

PEACE ON EARTH AT CHRISTMAS

JOSEPH: DREAMS FOR MY CHILDREN



JOSEPH WAS JESUS' MODEL OF COMPASSIONATE LEADERSHIP

Scripture:

Luke 2:4-7

⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.



PEACE ON EARTH

The Christmas message is *peace on earth*. It was *peace on earth* last year, and it was *peace on earth* in the year that Jesus was born. We dare not change this message; nor should we add qualifiers to it. It's just "peace on earth." The enemy is not someone who is different than we are, The enemy is war itself. The enemy is hatred itself. When we encounter hatred, by whatever name it is called, we have to make it stop, because we want "*peace on earth*."

It is easy to get lost in the details of scenery, locale, personalities, and culture of Christmas. But at the core of our faith is knowing that God so loved the world that God sent his only son. And that is Christmas.

THREE PAIRS OF EYES ON THE NATIVITY

In the next three weeks, I want to look at peace on earth through three sets of eyes who were at the nativity, as well as some eyes from our own time.

For most of the life of the Christian Church, the story of Christmas could not be read by the people who worshipped, and so the story was shown to

them, and preached to them. That is why we have nativity scenes, and that is why we decorate our church. And that is why art was so important. I have four of the great works of art that depict parts of our story, and we will use them to see Christmas through the eyes of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus. There are lots of choices, but I have selected mine from "The New Testament Through 100 Masterpieces of Art." Let's begin with Joseph. What kind of father was he?

MOST OF WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT JOSEPH IS FOUND IN THE STORIES OF JESUS' BIRTH

THE JESSE TREE WITH MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

According to tradition, David's father, Jesse, dreamed of a huge tree growing out of his chest. (Joseph is his descendent.) On its trunk and bowers were his descendants from his son to the Messiah. It was his family tree. Jesus is connected to King David through the lineage of his



father, Joseph. In this picture we see David's father, Jesse, asleep. Here is the image of a tree with Mary holding her child at the center, and all of the ancestors of Jesus are depicted with musical instruments in their hands. Some of the instruments in this picture existed at the time of Jesus including the harp, the flute, and lyre. The two Stradivarius violins and the two clarinets in this Renaissance painting, may not be products of the 1st Century, but instead the 14th to 16th Centuries. The instruments add a spirituality to the figures of Jesus' ancestors.

This picture tells us that Jesus came from a spiritual family that connected him to King David. Victor Hugo said, "A lineage rose up along it like a long chain; below a king was singing, and on high a God was dying."

THE TRADITIONAL NATIVITY SCENE

The next picture by Konrad von Soest from about 1400 AD is the traditional nativity. The cattle are in the barn, the shepherds are outside, and Mary is holding the child in her arms with a halo around her head. Joseph is keeping the fires going.

Joseph is the reason that the nativity took place in Bethlehem. Late in Mary's pregnancy, King



Herod ordered a census of his kingdom's population, each man to be counted in the city of his origin. Since Joseph was descended from David's line, he and Mary went to Bethlehem. As there were no places in the inns when they arrived there, they sheltered in a stone cave that was a bubble of shelter in volcanic rock.

Mary's time came that night and so she gave birth. They placed the child in the animals' feeding trough. In their simplest forms, Nativity paintings show the infant Jesus lying on hay between his adoring parents while a donkey or a bull warms him with its breath.

Jesus' birth was humble; he was not born into wealth or power. His power came from God.

THE ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS



Joseph was at the birth place, when according to Luke, on the night of Jesus' birth an angel of the Lord appeared to shepherds watching their flocks in fields near Bethlehem and said, "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a savior which is Christ the lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.

"Suddenly the heavens were filled with a multitude of angels singing 'Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to all of good will.'"

Tradition has improvised on Luke by having the shepherds bow down and worship the infant Jesus, and poets, dramatists, composers and painters inspired by tradition have improvised on it further.

So the first to see the Christ were common shepherds. Kings came later.

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

Here's one more view of Joseph. Shortly before Herod sent his soldiers to Bethlehem, an angel appeared to Joseph and told him to escape to Egypt



with Mary and the child in order to avoid Herod's wrath. This sudden flight has pictured often, the father on foot, the mother and child on a donkey.

Although the scene is often one of anguish it is also found within the tradition of European paintings described either as landscapes with figures or as figures in a landscape, depending on whether the emphasis is on the scene or on the characters.

COMPASSIONATE FATHER

Joseph was a compassionate father. He was an artisan who helped build stone cities, which is a trade he would later teach his son. The scriptures honor his religious heritage, and the angels spoke to him to tell him to protect his family and escape to Egypt. After the birth of Jesus, we hear very little about him.

