

Have you seen the Nate Bargatze Nashville Christmas special¹ on CBS? Well, I highly recommend it, especially the nativity sketch featuring comedians Mikey Day and Ashley Padilla from SNL, and country singer and former front man for Hootie and the Blowfish, Darius Rucker? At one point, the angel, played by Nate, in a hilarious sarcastically deadpan way, explains to Mary and Joseph just how differently the birth of Jesus is portrayed in our time, with pine trees decorated with glittering glass ornaments and “also with garbage made by our children at school” hanging on the tree.

The angel talks of celebration and the many songs that will be sung, including a “few boring songs about Jesus”. And angel tells Mary and the Wise Men that there are songs written about them too. At this, Joseph (Mikey Day) speaks up, and as hopeful as a person can sound while wearing a bathrobe and standing in a stable, asks,

“And what about me. And are there songs about me, Joseph?”

And there follows a perfect comedic pause. The audience bursts into laughter. And the angel gets just a little uncomfortable, quickly changing the subject to the fact that there are many Christmas songs, “mostly about snow and snow related activities”.

Yes, it is comedy, and, like most funny moments, the reason it works is that it gets something true. Even in our religious imagination, Joseph does not seem to have a theme song. No Magnificat. No recorded speeches. No grand poetic moment. He often feels like a supporting character standing a step behind the holy action.

And yet, remove Joseph from the story, and everything becomes unstable. Without Joseph, Mary is far more vulnerable. Without Joseph, Jesus has no earthly name-giver, protector, and guide. Without Joseph, the tender miracle of Christmas becomes much more fragile. He may not get a song in the way of Simeon or Zechariah, but Joseph holds the entire holy story in his arms, in his decisions, and in the quiet strength of his life. God entrusts him with something sacred. God trusts Joseph with love in its most vulnerable form.

Scripture tells us Joseph was a righteous man. That does not simply mean he followed rules. It means Joseph had allowed God to shape his character. He is thoughtful, compassionate, centered, and grounded. It takes years to become that kind of soul. Joseph is a person who has lived in faith long before faith asks anything extraordinary of him. He is not impressive in the sense that the world measures importance, but heaven looks at him and says, “This is someone I can trust.”

When the circumstances around him change, Joseph has choices. He can choose self-protection. He can choose distrust or resentment. Instead, Joseph chooses something holier. He chooses compassion. He

¹ <https://youtu.be/gpPPKtaayhM?si=Q3aVCj4K8BTStKWv>

chooses responsibility and faithfulness as his response to the unknown. Joseph is not a man of speeches. Joseph is a man of action. Twice, God comes to Joseph in dreams. I don't think that's random. God speaks to Joseph in dreams because Joseph is the kind of man who listens when God speaks. He is tuned in to God's voice.

Twice God entrusts Joseph with direction. Care for Mary. Name the child. Protect this family. Lead them safely where they need to go. And each time Joseph wakes from a dream and lives his faith. He simply carries the responsibility God places in his hands, and he lives it. In that sense, Joseph's life becomes his hymn. His faithfulness becomes his song.

This is the time of year when we rightly think about holidays. Holidays are beautiful. They are printed on our calendars. They come with music, expectations, decorations, schedules, gatherings, lists, and memories. But as Melody Beattie² reminds us, there is a difference between holidays and holy days. Holidays are given to us by the calendar. Holy days are given to us by life, by God, by the heart. Holy days are the days our souls remember. They are the days when love reshaped our lives. The day a calling became clear. The day something ended and something braver began. The day something shifted inside us, and we said yes to something new.

Joseph had holy days. The day he chose compassion instead of pride. The day he stayed when walking away might have seemed easier. The day he accepted the call to love and protect a child entrusted to him by God. The day he gathered his courage and his family and led them away from danger. Those moments are not circled in red ink on any religious calendar. No one names them as festivals. There is no feast day called "The Day Joseph Chose Faithful Love." Yet they are holy because they are filled with God's presence and human courage meeting together.

And we have those days too. Each of us carries days that are etched into our hearts even if no one else knows to honor them. The day we learned to love in a deeper way. The day forgiveness became real. The day we chose to stand with someone in their vulnerability. The day we answered a calling instead of ignoring it. The day faith asked something of us, and we found a way to respond. Those are holy days, even if they never become holidays. And just like God remembers Joseph's holy days, God remembers ours.

That is what Advent invites us to think about. It invites us not only to admire the drama of angels and stars and shepherds and magi. It invites us to think about the quieter work of faith, when no one is writing songs about us. Advent invites us to ask a different question. Not simply, "What am I celebrating?" but "What kind of person am I becoming?"

² Beattie, Melody. *Journey to the Heart: Daily Meditations on the Path to Freeing Your Soul*. Hazelden, 1990.

Joseph helps us see that holiness does not always look dramatic. Sometimes holiness looks like waking up in the morning and choosing to love again. Sometimes it looks like quietly showing up in other people's lives with tenderness and strength. Sometimes holiness looks like doing what needs to be done, carrying what must be carried, and remaining faithful over the long haul. And maybe that is why Joseph belongs so deeply to us. He is not beyond us. He is not extraordinary in the theatrical sense. He is deeply human, deeply faithful, deeply committed to love and to God.

So yes, let's celebrate the holidays. Let's enjoy the lights and music and beauty. Let's go sing carols today at The Arbors and lean into the joy of being together. And let's also remember and honor the holy days of our own lives. Remember the moments when God shaped your heart. Remember when love deepened you. Remember when commitment strengthened you. Remember when faith guided you. Those days belong in your spiritual story. Those days are sacred too.

That is Joseph's gift to the Church. He reminds us that God's love so often enters the world through people who are willing to be faithful rather than famous and devoted rather than dramatic. God does not only work through songs. God works through lives. God works through people whose souls can carry trust, tenderness, and responsibility. Joseph may not have a familiar carol that's all about him, but his life sings in us.

May we, like Joseph, be people God can trust with holy things. May our faith be steady. May our character be rooted in compassion and strength. May our choices reflect a life shaped by love. And may our lives, in whatever ways God calls us, help carry Christ's love safely, tenderly, and faithfully into this world.

Amen.