



Joe's Place

BY STEVE BROWN

Frankly, Joseph doesn't matter. He wasn't the father. He wasn't even important to the story. There is no "Magnificat of Joseph" and no one ever said "Joseph, blessed are you among men." Joseph is mentioned in Luke 2 and Matthew 1; then he simply disappears and is never mentioned again in the Bible. (When Jesus was in the temple, he is not mentioned by name.)

Two things stand out about him: Joseph was kind. Joseph was faithful. It has been universally assumed that Joseph died young and that was one of the reasons Jesus didn't begin his public ministry until he was thirty. As the elder "son," Jesus had obligations to the fatherless family. One suspects that Jesus took over Joseph's carpenter shop and looked after his siblings and mother.

I have found myself thinking a lot about what it would be like to be that family's pastor (...uh..rabbi) during the time of Joseph's death. Once a pastor, always a pastor, I guess. I've been a pastor forever. I've cleaned up after more suicides, buried more babies and stood beside more deathbeds than I can even

remember. I often tell my students that nobody wants to talk to dying people and that, as pastors, it's their responsibility. As a pastor, you have to be there, you have to talk and you have to prepare the person for death.

Joseph, of course, wouldn't be in a hospital room and doctors were in short supply, but Joseph would know when his time was coming. He would get progressively weaker and weaker, and have trouble breathing, until he simply couldn't get out of bed any longer.

I would visit Joseph on his deathbed. It would be late, long after Mary and the children were asleep. (The dying are usually awake.) As I picture it (and I've been there many times), I would come into his room after lightly knocking on the door. "Hi, Joseph. Do you want a friend to sit with you a while?"

I suspect we would talk about the weather and the carpentry business. But eventually, we would have to acknowledge the elephant in the room. "Joseph," I would say, "I know that you know you're dying and dying is hard. If you want, I would like to sit with you. Maybe, if you want, we could talk about it."

You Are Forgiven

"Joseph" I would gently say, "I suspect you're thinking about the things you've done that you

shouldn't have done. If you're like everybody else, maybe you're feeling down and guilty, knowing that you'll be facing a holy God soon. The guilt must be difficult."

I would notice the tears in Joseph's eyes and he would nod. I would tell him that I've heard a lot of confessions over the years and, if he wanted to confess anything, it would be okay. Then I would remind Joseph of what the angel said: "You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

If you're normal, you look around and think that everyone else except you has it all together. You've done things, said things and hurt people, and it makes you ashamed. Let me let you in on a secret: Everybody has done things, said things and hurt people...and we're all ashamed. We are a bad lot.

Do you know the point of Christmas? You are forgiven.

But, Steve, you don't understand. You think, I'm so ashamed. I've done things that are horrible...and thought even worse. I wish I could go back and fix what I've done. Even now, I'm bound by my addictions and sin...I'm like a fly in a spider web.

Again: You are forgiven. And, in Christmas, there is great comfort and hope. After the reminder of God's forgiveness, Joseph would relax a little and smile.

You Are Significant

"Joseph," I would say, "It's more than just the guilt, isn't it? It's hard to die so young, before it's time. There are dreams that will never be fulfilled. There is so much that you still wanted to do. You may wonder if you've done anything and feel pretty insignificant about what you have done."

I would remind Joseph of the time when he found out about Mary's pregnancy. Knowing that he wasn't the father, in his kindness, Joseph still didn't want to shame Mary. I would remind Joseph of the trip to Bethlehem (Luke 2:4) and his protection of his wife, Mary, who was with child. I would remind Joseph of his strength on the trip to Egypt and of the time when he and Mary presented Jesus at the temple.

Joseph would shake his head and say, "But those are such little

**Two things stand out about him:
Joseph was kind. Joseph was faithful.**



things...just what any man would do." I would remind Joseph that a little bit of faithfulness in a dark place is all that God needs. I, of course, couldn't tell him about what happened with Jesus, but I would remind Joseph that God does very big things with little actions. I would remind you of the same thing.

