



Joseph: Preparing a Heart to Serve
December 15, 2024
By Pastor Joshua Clough

Group Leader Notes

Throughout Advent, the four weeks leading to Christmas, we're looking at important people in the Christmas story to understand how they prepared their hearts for the arrival of Jesus. We started with the prophets who called the people of God to repent and prepare their hearts. Last week, we learned about Mary's life and faith and the humility she had to say, *Here am I, Lord, use me according to your purpose*. We don't know as much about Joseph because he briefly appears in the Christmas story and then disappears. Yet, no other man played a more important role in Jesus' life than Joseph. So today, we focus on Joseph. His life and his heart to serve can teach us how to prepare our hearts for Christmas.

Question: How do you prepare your heart for Christmas?

Bottom Line: Choose the heart of a servant. Be willing to bend low to lift others up. In your workplace, at school, in your home – Joseph reminds us to live with the heart of a servant.

Memory Verse: Matthew 20:26
Whoever wants to be the greatest among you will be your servant.

Take Home Message:
What's the antidote to disappointment, and how do we prepare our hearts for Jesus to enter? Joseph shows us that he bends low, he serves Mary and Jesus, and it reframes his disappointment to purpose.

Main Scripture Reading: Matthew 1:20b-21

Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the child she carries was conceived by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you will call him Jesus, because he will save people from their sins.

Other Scripture References:

Micah 5:2

Matthew 1:18-19

Matthew 1:20b-23

Teaching Points:

- Although Joseph wasn't Jesus' biological father, he adopted him as his own, protected him, taught him, and loved him.
- In our darkest moments, at our lowest points, and even in big disappointments, God is with us.
- Emmanuel means *God with us*.

- Jesus is the visible sign that God is with us, no matter what happens in our lives or the world around us. When we see this sign, we are also called to be God's presence to others.

Group Discussion

Begin in prayer before reading and discussing the text.

1. Pastor Joshua mentioned that he recently visited someone in the hospital. He comforted the patient by reading Scripture and praying with them. Of this experience, he said, *"The truth is, I felt too busy and almost didn't go"*.
 - Most of us are overwhelmed with our own personal, family and professional responsibilities that we feel like we don't have time for others.
 - Discuss with your small group ways that you can plan ahead and make a deliberate decision to serve others. Consider who would you serve? What would you do? Where and when would you do it?
2. Cheryl Bachelder, CEO of Chick-fil-A, said, *"Deep down we are self-absorbed little people."* When she reflects on how she spends her time, or on the decisions that she makes, she asks herself, *"Am I thinking about myself or am I thinking about others?"*
 - Brainstorm with your group some personal mechanisms to safeguard against living a self-centered life, or perhaps how members of your small group can hold each other accountable.
3. Upon hearing the news of Mary's pregnancy, we can imagine that Joseph experienced anger, jealousy, and heartbreak. Read Matthew 1:20b-21
 - God is with us in our darkest moments, at our lowest points, and even in big disappointments. God spoke to Joseph's heart – his dreams and expectations, and said, *I am with you*.
 - Take a few minutes to recall an absolute low point in your life. Describe the situation. Did you sense God's presence? Describe any encounter, experience, or sign that God was walking beside you, guiding you along the way. Ask one or two volunteers to share their experience.
4. Pastor Joshua closed the sermon by drawing a contrast between Herod the Great and Joseph. Herod ruled Judea during Joseph's life. Herod's Winter Palace is a testament to a man who was remembered for his self-centeredness, self-indulgence, and arrogance. In contrast, Joseph chose the heart of a servant. His decision was to think less of himself and serve others without recognition.
 - Who do you want to be? How do you want to live your life? In pursuit of glory or a life of humble service that changes the world, like Joseph.
 - Who do you know who needs the reminder of Emmanuel, God with us? How might you be a reminder to them that God is with them? How would you approach them? What would you say? How can you best serve them and meet their needs?

Let's Pray