

4 Advent A 2019 SML MT 1:18-25

Comparing the Gospel of Luke to the Gospel of Matthew, there are some obvious differences. For example, one difference that jumps right off the page when you compare the accounts of Jesus' Nativity is - Luke recounts the words and deeds of Mary through each of the five Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary:

- ✓ In Luke, the angel Gabriel appears to Mary
- ✓ In Luke, Mary visits Elizabeth
- ✓ In Luke, Mary ponders all that the shepherds told her . . .
- ✓ yada yada yada

while Matthew recounts the words and deeds of Joseph as recorded in this morning's/evening's gospel. So with that in mind, I'd like to explain some of the details included in Matthew's Nativity account regarding Joseph.

Matthew begins by telling us that Mary was betrothed to Joseph, or as we would commonly say today, they were engaged. The only difference is according to the Jewish law at the time, betrothal already established the marriage bond, even though they were not yet living together. So during this period, which lasted a year, Mary was considered Joseph's wife, even though they were only engaged and Joseph had not yet taken Mary into his home.

Now Joseph had to come to terms with the fact that Mary “was with child through the Holy Spirit, and it seems as if Matthew is anticipating something here that Joseph does not yet know. So Joseph had to assume that Mary had broken their engagement, and according to the law, Joseph must dismiss her. To do that, Joseph had a choice:

- ✓ He could divorce Mary by dragging her through the courts
- ✓ or he could divorce her privately.

Joseph decided on the latter, in order not to put her to shame.

Why? Because Joseph is a “just man,” and as a just man, Joseph does not readily give up his inner peace.

Joseph’s character as a just man was the case long before his decision how to divorce Mary. Rather, Joseph’s character as a just man gives an overall picture of Joseph, aligning him with all the great figures in the Old Testament, beginning with Abraham the just. If the just man in the New Testament can be described as a believer, or a devoted follower of Our Blessed Lord, then the “just man” in the Old Testament can be described as a whole life lived according to the Law. The first few verses of Psalm 1 describe the “just man” best:

Happy the man who follows not the counsel of the wicked nor walks in the way of sinners, nor sits in the company of the insolent, but delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on his law day and night. He is like a tree planted near running

water, that yields its fruit in due season, and whose leaves never fade. Whatever he does prospers. (1-3)

And so this image of the man who delights in the law of the Lord and who meditates on his law day and night, becomes concrete in the events recounted here regarding Joseph, and in everything we are subsequently told about him. Joseph does not embody the ugly legalism that Jesus denounces later in Matthew's Gospel, when He chastises the scribes and Pharisees for neglecting the weightier things of the law, such as judgment and mercy and fidelity. (MT 23:23)

It's Christmas. And when it comes to Christmas, and it comes to family, the skids are often greased to give up one's inner peace. Add to that mix a death in the family, and let me tell you . . . family – you can't live with them, and you can't shoot them.

Take for example the "other side" of my sister's family. Every year before Christmas, my sister gets quite a wish list from her nephew on the other side of the family, as promptly delivered by her brother-in-law. It's just a shame that her nephew, never once, acknowledged, just once, a gift he received from my sister and her husband. And, if she wrote this kid, now a young man of 17 a check, never once did have the courtesy to cash the check, let alone write a thank you note. Yet, year after year, the wish list comes with quite a price tag attached.

I've mentioned in homilies past that my Dad died in 2013 on Thanksgiving morning. That same year, the following wish list was emailed to my sister one day after our father had died, and I'm only including those items on the list that I can pronounce:

1. A men's peacoat
2. Dark knight blu ray collection
3. Mission impossible blu ray collection
4. Dartboard
5. Homedics shiatsu foot massager
6. Homedics back masseur massage cushion
7. Heated blanket
8. Kinetic Light Newton's Cradle
9. The Think Geek 8-bit Tie
10. Spatial Manipulation Toy
11. Strandbeest Kit
12. Zendulum Solar Powered "Pendulum" Kit
13. Magnet Powered Spinning Top
14. Magnetic Accelerator Cannon
15. Epic - Bluetooth Virtual Keyboard
16. Easy-Macro Universal Smart Phone Lens Band
17. Light Show Fountain Speakers
18. Luminglass
19. X5 Titanium Anodized Ultraviolet LED Flashlight

20. Grippy Gadget Mat
21. Slot machine piggy bank
22. Power strip
23. Juggling balls

To which his father added, “Pretty impressive list. No shortage of ideas here!” A day after our father died . . .

Now my good sister, who is “as just” a woman as is Joseph, the husband of Mary, could have fired off an email that would have blown a fuse, but instead, she sent her nephew \$10, a candy bar, and a note that said a gift has been made to St. Benedict’s SVDP in his honor. And as a result she, like Joseph, did not give up her inner peace.

While we cannot control how other people act this Christmas, or any other time of the year for that matter, we can control, like Joseph the just man, how we will respond.