

*Shiloh United Methodist Church*  
Joseph A Carpenter

Matthew 13:54-56     Rev. Tyler Amundson     December 1, 2019

Matthew 13:54-56 Common English Bible (CEB)

<sup>54</sup> When he came to his hometown, he taught the people in their synagogue. They were surprised and said, “Where did he get this wisdom? Where did he get the power to work miracles? <sup>55</sup> Isn’t he the carpenter’s son? Isn’t his mother named Mary? Aren’t James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas his brothers? <sup>56</sup> And his sisters, aren’t they here with us? Where did this man get all this?”

Over the next few weeks as take part in this season Christians call Advent, a time of preparing our mind, body, our entire selves for the coming of Christ, we will be studying the story of Joseph. Joseph is found in the gospels to be the earthly father of Jesus. We always seem to put that disclaimer in front of “father” for Joseph, of earthly, because we know that God was the father of Jesus too.

During this season I want to invite us to learn about Joseph for a few reasons and most of these are from a book that follows our study by Methodist Pastor Adam Hamilton called *Faithful: Christmas through the eyes of Joseph*:

1. What can we learn about God from Joseph’s story?
2. What can we learn about ourselves from Joseph’s story?
3. How does Joseph shed light on the meaning of the Christmas story, the birth of Christ?
4. By focusing on one character of the birth of Jesus, can we allow ourselves the space to slow down and see our own place in the story of Christ’s birth? What character or parts of characters do we see ourselves in?

Since Joseph was the father of Jesus I plan to start each of our sermons this season with a few bad dad jokes. Let's be honest if Joseph was a good father he told bad jokes just like every other good father I know.

Someone told me that their dog could retrieve a ball from up to a mile away.

- Seems a bit far-fetched.

What's the key to a good UPS joke?

- The delivery.

Why did the butter keep telling jokes?

- It was on a roll.

Today let's learn about Joseph and who he was even before he became the father of Jesus and potentially told bad jokes.

In our scripture for today we see Jesus return to his hometown of Nazareth. Believe it or not when he started teaching people were offended by the words he shared. They began asking, "Isn't he a carpenter's son? Isn't his mother Mary? Aren't James, Joseph, Simon and Judas his brothers? And his sisters, aren't they here with us? Where did this man think up all these things?"

We hear mention of Jesus' brothers, of Mary, and of his sisters, though they are not named. We don't hear mention of Joseph in this part, meaning that likely he was no longer living. However, we do hear mentioned his vocation of being a carpenter.

Let me reiterate that the comments people are making about Jesus here are not nice. Snide would be a gentle way of putting their attitude. "Where would he gather this wisdom he is teaching? From that

carpenter?” They are trying to undermine Jesus, because his teachings sound fool hardy to them, and they want to not believe it.

In Mark’s gospel Jesus is not just Joseph the carpenter’s son, but a carpenter himself. It seems to mention this means the trade was passed onto Jesus. I want to note a Jewish practice of the day. You did not learn your father’s trade until you had essentially flunked out of working as high as you could toward becoming a rabbi in Jesus world. Most parents would make sure their children would get as high in schooling as they could, and then see if they could apprentice their children to a rabbi. It was only after this did not work out that they would teach the family trade to their child. Another reason the people are being snide is that Jesus’ supposedly flunked out from the rabbi gig by learning the trade of carpenter. How dare he be teaching like a rabbi?

I want to think that it was something that Jesus’ learned from his earthly father Joseph as well as God’s Spirit that urged Jesus on from this point, despite these naysayers.

Just to see what kind of advice father’s give I asked a question of my friends on Facebook, “What is one piece of advice your father gave you?” I wonder if Jesus’ had things like this going through his head as these snide remarks flew at him.

- A friend of mine who has faced adversity and is a parent to many his community and has been there for me said his father gave him this advice, “To be good to your neighbor: stay up late and talk to them, change the world for them and be there for their children.”
- Another friend of mine who is a fierce parent herself said her father gave her this advice, “Go when you don’t want to , so when you can’t you don’t have to. God will never leave you , you might leave God , but he is always there.”

Let's take some time to get to know who Joseph this carpenter is and where he might have drawn upon to get insight to raise a young Jesus.

In the second century, Christians began to do what I have heard many teenagers and families do, wonder what Jesus' childhood and parents were like. Some Christians sought to fill in the gaps by writing what are called *apocryphal* gospels. The word *apocrypha* means hidden or secret in Greek. These texts many of which were found with the Dead Sea Scrolls or the Nag Hammadi texts contain mythical and fanciful descriptions of the early family of Jesus. These were written around the year 150 CE, while the gospels in our scriptures were written between 70 and 100 CE. Just a reminder CE has replaced AD, and is an abbreviation for common era.

