turned Mary & Joseph away. I'm guessing many of us can recite whole passages of who said what in the Advent and Christmas narratives ... maybe portions of the Magnificat, or Linus's recitation of Luke in *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, or what the magi said in their conversation with Herod.

You know what we don't hear? We don't hear what Joseph said. Not one word. Ever. In the entire New Testament, Joseph has no dialog. He doesn't appear in the Gospels after the story of twelve-year-old Jesus being left behind in Jerusalem. He's mentioned once in the Gospel of John, and he isn't mentioned in the Gospel of Mark at all.

What facts do we know about Joseph? He was an obedient citizen of the Roman Empire, traveling to Bethlehem to register in the census. He was a devout Jew, taking baby Jesus to be presented at the temple, and taking his family to Jerusalem every year for the festival of Passover. We can infer from a mention in Matthew that Joseph was a carpenter. Just an average ... um ... Joe. If the Gospels were a script or screenplay, Joseph would probably be tagged as a "minor character."

Well. In today's Gospel, we are presented with the staggering fact that, if not for Joseph, there would be no Jesus. There. Would. Be. No. Jesus.

In Advent, we heard that Joseph could have, and in fact, had resolved, to sever his relationship with Mary. Under ancient Jewish law, this act would have surely led to her death for adultery. I'm guessing it was Joseph who sought out and found the shelter under which Mary was able to give birth to Jesus in, for that time, relative safety.

And it is Joseph who gets out of bed, in the middle of the night, throws a few things into a suitcase, gathers his family, and takes them into Egypt to keep them safe from King Herod's narcissistic fear. It is Joseph who figures out how to provide for his family's welfare in Egypt as they await further instruction from God. And it is Joseph's caution and obedience that lead the family to Nazareth.

Do I think Joseph actually spoke words? I'm quite sure he did. If you've spent any time AT ALL around people, you know that, while it may be hard to get a word in edgewise sometimes, you're going to speak. You're going to have conversations, some of them more difficult than others. I'm sure there were hundreds of conversations - between Joseph and Mary ... Joseph and Jesus ... Joseph and the neighbors. The Gospel writers knew we didn't need to know what those conversations contained. What we need to know is that Joseph loved God. Joseph listened. Joseph had faith. Joseph acted.

I think it's easy, sometimes, to get distracted by worrying about whether or not we're being listened to. Is our advice taken? Are we saying the right thing? Do our words anger, or incite, or soothe, or encourage?

There's a tradition in my family on Christmas Day ... we sit down to watch the Christmas classic, Die Hard. In it, Sergeant Powell says "...you should know when to listen, when to shut up...and when to pray." Joseph lives into that quote better than anyone *I* can think of. And I am reminded, every time I see that movie (yes, more than once a year) of that excellent advice. Stop talking so you can listen. Listening to God is praying.

Salvation history is a series of people listening to God, saying "yes" to God, and then acting with and for God. Noah said, "yes Lord, I'll build an ark." Abraham said, "yes Lord, I'll leave everything I know and go where you tell me." Moses said, "yes Lord, I'll lead your people out of Egypt." Mary said, "yes Lord, I'll bear your Son." The apostles said, "yes Lord, we'll follow you."

And Joseph? Joseph said (although not out loud!), "yes Lord, I'll marry this girl. Yes, I'll believe the angels you send to me. Yes, I'll keep this family safe. Yes, I'll raise this child." Joseph's faith and love and action was his answer.

So as this season ends and a new one begins, in what way will YOUR faith and love lead you to say "yes" to God? And how will you act on it?

Amen.