**Sermon Text**: Matthew 1:18-25

**Occasion**: Christmas Eve; Jesus’ Genealogy series 8; 24 Dec 2023

**Fatherhood of Joseph**

Grace, mercy and peace be to you in the name of God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

What makes a father? The most natural answer is: a child—fathering a child. But when we look to Joseph, the father of Jesus, we see that the qualities of fatherhood are not solely related to biology. After all, Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary to be the Son of God. Joseph knew the child was not his. He almost divorced Mary over this. Yet, once he learned from God that Mary was not unfaithful, Joseph joyfully became a father to a son he did not create. And here we see some qualities of a father displayed in Joseph.

Right of the bat, one of the most important qualities Joseph shows is: Joseph is faithful to his wife, the mother of his child. A father should show love not only to his children but also to his spouse. Having a loving household is just as important for raising children as loving the children themselves. In a loving household, a child may be safe and nurtured—not just by one parent but the love of both parents. And here Joseph fulfills another important fatherly quality: he loves his child by devoting time and effort to raising them. Joseph did not wander off to leave his adoptive child to fend for himself. Joseph made the effort to be with his son and raise him in the faith. Here Joseph demonstrates the care a father should have. Fathers should show love for their children by not just spending time with the kids but actively engaging himself in the lives of his children. And, finally, a father protects. We see this more clearly after Jesus is born. When the Magi come seeking the child king, Jesus, the current king in Israel tries to kill him. To protect his son, Joseph flees to a foreign land of which he has next to no knowledge in order to keep his son alive. Despite Joseph not being the biological father of Jesus, there can be no doubt that Joseph was Jesus’ earthly father through the love and protection he had for the family.

Sadly, many children have far different experiences with their earthly fathers. Rather than Joseph being a father by love rather than biology, many earthly fathers are biologically fathers but not fathers by love. Joseph was faithful to his wife to make a home by spending time and showing love for his child. Many fathers in this world are unloving by neglecting, abusing, or abandoning their children and/or their wives. If you have had experiences with this type of father, you may be skeptical of Joseph’s parenting skills. And while this may be too critical of Joseph, it is not like Joseph is perfect either.

Joseph is a sinful human being like the rest of us. He had his faults and misconceptions, such as suspecting his faithful wife to be unfaithful given her pregnancy. But Joseph’s ultimate test would be raising the Son of God. How do you parent someone who is perfect? I mean, if we look to the only recorded event of Jesus’ childhood in the Bible (Luke 2:41-51), we find Jesus at age twelve in Jerusalem on a trip with his parents. When it was time to leave, Joseph and Mary neglect to check that Jesus is with them when they head off down the road—perhaps you’ve had a similar experience with your own children. In the evening, they realize they don’t have Jesus and they have to run back to Jerusalem to try and find him. On the third day, they discover Jesus in the temple. That is, Jesus was staying with his birth Father, God. And now we have two things striking Joseph in the heart. The first is that, even though Jesus is being blamed for all this, it is actually Joseph who neglected to check if Jesus was with him. Thus failing in his fatherly duty. The second stabbing pain for Joseph is that Jesus showed how much less faithful Joseph was to God than his son. Had Joseph thought to look for the faithful Son Jesus is, Joseph would have found him in the temple right away, not on the third day.

When we see so many imperfect examples of fathers in our world—including ourselves—sometimes what we neglect to reflect on how God is perfectly our Father in heaven He is the one who created us through our biological parents, giving us life. He has always faithfully been there for us, opening up His household of faith to us and to our parents. He called us to be part of His household and provides for us here. He never abandoned us and remained merely a prayer away—or a Bible away. God is always present in His Word; and in His Word He tells us how much He loves us and cares for us, desiring to be with us always unto eternity. He tells us outright that He will never leave us nor forsake us (Heb 13:5). Even when we are faithless to Him, He remains faithful to us (2 Tim 2:13), calling us to Himself. He will still provide the blessings of the world for our wellbeing and, through faith, He will provide life and salvation.

Even if we are scared that our Lord will abandon us like some people have in this world—fathers or otherwise—God will not have the same faults as sinful human beings do. Joseph was ready to leave his fiancé through a misunderstanding with her, but there will be no misunderstanding between you and God. He knows all things, including your heart. There are no misunderstandings with Him, nor are there secrets. He knows you—knows you better than you know yourself. He is aware of all your shortcomings and failures and the blatantly evil things you have done, yet your heavenly Father still loves you. He has seen the worst of the worst you have to offer and He still cares for you and calls you to be with Him forever. If that’s not love, I don’t know what is.

We even have proof of this love in the birth of Jesus Christ. Our reading from 1 John tonight said, “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation [the sacrifice] for our sins.” (4:10) It is not because you were perfect that God sent Christ at Christmas for you but precisely because you weren’t perfect that God gave His only begotten Son to deliver you from your sins. Thus the very fact that Jesus was born to deliver you from your sins shows you that your God loves you and wants you to be with Him always. He wants you to be with Him in His Word of the Bible. He wants you to be with Him in the Lord’s Supper where you are united to Christ’s body and blood. He wants you to be with Him as He supports you in service to your neighbours in this world. Even when you are faithless, God is faithful to you by calling you to be faithful to Him. And we see this great reversal of faithfulness in Joseph.

Being a just man, Joseph was trying to do what was right by God and by Mary by divorcing her quietly since he was not the biological father of her child. But despite this, Joseph was still meant to be the father of Jesus and do what fathers do: be faithful to, love, and protect the family. God was faithful to Joseph when Joseph didn’t have faith in his situation. So, God called to Joseph and told him that the child born to him and Mary would save them from their sins. Although Joseph was supposed to love and protect Jesus, it was really God who was loving and protecting Joseph through Jesus. By giving Jesus to Joseph, Joseph’s sins would be wiped away and he would never be separated from His heavenly Father by sin. Hearing this love for him, Joseph became faithful to God and did as he should: he was a father to the child of his wife. He loved his wife and loved his son, protecting them from harm and being faithful to them, just as God commanded.

And we know that our heavenly Father is faithful to us in a similar way. He is faithful to us by always being there through prayer, His Word, and the Church. Our Father is always loving us and showing His love for us through Christ by forgiving our sins when we confess them unto God. Our God urges us to do better by disciplining us as His children. He calls us to do good as we receive good from Him in His words of forgiveness. And, finally, our Father protect us from evil, even promising to raise us from death on the Last Day that we may be with Him now and forever in His heavenly household. Amen.

The peace that surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.