

Matthew 1: 18 – 25

'Joseph's part'

If a Nativity play is sticking close to the script of the Gospels, it can be difficult to find a boy who wants to play Joseph. For the extroverts there are no lines and little action. For the introverts (most boys at that stage) it involves too close a proximity to the 'girl' playing Mary. 'Please don't ask me to touch her, never mind hug her!' Even in 'grown up' professional theatre, actors tend to count their lines to see how prominent their role might be and perhaps how much they will be paid. And again, Joseph is a relatively minor character on that level.

But some actors, because of their previous reputation, will sometimes take on a relatively minor character in a play or a film. And while they might not get top billing, they might be listed as 'With ...' or 'Featuring ...', setting them apart from the other bit part players and lending their name to the production (at a price).

Joseph does not play a prominent role in the nativity story in terms of words, although in the Matthew account his role is more prominent than that of Mary, who has much more to say and sing in Luke's account. According to Matthew, if nothing else, Joseph does have a good reputation and family name or pedigree, stretching back through David and beyond to Abraham. We don't know from Scripture exactly what Mary's family tree was. But when Joseph was told in a dream who Mary's child would become and should be called, through his act of naming the child, Jesus, he formally adopted him into his family. So – his role in his actions is crucial. Taking Mary to be his wife, despite her pregnancy and then naming him Jesus – created a family where there might have been none.

That child, Jesus, went on – amongst many other things – to redefine family in his adult life. He wasn't content to have been adopted himself – humanly speaking – by Joseph ... he wanted that adoption process to widen to all who have faith in him.

You may recall the Gospel incident in which this became crystal clear. At the end of Matthew 12, when Jesus was told that his mother and brothers were waiting to speak to him, he replied: **"Who is my mother and who are my brothers?"** And pointing to his disciples, he said: **"Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."**

So for us, this morning, thinking about Joseph could help us to ponder this:

What part might we play in including others into God's family, particularly those that the world, or some within the family of faith, might look down on?

Even where we might think we have little to contribute, whether we are male or female, whatever age we are, whatever the rest of society may think, being there briefly, at the right time might be enough to make someone feel welcome. We might not feel confident with words – but then we don't necessarily need to say anything. We do however need to follow Joseph's lead and so to listen to what God wants to say to us and then to respond in our actions.