

The 5 Gifts of Christmas Joseph's Gift

How many of you are Frozen fans? Do you know the story? Remember when it first came out - the first Frozen movie? For those who aren't familiar - here's a synopsis:

"When their kingdom becomes trapped in perpetual winter, fearless Anna (Kristen Bell) joins forces with mountaineer Kristoff (Jonathan Groff) and his reindeer sidekick to find Anna's sister, Snow Queen Elsa (Idina Menzel), and break her icy spell. Although their epic journey leads them to encounters with mystical trolls, a comedic snowman (Josh Gad), harsh conditions, and magic at every turn, Anna and Kristoff bravely push onward in a race to save their kingdom from winter's cold grip."

Now the end of the story (spoiler alert) is that only true love can heal Anna who has an ice crystal in her heart ... The beauty of it is that it's love that while there's a typical Disney prince-like character - it's the love of the two sisters that saves is the true love needed to save her.

And the second movie came out about a year ago. Frozen 2 - I remember watching a video clip of an interview with Kristen Bell who plays (is the voice of) the younger of the two sisters. She was speaking of her love interest in the story - Kristoff. Something she said in this interview really stuck with with, she was speaking of how iconic this role was -

"He also has two lines that I love, he rescues Anna at one point, it's in the midst of battle and he looks at her, first thing he says is: **'I'm here, what do you need?'**"

"And then in the end, Anna apologies for something and he says: **"It's ok my love is not fragile."**

What makes, I'm here - what do you need revolutionary? Because, men in fairy tales - princes of all kinds and in all stories show up and save the day - they become the hero often saving the princess in distress, or the village.

But not Kristoff - he shows up and says, "I'm here - how can I help".

Profound right?! Exciting too. Maybe even Biblical?!

This weekend begins the season of Advent - the season of anticipation for the birth of a Savior.

As I think about the anticipation of the birth of a baby, and I thought of Joseph this week, I realized that I know that I can't really speak specifically to how this expectation and anticipation feels like for a father. My experience, as a mother, is quite a bit different.

I know it can sometimes it's unnerving because you wear the biggest thing going on in your life right out in front of you for all to see while you're pregnant.

Now, I can imagine that as a man - it could be frustrating that the biggest thing in your life is going on and no one may know about.

No one can look at you and know that you may be having a child any day now when your wife is 8 ½ months pregnant.

And yet, that's may be all you're thinking about - and planning for.

There's nothing you can do - there's nothing really anyone can do - a baby comes when a baby is ready to come. But for great husbands, I think a lot of it probably is being a strong supportive role - showing up, saying *'I'm here, how can I help?'*

It may not feel heroic, it may not even feel brag worthy - not story worthy - and we live in a society where there aren't many prizes or recognition for the behind the scene folks.

But it's not an easy role - it's hard to show up, be present, assist, watch, wait. To not be the hero but know that it's not about you. To not fix the problem but to support the process and lend a hand when needed - however needed and wherever needed. That takes a very special person. And that person often gets little recognition.

Gift of Advent - so who is Joseph and what gift does he bring.

So when the Matthew scripture begins, Joseph is not yet Mary's husband. But they are engaged - and in that time, an engagement was a binding agreement. One that could not be disrupted without something similar to a divorce.

So you can imagine how disconcerting it is when Mary - his fiancé - becomes pregnant. It is before they are married so he knows the child is not his.

We know from the scripture before, the lineage of Joseph that is noble (and we know he's from the line of Jacob, and Abraham, and Ruth - who leads to King David, ... and many others who walked with - and wrestled with - God through the years).

Scripture describes that Joseph is "faithful to the law" - NIV, "righteous" - NLT,

The Message version of this story says **"Joseph, chagrined but noble, determined to take care of things quietly so Mary would not be disgraced."**

Chagrined: to feel distressed or humiliated.

So listen to this again to this version from The Message of Christmas (Message version):

The birth of Jesus took place like this. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. Before they came to the marriage bed, Joseph discovered she was pregnant. (It was by the Holy Spirit, but he didn't know that.) Joseph, chagrined but noble, determined to take care of things quietly so Mary would not be disgraced.

According to Jewish law, Joseph, not being the father of her child could have stoned her. But instead, he goes to bed humiliated and disgraced but not wishing any bad or disgrace upon Mary.