Last week someone asked me how trustworthy these texts are, and my response as a pastor is that they are helpful to me to imagine along with the early Christians the questions of faith they were pondering too. The apocryphal texts are not factual accounts to me, and the gospels for me are not word for word factual accounts, however being closer to the source of Christ they are more filled with truth than the apocryphal texts are. The bible for me are primary texts to understand faith and follow Jesus, the apocryphal ones are secondary imaginative stories written by early Christians trying to do the same.

I am teaching about these other texts today, because we need to use them to understand the early church history around Joseph. For example the early writers of one of these extra texts called the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* contains a narrative of raising Jesus, attempts to give him discipline and direction. It give Joseph this wider role of the father and even makes know that Jesus would go to school despite a push to just teach the family trade to Jesus.

Another of the apocryphal books, the *Infancy Gospel of James*, describes the birth story of Mary, her being raised in the temple by the

priests, and that Joseph was actually a widower of the House of David. There is one story that goes this way:

*As the widowers gathered, each was given a rod or stick. Joseph, himself an elderly widower, took one of these rods, and from it a dove sprang forth and landed on his head. Other versions have flowers springing from the rod. Hence the priests knew Joseph was chose by God to be Mary's husband.<sup>1</sup>*

This depiction allowed Joseph to be understood as an older father able to have other children for Jesus' siblings and protecting the virginal status of Mary (which I will talk more about next week.) However, if we only had the New Testament to go by in Matthew and Luke we might think Joseph is a young man, not an older widower.

I share this because part of our work this season is to know that we are studying a character who is left intentionally vague by the scriptures around how old he is. Joseph's age has been a source of debate. Many protestant nativities show Joseph as young and Orthodox or Catholic show Joseph as older. Paintings do the same. Take these two for example.

I encourage you when you go home, take a look at your nativity and see how Joseph is depicted in your nativity at home. What age is he?

The exact age of Joseph being vague detail may be a blessing and reminder that we are called to father Christ's love in this world at any age.

The last aspect of Joseph I want us to take a look at is his role as a carpenter. God could have chosen a doctor, a priest, a merchant or even

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<sup>1</sup> Hamilton, A. (2017). *Faithful: Christmas through the eyes of Joseph*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.  
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a king. Instead God chose a carpenter to be the father of Jesus. In the text of our gospels the Greek word used for carpenter is tekton. This was not just a skilled builder in Greek, this would have been a word worker. Houses in Jesus day would be built from mud or stone. So, carpenters would have built doors, furniture, etc. Joseph also was not described as the other Greek word architekton, which was much more skilled builders and the word we get architect from today.

Joseph would have worked with simple tools, many that are like the tools used to make furniture today. And being the father of a man who worked a manual labor type job, there was also a straightforward nature about life. You follow certain rules that guide your life, and you hope guide the lives of people around you. Pieces of advice like we heard before from fathers.

Just to get a sense of what carpenters, workers might say about being Jesus' parent today I want to invite us to watch a short video clip of some carpenters talking about Joseph.

<https://vimeo.com/193396798> Minute 37

A document written by an early church leader in 150 CE, Justin Martyr who is more accurate than the apocryphal texts says that Jesus "was in the habit of working as a carpenter when among men, making ploughs and yokes." Which makes the passage from Matthew 11:28-30 more tangible to us.

Matthew 11:28-30 Common English Bible (CEB)

<sup>28</sup> "Come to me, all you who are struggling hard and carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Put on my yoke, and learn from me. I'm gentle and humble. And you will find rest for yourselves. <sup>30</sup> My yoke is easy to bear, and my burden is light."

It seems to me that Jesus carried both the complexity of a rabbi and the simplicity of a carpenter into how he taught people to live faithful lives. It seems that Joseph may have shaped Jesus' life in a substantial way

just through his profession, but most likely even more through how he offered that parent advice.

How will others see Joseph and Jesus in our lives this advent season? We are called to practice these faithful practices, and images of grace like Jesus did.

If we learn anything from Joseph it is that his life had an impact on how Jesus lived. If we learn anything from fathers on this earth that good or bad, their decisions will impact their children. As we learn more about Joseph in the coming weeks I invite you to remember that people are looking to you to parent, to foster Christ's love in this world. Consider the humble parentage of Joseph, the career of his humble grounding and even that at any age we are called to show people how grace and love might transform their lives. We are called even to get them to giggle at bad dad jokes.

Shalom and Amen my friends.  
Blessings this Advent season.

(Children's time jokes:

Lancelot and King Arthur arrive at a motel.

- Lancelot says, "We'd like a room for two knights, please."
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- What do you call an ostrich that practices magic?
  - An ostwitch.
  -
- Did you hear the story about the frog?
  - It was ribbiting
  -
- How do you get a sea creature to play music?
  - o You tuna fish.