

Joseph's Story
by Rev. Sharon Lee MacArthur
For Berkeley Chinese Community Church
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Luke 2:41-52

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.



Here we are knee deep in Christmas!
We've followed the story –



- The angels coming to Mary and to Joseph and letting them know their special roles in bringing God in the flesh into the world.

We've journeyed with Mary to visit Elizabeth....we've traveled with Mary and Joseph as they made their way to Bethlehem and found a place among the animals to birth the Baby Jesus.

We've witnessed the shepherds making their way to meet the Baby Jesus. And whaaaam – in the midst of our cooing and jiggling the baby – we hear he's already 12 years old – no longer a baby and holding his own at the temple with the elders!



What gives? We haven't even heard the part about the wisemen arriving in Bethlehem, for heaven's sake! Epiphany isn't until next week! I realize that kids grow up fast – but this is waaay too fast!

It was really bothering me to think that we couldn't slow down and enjoy the Christmas Story at a more leisurely pace when life had a few lessons of its own to teach.

My son Popi and his wife Amy and their kids,

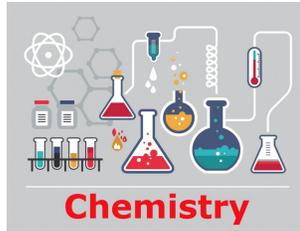


Aidan and Meagan, are with us for Christmas. And when we're together – we often recall favorite memories -

What was interesting as we began to reminisce is that memories had much more meaning because we have already seen and witnessed what has happened between a particular memory and the present and if we dig deep, we can find a connection between the childhood memory and the present. AND That connection made the memory all the more precious AND meaningful!

For instance – Popi is a chemist...he has lived and breathed “chemistry” since he was able to pronounce the word I think. We have a recording of him playing radio with his older brother – he was probably about 5. In the recording, there were about 3 or 4 little voices talking about how they should spend the afternoon. The pretend man-in-the-street “reporter” would ask each person, “What would you like to do, sir?” and a voice would respond:

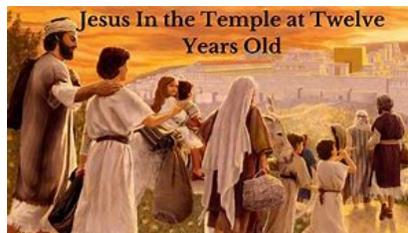
- let's slide down Albany hill,
- let's hunt for tadpoles in the creek,
- let's build a fort in the backyard.
- And then there's a clear very excited and enthusiastic voice



- calling out "I know, I know, let's play chemistry!" We knew it was Popi!

We didn't know *then* what we know now....the mysterious brown spots in the lawn under the window? Popi's concoction of dish detergent, perfumes and cleansers – created during one of those times when his brother and friends went along with his suggestion to play chemistry. We didn't know *then* that he would make chemistry his life career!

It made me think about our story of Jesus today as a 12 year old in the midst of celebrating a newborn Jesus...here is a story of someone so special that at age 12 he was holding his own with the rabbis in the temple. He was so lost in that encounter that he forgot about his parents – for 3 days!



And when his frantic parents found him, they probably were yelling, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I were worried to death about you."

Remember his response? "Why? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

Luke says Mary and Joseph did not understand what he said to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart.

How about Joseph? Did **he** treasure all these things in **his** heart? Joseph was the earthly dad who celebrated Jesus' first words...his first steps. He was the one who agonized with Mary whenever Jesus was sick. He was the one who helped to grow Jesus into adulthood. And now that Jesus was 12....he was frantic along with Mary when they couldn't find their son. And when they did find him, and when Jesus seems to chastise his parents by saying: "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" Did Joseph get it that Jesus had just acknowledged that God as his father? What about earthly dad Joseph? He has gone through a lot being Jesus' earthly dad! What now? Is his part over now that Jesus seems to have announced that he is about to live life as God's son?

Last week we heard Mary's story. It seems to me that it would be appropriate to hear Joseph's story today!



Who is this person who was asked by God to raise God's son? And apparently step aside once Jesus is grown up? Will he be cool with that? Just who is Jesus' adoptive father on earth?

The clue I am drawn to is one haunting sentence from Matthew's narrative just before the angel visits Joseph and after he finds out that his betrothed is pregnant with another man's child.

"Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly."

And I wonder - how did this man Joseph become this way - righteous and unwilling to expose Mary to public disgrace.....

One answer might be his mother! Even though she's not in the picture, we know her through the actions and ways of Joseph.



Wouldn't it be interesting to hear from her? And through the magic of wardrobe change and imagination – welcome Joseph's mother, Jesus' grandmother.... <<pull up shawl to become head covering>>

Good morning - I am a humble servant of God, mother of Joseph. I have to admit that never in all my days, would I have believed that my grandson (OK - so adopted-grandson) would be the Prince of Peace, the Messiah, Emmanuel, Savior, the Christ! Imagine - my son helping to raise the Son of God! What an awesome responsibility! It was pretty difficult to raise a child with the world in such turmoil back then - all the fighting, all the hate! But I and many other mothers managed.