While he was trying to figure a way out, he had a dream. God's angel spoke in the dream:

I also can't help but notice the Spirit speaks to Joseph, in his sleep. Just before this Zechariah & Elizabeth find out they are going to a baby - John but Zechariah (Elizabeth's husband - the father of John the Baptist) sees the angel in the day, Mary in Luke's story is told by the angel during the day - he answers all of the questions, helps her process, assures her. But in Joseph's sleep, he is instructed what to do.

Joseph has a humility few others could behold. He doesn't have much of the limelight, he's never the hero, but "love is not fragile". He is steadfast. He shows up relentlessly and throughout challenge and potential disgrace, mockery and says 'I'm here, what do you need?'

Joseph's gift is not unexpected, not unlikely, not glorious, or glamorous, but it is exactly the gift that God chooses over and over again in the Christian story. Joseph isn't the prince who miraculously wakes Sleeping Beauty or the Prince who saves Cinderella from the wicked step sisters by relentlessly seeking her out and saving her from her old life and offering her a new one.

Joseph's gift is humility, compassion, loyalty - his love isn't fragile. Joseph reminds us that in the midst of God's glory and majesty, the greatest heroes are sometimes the ones who are present, who are faithful, who are not especially glamorous.

So I wanted to learn a little more about Joseph - and dig deeper this week as I was preparing for this message. I am a big podcast fan so I listened to a podcast called '3 guys named Joe' - and it was about 3 Josephs in the Bible:

- Joseph of Egypt - with his dreams and coat, very commonly known.
- Joseph - Mary's husband
- And Joseph of Arimathea (air-a-ma-thea)

I'm going to be honest - this podcast was 10 minutes long ... and it covered 3 Joe's - so it's fair to say there's not a TON of character studies on Joseph - Mary's husband. In fact - that actually intrigued me even more.

This Joseph that we're talking about today ... Joseph, Mary's husband - and truly, that's how we refer to him. Mary is Jesus's mother ... but Joseph is Mary's husband - we don't often refer to men like this - especially not then. And we know that because in the lineage in the paragraph before - it was the male list of descendants - even including Obed - and Boaz - who are the husband and son of Ruth - and the entire book of the Bible is

about Ruth! I must think that took quite a bit of humility to realize this to be your defining role. But would Joseph mind?

So what we do know about Joseph is that he never turned away, he never said no ... he obeyed. He was present. Trustworthy, solid - an overall good team player for the nativity story. The kid on the team that never scores the winning goal, probably never has the assist but can always be counted on to show up, to encourage others, to have a good attitude. This podcast said all 3 of these Joe's were guys that, when asked by God to do something, they did.

So Joseph - he's present at every nativity scene, he's an iconic character that we all know and love - and yet of Joseph of Arimathea is mentioned in all 4 of the Gospels (he's the guy who buried Jesus after the crucifixion) and Joseph, Mary's husband is only mentioned in Matthew and Luke. As you may know, Mark's account doesn't include Jesus's birth but starts with John the Baptist and Jesus' activity ministry. And John's account is a much more esoteric sharing of Jesus's life beginning before the birth but only introducing Jesus in active ministry as well.

I think we can all learn something from the gift that Joseph brings. And I think we all have a bit of Joseph in us. The ability to quietly say 'yes' to God, the still moments of following a nudge, it being satisfied with soft whispers of God's presence with many others speak flashes of light and loud thunderous noise. Joseph is steadfast, Joseph is grounded, he puts others before himself and he puts God before all.

So as we go into this holiday season - it might look a bit more like a Joseph -style than past years. Our hearts might ache for the fancy hotels over the simple stables. But we remember that God is working in the stables and in the quiet nights - not only in glorious and majestic ways.

Maybe we need to let go of some of the expectations that we have for ourselves - for our family members, friends - for perfect pictures, and abundant gatherings, lavish trips and embrace a simple Christmas.

It may not be the same thing that we have done for 30 years - and that might be hard, but that doesn't mean it's not faithful, it's not love-filled, it's not God working in our world - maybe while we are sound asleep.

Let us learn from Joseph not to miss the chance to be present (maybe even virtually) for our loved ones. Our hearts or even our world may feel fragile these days but we know that the love from our God is not and that is what the true gift of Christmas is all about.