Today's lesson from Joseph is compassion for his family, and down to earth practical wisdom that kept them safe.

THE COMPASSIONATE LEADER, BY CHRISTINE ZUST WHAT WE WERE TAUGHT IN BUSINESS SCHOOL

As leaders, we have been taught in our business schools and corporate board rooms to lead with our heads, not with our hearts. We're expected to be tough, bottom-line business people. The buck stops with us.

NURTURING LEADERSHIP

But given the chain of horrific events that shook the world on September 11, 2001, the business world is now seeing significant changes in this behavioral pattern, as leaders of companies and organizations across the country and around the world embrace a more compassionate style of leadership --leading with the heart. Leaders have shown that they possess a more nurturing, caring management style by reaching out to the families of the victims through corporate giving campaigns, devoting precious print and broadcast advertising budgets to either express sorrow or show pride in America, rather than to sell a product. In the months and years ahead, there will be many more examples of compassionate leaders, the new heroes of our modern day society.

EMPOWERING OTHERS

This shift toward becoming more caring, sympathetic leaders has given us all pause to reflect and ask ourselves: What does it take to become a compassionate leader? How can I empower my management teams and employees to become more caring when dealing with customers, clients and each other?

A DEFINITION

A simple definition of compassion is putting others' needs before your own, or being sympathetic to their needs. A results-driven leader who is accustomed to making rational decisions based solely on facts and numbers may feel isolated on the journey into this relatively unknown territory called compassion.

We saw male sensitivity in unlikely places after the September 11 tragedy. New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani took center stage, as he reported in almost up to the minute detail any news that he was able to share. He became the lead spokesperson for the state of affairs at Ground Zero. New York Governor George Pataki stood by Mayor Giuliani's side throughout the repeated news broadcasts, day after day, offering his state support to rebuild the city. President George W. Bush visited the site, sharing hugs and handshakes with firefighters and police officers from New York, Washington and across the country. We saw grown men on national television crying openly and uncontrollably. Our nation's leaders were shocked and devastated.

LETTERMAN INTERVIEW WITH DAN RATHER

Even David Letterman traded his comic banter for a more serious tone while interviewing CBS-TV news anchor Dan Rather, who broke his stoic facade and exposed his deepest grief. These were all leaders who we had never seen openly express their feelings. We had never seen them speechless. We had never seen them cry. And we realized that not even our civic, business or public leaders had all the answers. Today is a turning point for our country and for the world, one that will forever change the way we do business and interact with each other.

As we all reconsider the attributes of a compassionate leader, I offer these for consideration. A compassionate leader is someone who:

COMMUNICATES OPENLY. The most visible change that occurred after the September 11 tragedy was people's willingness to communicate with others. People who had worked side by side for years but who rarely spoke were now openly talking and sharing their thoughts and feelings with each other. Just as important, people began asking sincere questions and listened with rekindled interest and intention. Within companies and organizations, leaders encouraged an open dialogue among teams and employees. Companies set up grief counseling for their employees. Others encouraged their staff to donate blood and make charitable contributions.

IS FLEXIBLE. The leader who is willing to set aside rules and procedures for the greater good demonstrates his or her human side. We are all given choices in our professional lives. When you take the high road with employees, they never forget, and as a result, you develop more loyal employees, people who want to work for you because you care. You don't just pay lip service to a cause; you make a promise and keep it. By doing so you show that you genuinely care about their well-being.

LEADS BY EXAMPLE. The actions of a leader who tries to be compassionate on the outside but does it more for winning votes or stroking his or her constituents is disingenuous. Nothing does more to build a person's character than getting down into the trenches in an hour of need. Our society has been

challenged to re-examine the true meaning of the word "hero." We have learned that a hero is not someone who we idolize because of position, status or income but rather someone who genuinely, and humbly, puts others first.

IS THERE A PLACE?

Is there a place for the compassionate leader in today's tough business climate? Absolutely! We have spent decades becoming more professional and businesslike, and in the process we have built impenetrable armor around ourselves. It's time to set ourselves free, and become more human and humane in the workplace. The compassionate leader brings a sense of balance and a fresh approach to doing business in the marketplace. While there will always be hard-hearted, bottom line executives to lead companies, in this new millennium, we may find that those who exhibit the characteristics of a compassionate leader will fare better in handling crises and communicating more effectively in any economic and social climate.

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LET PEACE BEGIN WITH COMPASSION

The New Testament offered examples of leadership, compassion, and care that were personal and self-sacrificing. And that is our first lesson in peace. If there is to be peace on earth at Christmas let it begin with each one of us, in the families, communities, and cities where we live and work.



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November 29, 2009