I wasn't around when the Bethlehem birth happened - but I knew all about it. I might be dead, but I'm not uninformed! Back then, marriages were arranged...there was this nice, God-loving girl named Mary...people who knew Joseph thought she would be a good match for him. They knew Joseph to also be a God-loving man. And with Mary, they would honor and praise God together.

So they were betrothed - which sounds like “engaged” but it’s much more than that. There’s actually a signed contract and promises made between families and dowries negotiated. So they were “legally” a couple - just not living together yet. The families get to know each other and get used to each other and finetune the dowries for about a year until the couple starts to live together - that is, they live with the husband’s family. It was during this year when all the trouble started.



I started taking notice when my son became involved. That’s when Mary told Joseph that she was pregnant...he knew that the child was not his! I held my breath and waited to see what he would do. I taught him to always think about others and think about God before acting on anything. I always reminded him that when you speak before you think, you get yourself and a lot of others in trouble and run the risk of hurting people and relationships.

His decision could bring about Mary’s death. Back then adulteresses were often stoned to death! And if she died, so would an unborn child. And if that happened, could he live with that? Could he forgive himself and the neighbors, friends and relatives who would carry out that tradition?

But if he continued to honor the betrothal contract and continue with the marriage, could he handle it? Could he handle raising another man’s child? There was no easy answer and he had no idea that the world was at stake! I had no idea that I had raised a son who would be such a pivotal character in the story of the world.

Being a parent is never easy - there’s that parental instinct - protect your child at all cost. But at the same time there’s the instinct to prepare them for life without you! Sometimes, these two principles seem to be diametrically opposed.

Protecting a toddler means to scoop that child up when fingers get too close to a burning flame or a hot kettle. And then the child grows - you teach and show that burning flames and hot kettles can cause pain...you hope and pray that your child will remember what you’ve taught when you have to leave him or her in another’s care. And so it goes, bit by bit, step by step...you and your child enter the world and begin to teach and learn.

That’s what I did with Joseph...I talked and taught and demonstrated and he listened. He’s a very good listener. But I think he was always able to hear more than what I was actually saying...he’s always been very quiet, but feels deeply. And his love for God is strong...he lives his love for God through actions...always has.

And I think the most important thing was the one that Matthew wrote about...I'm pleased that Matthew picked up on "righteous" - you see Joseph studied the laws of Moses, learned them and internalized them pretty well. But I'm even more pleased that he saw Joseph as one who was not willing to expose Mary to public disgrace.

That means to me that my Joseph is close to God and loves God more than laws. See what I mean? He's always been able to learn the lessons I tried to teach in spite of the words he hears from my mouth. It seems that THAT God-given ability enabled him to help give birth to the Messiah.

Matthew reminded me that Joseph planned to dismiss Mary quietly. At least my son didn't act immediately and didn't speak immediately to do any damage to the situation! He tried to sleep and couldn't...he tried to rest and couldn't...even though he thought he had made up his mind.



So he was visited by one of these messengers of God who swooped down to earth to say, "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. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

***Then** he was able to rest and sleep. I think he knew in his heart that his first decision was not the right one and he was wrestling with himself and with God. And **that's** why he couldn't sleep or rest. Once he was "insynch" with God - his heart was at peace...and he found strength and courage in God to do what he had to do.*

My heart ached for him - it wasn't going to be easy - people will know that Mary was pregnant before they were really married. After all, her swollen belly will show itself too soon after they start to live together.

But he and Mary were spared that shame –



they had to travel to Bethlehem just before the baby was due – so the baby was born there...God works in mysterious ways - even back then!

So, I guess what I'm really trying to say is that parenting is just about the most important job anyone can have....even though there is no job description that comes with each birth.

As parents - whether we are parenting our own child or any child of God, it is in the growing, teaching, nurturing of each child that gives that child

- *a unique worldview,*
- *a unique God-view and*
- *an introduction to the connection between the child and the world and all who dwell in it,*
- *and between the child and God.*



The thing is - we might never know how your child will be used by God for something beyond imagination! Like my Joseph!

Thanks for welcoming me today! <<take off head covering>>>

So, folks – what I understand through Jesus’ grandmother is this – that together we, all of us...all of us in this church, all of us here on earth *and* all who have gone before us – **ALL of us** can join together to bring to life Emmanuel - God with us! **All of us** - whether or not we have our own children

- I understand that all of us are parents – we are Mary’s and Joseph’s – and given the awesome responsibility of raising God’s children!

May we be led by the spirit of Mary and Joseph and the birth and life of Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us, God’s love made visible! Amen.