



First United Methodist Church of Hanford

*Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors.*



Reconciling Congregation

505 N. Redington Street Hanford, CA93230

559-584-4075 (voice) 559-584-5438 (fax)

office@fumchanford.org

[www.fumchanford.org](http://www.fumchanford.org)

Facebook: @HanfordFirstUMC



### **GPS GUIDE Grow, Pray, Serve Guide for Weekly Reflection**

(Adapted from United Methodist Church of the Resurrection resources: sharechurch.com)

#### **December 15, 2024 Joseph, Patron Saint of...**

Scripture: Matthew 1:18-21, 24-25

#### **Joseph the carpenter**

##### **MONDAY 12.16.24** Matthew 13:53-57, Mark 6:1-6

Joseph is central in all nativity scenes, but he was actually an obscure person in the gospels. The gospel writers never specified what he did for a living, never directly called him a carpenter. Matthew and Mark recorded that when Jesus went to Nazareth, many people rejected him. In Matthew's version, they called him "the carpenter's son." According to Mark, they identified Jesus himself as a carpenter, and it seems logical that he would have learned his father's trade.

- It would be nice if the GPS could have you read an eloquent speech Joseph made about being Jesus' earthly father. But, as Pastor Hamilton wrote, "Unlike Mary, Joseph has no 'lines'—we don't read a single word he speaks in the Gospels.... He is the patron saint of those who serve and do the right thing without seeking any credit." \*\* How easy or hard do you find it to be content when the spotlight falls on someone else more than on you?
- "The noun 'carpenter' may refer to one who builds with wood or stone. Wood is somewhat rare in Palestine, and houses are most frequently constructed with stone." \*\* Joseph and Jesus may

have been stone masons, or perhaps “subcontractors,” making wooden items like doors for stone houses. People apparently did not see such workers as wise or impressive. Are you open to learning from people of all ages and experiences, or do you discount anyone without the “right” outward credentials?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, the gospels suggest that many people in your day added “just a” before “carpenter.” Help me value all people, not only the ones who have a job that impresses me. Amen.

\* Adam Hamilton, *The Journey: A Season of Reflections*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011, p. 45. \*\* Barclay M. Newman and Phillip C. Stine, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew* in the UBS Handbook Series. New York: United Bible Societies, 1988, p. 444

## Shocking news for an engaged carpenter

**TUESDAY 12.17.24** Matthew 1:18-19, Psalm 18:28-30, Isaiah 43:1-4

Matthew’s and Luke’s gospels did not duplicate each other; they complemented each other. Luke told about Jesus’ birth through Mary’s eyes, while Matthew told the story from Joseph’s outlook. He was engaged to Mary when the story began. Mary lived in the tiny village of Nazareth, but it seems from the slender evidence the gospels give us that Bethlehem was Joseph’s home town (cf. [Luke 2:1-4](#)). If so, that suggests that their families arranged the marriage, as was common in their time and place. •

“In Matthew’s Gospel, Bethlehem appears to be Joseph’s hometown.... Nazareth was certainly Mary’s hometown, Joseph and Mary’s engagement was most likely long-distance, arranged by their respective families in Bethlehem and Nazareth.” \* When Joseph learned Mary was pregnant, he knew he couldn’t be the child’s father. Hurt and let down, he likely turned to Scriptures like today’s. How can passages like these give you a spiritual foundation when you face a letdown?

• Isaiah 43 came in a section of the book many mainline scholars call “Second Isaiah.” It spoke first to Israelites returning from exile in Babylon. It emphasized God’s personal bond with God’s people— “I will be with you.... I love you.” It did not promise an easy, pain-free life, but pledged that whatever happened, God’s people can depend on God’s presence. How could such a passage speak to Joseph’s hurting heart? How does it speak to you today?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, your miraculous conception started your life upending business as usual in our broken world. Fill me with the courage to let you reshape all the parts of my life that need it. Amen.

\* Hamilton, Adam, *The Journey: Walking the Road to Bethlehem* (pp. 34-35). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

## Mercy from a struggling carpenter

### WEDNESDAY 12.18.24 Matthew 1:18-19, Deuteronomy 22:20-24

In Israelite culture, a betrothal was as binding as marriage. When Mary, betrothed to Joseph, became pregnant, Joseph at first drew the “obvious” conclusion that she had been intimate with some other man. Painful as that was, Joseph began to realize that the law in Deuteronomy might cost Mary’s life. If he denounced her publicly, she might be stoned to death (see [John 8:3-5](#)). He sought a different solution, even though it might let some people blame him for her pregnancy.

- Matthew, with just a few words, reported something important about Joseph. “Joseph her husband was a righteous man.... he didn’t want to humiliate her.” What do you learn about Joseph’s inner qualities from his measured response (“he decided to call off their engagement quietly”)? The book *Safe People* \* listed Biblically based qualities of “safe people.” How safe for others are you? Like Joseph, do you choose not to humiliate others?
- Joseph was “a devout Jewish man willing to give up what was often perceived to be a Jewish father’s greatest privilege—siring his first-born son—in order to obey God’s will.” \*\* Have you had to give up some cherished dream to obey God, or might you have to? If so, how are you and God working to bend that loss to produce good results?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, your earthly father showed his righteous character, not in demanding that Mary follow the law to the letter, but in showing her mercy. Help my righteousness, too, to always lean in the direction of mercy. Amen.