We all say, "I want my life to count. I want to make a difference. I want my life to have meaning." Even if it's all about God and not about us, it really is about us and

**...we discount the little things.
You make a difference...when
you change a diaper, go to work,
are faithful in your marriage...**

our need to make a difference. But we discount the *little* things. You make a difference...when you change a diaper, go to work, are faithful in your marriage, stand by the church and do what God has told you to do.

So, do what God has told you to do—the way Joseph did—and you might be surprised when you get Home by the true impact you

made. Besides, impacts are God's business. Faithfulness is our business... faithfulness in the little places of our lives.

You Can Trust God

"Joseph, there is more, right? You're worried about your family, Mary and the boys. Who will take care of them? Will they be okay without you?" Joseph would nod his head again and admit, "Yes, I'm really worried about them."

I would remind Joseph of how

worried he and Mary were when they couldn't find Jesus. "You looked for Jesus and found him in the temple with the rabbis. Do you remember what he said to you then?"

Joseph would reply, "Yeah, he was surprised at our worry and said that he had to be about 'his Father's business.'"

He still is about his Father's business, I would remind Joseph...and you. You love Mary and your other sons, but they are the Father's business. Their

Are you worried about your kids?...husband or wife? Welcome to the club, but you don't have to fix them. You can really entrust them to God.

heavenly Father loves them more than you do. You can entrust them to him. Being God is way above your pay level, anyway.

You really can trust God. A part of being a Christian is to be committed to the commitments of one another. I may not be called to where you are called, but I am called to be the cheerleader of you and the places where you are called.

God is kind of like that. He loves us. Not only that, he loves those we love. It's called a covenant and the Scriptures have a lot to say about the family covenant.

Are you worried about your kids? Are you worried about your husband or wife? Welcome to the club, but you don't have to fix them. You can really entrust them to God.

And all the other stuff that keeps you up at night...you can trust God with that, too. Sometimes God says, "you go on to sleep, and I'll stay up the rest of the night."

You Will Live Forever

"Joseph," I would quietly and finally say, "dying is hard and

Don't let the baby fool you. God came as a baby because he didn't want to scare us to death.



Christmas is really about death, isn't it? We hide that fact with the baby, the trees, the manger and the parties, but it is true.

Everybody who is born starts dying at the very moment of their birth.

scary. Are you scared?" And Joseph would respond, "Yeah, you could say that."

Joseph wouldn't understand all the things I would say to him and he wouldn't know why I was so certain, but I would tell him that death wasn't the end. Maybe I would quote some Scripture without telling him where it came from: "But we do not want you to be uninformed...about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.... Therefore encourage one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:13, 18).

I would tell Joseph about heaven. I would tell Joseph that God—the God who had always been faithful to Joseph and the God Joseph had served—would always welcome him Home.

When my father was dying, he was worried, but brave, and he told me that he just "couldn't make the clock move fast enough." After the doctor (to whom I'll be eternally grateful) told my father about the cancer, he said, "This is bad and you have about three months to live. This is what we are going to do. We are going to pray and then I'm going to tell you something far more important than the cancer." The doctor told my father about Jesus.

Christmas is really about death, isn't it? We hide that fact with the baby, the trees, the manger and the parties, but it is true. Everybody who is born starts

dying at the very moment of their birth. The statistic is one out of one. One of the sad things about Christmas is that there are many who come so close and feel the warmth...then miss it and walk away. Don't you miss it this year.

Don't let the baby fool you. God came as a baby because he didn't want to scare us to death. But he grew up and died on a cross so you could live forever. A dead man got up from the grave and said that we could, too.

"These all died in faith, not having received the things promised..." (Hebrews 11:13). But the hope of Christmas is more than death. The rest of the text reads, "Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city" (Hebrews 11:16).

And what about Joseph? After a while, Joseph would fall asleep ...more at peace and hopeful. □

Originally published in Key Life magazine, Winter 2008, Volume 23, #3. Adapted from Steve & Pete's audio series for Advent, Hope Has Come. Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Steve Brown is a radio broadcaster, seminary professor and author of numerous books, including *Born Free*, *When Being Good Isn't Good Enough* and *When Your Rope Breaks*. His articles appear in such magazines and journals as *Leadership*, *Decision* and *Today's Christian Woman*.

