

Jesus says a lot of words in scripture, but Joseph, his earthly father, does not!

You know as well as I do, that there are times in life when you just can't find the words. You hear news that's shocking, overwhelming, unbelievable and you're rendered speechless. None of the writers of the Gospel texts put any words into Joseph's mouth. He's speechless and yet he has something to say to us today.

Ladies, your husband returns home from a day of golf with two of his closest friends whom he hasn't seen in a month. Between the round of play and lunch afterwards, they've spent about five hours together. Your man is happy but tired.

"So, what did you guys talk about?" you ask him. "Nothing much." He replies. "just talked about the way we were hitting the ball, and made fun of each other."

"Is Ron's mother out of the hospital?" you inquire. "I don't know," says your husband adding, "She was in the hospital?" You shake your head and try again, "Did Steve's daughter get into the college she wanted? She was wait-listed." "It never came up," says your husband. In disbelief you say, "But of course you told them about my new job didn't you? That's big news." "Actually there was never really the right time to mention it," he replies.

"Let me understand this," you say, "you and Ron and Steve just spent five hours together for the first time in a month, and you didn't discuss anything that's happening in your lives?" "We were playing golf."

Men and women see the world differently. Women don't get why men don't talk, and men don't get why women don't get that men don't talk! Joseph's speech was silent about Mary's pregnancy, but he was thinking and resolving what to do.

Matthew implies he knows Joseph's intentions, "Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly."

Well, wouldn't any man dismiss his fiancé who is pregnant – by someone else? Joseph thought, that perhaps, by doing so quietly, no one would notice. But, in his thoughts, Mary was considered; in his thoughts, Joseph considered Mary's family; and his family; Joseph even considered how people might look at him.

The families of these two central characters would have arranged their marriage one year before they would get married. They would have time to get to know one another. But **WHAT TO DO WITH THIS PREGNANCY?**

In *The Journey to Bethlehem* by Adam Hamilton, we learn that Joseph was probably from Bethlehem, not Nazareth where Mary came from. He was a carpenter, a humble man, from a town far better known than Nazareth, but still a town primarily of working-class people. Bethlehem was known for its laborers, shepherders, farmers and millers and bakers. They produced goods, such as bread, Bethlehem means, *House of Bread*, primarily sold to Jerusalem, about six miles away. These are people who would have lived in the obscurity of Jerusalem. They

were common, humble people, maybe no more than 500. God shows us again how he chooses people to enact his story from the least likely places.

But these people knew their history too. Bethlehem is where Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin. Bethlehem was the setting for the Book of Ruth, who's great-grandson was David, later to be King of Israel. Along with Jerusalem, Bethlehem became known as the City of David, too. Several hundred years later, Micah prophesized that a new king would come out of Bethlehem.

Joseph, growing up in Bethlehem would have known these stories, including the one about the Messiah coming from Bethlehem. This information may have gone into his decision-making? We don't know. We can't always read a man's mind, can we?

Joseph was a humble woodworker. Homes in Bethlehem would have been made out of stone, so he may have been a stonemason too. As a woodworker he probably repaired farming tools. He was a man who worked with his hands; patient, persistent, skilled for his day and taking pride in his work, ensuring his work was done right the first time. Skilled craftsmen are honest-as-the-day-is-long.

So, **WHAT TO DO WITH THIS PREGNANCY?** Was Mary unfaithful? may have been one of his thoughts. That thought would be devastating. Joseph would have felt betrayed, humiliated and dishonored by Mary and the so-called other man. Trust is shaken to the core. Hurt leads to anger, and soon the image of

your world comes apart. Because Joseph is silent we have to step into his sandals and feel his emotions, think his thoughts, ponder the complexities of the issue.

After hearing this shocking news, Joseph walked home, most likely from the town where Mary had visited her cousin Elizabeth, a few miles away from Bethlehem. He would have mulled everything over in his head. He knew the law commanded adulterous women to be put to death, if he told anyone.

Mary's life was in his hands!

He was upset but didn't want Mary to be hurt. Joseph believed he can dismiss Mary quietly without further explanation. If he did, the gossip would likely be that he, Joseph, got Mary pregnant but wasn't man enough to stay by her. The shame would be on him, not on Mary. Mary's life and her family would be spared.

Why would Joseph do this? Because he was a righteous man! Matthew sees into Joseph's actions as compassion and mercy, so great, for Mary, that Matthew can only call Joseph, *a righteous man*.

What a lonely walk Joseph took, when he left Mary and went back home.

We hear not a word! It's a dark place for Joseph. It is the same for you and me; too much heartache, too many unanswered questions.

Many of us have been on journeys that *were* terrible, *are* terrible, fraught with hurt, pain and fear. In the moment of Joseph's greatest suffering, God was at

work in Mary's womb, weaving his Son together, a Son who would be born to save the world.

And Joseph was a part of that plan!

**You and I, when we don't see it, when we don't feel it,
or when we don't hear it, are still part of God's plan.**

Unfortunately, it's only in hindsight that we realize God was there, at our lowest point. God is always a part of the journey with us.

Hamilton writes, "God takes our disappointments, heartache, and pain and uses them in profound ways. If Joseph had simply walked away that day, leaving Mary as a single mom to raise the child she was carrying, imagine what blessings he would have missed and how different the Gospel story may have been. It's a reminder to us to be cautious about walking away from disappointing situations" (pg. 46).

What happens in the story is that Joseph dreams! And the Lord said to him, "Don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife. The child is indeed special and conceived by the Holy Spirit. You will have a son and you are to name him Jesus."

Joseph didn't say anything in the Bible, but his **actions** are what we focus on. He didn't disgrace Mary; He didn't run away from the situation; He didn't turn

to another woman. He went to Mary and married her and he raised Jesus. He participated in the life God set before him. Amen?

Men are sharers in life, even when we don't talk. The difference between men and women is that men share experiences; they share through **action** – not words! And Joseph was a **man of action!**

We participate in life through sharing, speaking and acting, because God is with us, “Emmanuel.” And it's not just this time of year but every second, every minute, every hour, every day, month and year, God remains faithful to his people, to you and to me. He is with us! He has been with us! And He will be with us!

Jesus is the visible sign that God is with us. Yet, we, too, are visible signs of the presence of God, to others in this world. We are called to be reminders of hope, and love, and mercy. So many people suffer in one way or another – how will they know God's love and presence if we don't show it to them? Joseph embodied “God is with us.” We are called to incarnate God, to incarnate his presence, with those we know and meet, like the way Joseph did with a son called Jesus. Amen.