\* Cloud, Henry; Townsend, John, *Safe People: How to Find Relationships That Are Good for You and Avoid Those That Aren't*. Zondervan, 1995.

\*\* Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight, *The Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992, p. 63.

## Joseph: you will parent your Savior

### THURSDAY 12.19.24 Matthew 1:20-21, Acts 5:27-32

Joseph planned to break the engagement quietly. In a dream, an angel told him to trust Mary and proceed with the marriage plans. Joseph was in a story much bigger than just one wedding. The angel said to name the child “Jesus” (the Greek form of the Hebrew “Joshua,” which meant “Yahweh is salvation”). Many Hebrews wanted salvation from the occupying Roman army. But the angel never mentioned the Romans. This child, he said, would save people from humanity’s greatest enemy: sin.

- “The name Jesus comes from the Hebrew *Yeshua*, which means “deliverance” or “salvation”.... through him, God would forgive God’s people.” \* There were about 125 direct Bible references to forgiveness. It was a BIG idea, “revolving around the driving need that the human heart feels for forgiveness, the decisiveness of the act by which God discards sin and the lavishness of God’s mercy in forgiveness.” \*\* How did even Jesus’ name point to God’s decisive, lavish act to meet our greatest need?
- Scholar N. T. Wright wrote, “Matthew sees Jesus as the one who will now complete what the law of

Moses pointed to but could not of itself produce. He will rescue his people, not from slavery in Egypt, but from the slavery of sin, the 'exile' they have suffered not just in Babylon but in their own hearts and lives." \*\*\* What are the benefits of letting Jesus save you from that spiritual exile? How confident are you that Jesus is in fact the savior from sin that we all need?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, though I sometimes forget it, I need a savior. Thank you for being the savior I most need. Redeem my inner and outer way of life from sin, that I may walk daily in your light. Amen.

\* Eugene Eung-Chun Park and Joel B. Green, study note on Matthew 1:21 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 6 NT.

\*\* *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, general editors: Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman III. InterVarsity Press, 1998, p. 303.

\*\*\* N. T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone: Part 1*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002, p.8.

## Matthew's simple story of Jesus' birth

### FRIDAY 12.20.24 Matthew 1:24-2:1

Matthew wrote almost no details about Jesus' actual birth. Maybe that was because he told the story from a man's point of view; maybe his sources simply gave little information. His succinct account didn't even identify where the birth took place until after the fact in Matthew 2:1. But he reported two key facts: despite his earlier reluctance, Joseph **did** marry the pregnant Mary. Even more important, he named the child she bore "Jesus" (the Greek form of Joshua, which meant "God saves"). • Luke 1:38 showed Mary saying, "I am the Lord's servant. Let it be with me just as you have said."

Matthew 1:24 said Joseph "did just as an angel from God commanded." Neither of them could even imagine it at the time, but today millions, likely billions of people worship during Advent because two humble Hebrew peasants listened, believed, and obeyed. What is God calling you to listen to, to believe, and then to do or be this Advent season?

- Christmas Eve is next Tuesday, and Resurrection's Christmas Eve services start on Sunday evening. For the first time ever, this year there will be candlelight Christmas Eve services at 8 locations plus online and on TV. [Click here](#) for detailed schedule information at all locations, and plan to join us for a light-filled service honoring Jesus' birth.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, on that first Christmas you came into our midst, human, but also more. Be born in my heart this Christmas, I pray. Amen.

## Jesus: the ultimate sign that God is with you

### SATURDAY 12.21.24 Isaiah 7:10-16, 8:3-4; Matthew 1:20-23

700 years before Jesus, three kings were plotting to attack Israel, and King Ahaz was frightened. The prophet Isaiah said to ask for a sign that God was with him. The stubborn king refused, but Isaiah gave him a sign anyway—a young woman (maybe Isaiah's wife) would give birth to a son. Before the boy reached age 13, the plotting kingdoms would lose their power (and they did). Pastor Hamilton wrote, "Matthew was not confused nor was he misinterpreting Isaiah.... I think he was saying, 'Jesus, like that first Immanuel, was a sign sent by God that you might know God is with you, that you might know he will never leave you'.... Jesus, in a way that the first Immanuel could not, incarnated the presence and love of the God who rules over the entire universe." \*

- By quoting Isaiah Matthew linked Jesus with the name that meant "God with us." Then Matthew 18:20 quoted Jesus as saying, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I'm there with them." In the gospel's final verse, Matthew 28:20, Jesus pledged that "I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age." What settings or practices help to make God's presence real to you? What makes God's presence as important for you as it was for King Ahaz? Scholar William Barclay summed up Matthew's message: "Jesus is the one person who can tell us what God is like, and what God means us to be. In him alone we see what God is and what [humans] ought to be." \*\* In what ways have you made Jesus central to your understanding of what God is like? Has that helped you to avoid some of the negative, frightening images of God some people hold? If so, how?

**Prayer:** Be near me, Lord Jesus. I ask thee to stay close by me forever, and love me, I pray. Amen.

\* Adam Hamilton, *The Journey: Walking the Road to Bethlehem*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011, p. 48. (Pages 46-50 of the book more fully explain Isaiah's prophecy and the way Matthew applied it.)

\*\* William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew—Volume 1, Chapters 1-10* in The Daily Study Bible Series. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976, p. 21.