

Matthew 1:18-25

Joseph is like our appendix. It's part of our body, but it's not really necessary. Take out the appendix and our body will continue to function just fine. Take Joseph out of the Christmas narrative and nothing really changes in the end. Mary conceives and gives birth without him, because Jesus has no human father.

Still, we like Joseph. He's quiet and obedient. A good husband in other words. Mary chose well. But Joseph is thinking he did not. She is pregnant, and they had not...well, you know...yet. Jerry Springer would have loved to have these two on his show. And what's his face...the guy who always says, "The results are in, and you are the father!" Poor Joseph. He would confirm his worst nightmare. "Joseph, you are not the father!"

But it was far from a nightmare when God's angel appears to him in a dream. Just the opposite. Upon hearing the angel, everything is right again. "*Joseph,*" says the angel, "*do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.*" What a happy dream! And it gets better. "*She will bear a son,*" says the angel, "*and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.*"

So Joseph is somewhat necessary. It's his job to call Mary's son Jesus. Anyone could do that, I suppose. But the privilege is given to Joseph.

And it's also given to you. If you stop to think about it, you and I are just as unnecessary as Joseph. We were not there on that first Christmas, nor did we need to be. We are just as much an appendix as was Joseph.

But the wonder of it all is that God brings you into the story of Christmas just as He brought Joseph into it. And He does this with these words, "*You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.*" You are given the same privilege as Joseph. The privilege of calling Mary's son Jesus.

Jesus means Savior. And He truly lived up to His name by dying on the accursed tree of the cross for all sinners, including you. Whenever you *call His name Jesus*, speaking, praying, singing, you are naming Him your Savior, the one who died for you. But to do this you must be one who needs to be saved from your sins.

Jesus did not come to be your buddy, or your coach, or your example, therapist, encourager, or any such thing. He came to be your Savior. But He's only the Savior of those who confess they need to be saved.

Is it surprising, therefore, that the world celebrates Christmas in a far different manner from us in the church? I'm not against *Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree*, *Silver Bells*, *Jingle Bells*, or other secular Christmas songs. I like Rudolf, and Frosty, even the Grinch. But all of these are truly an appendix. Take them all out of Christmas, and the true meaning of Christmas stays the same. So ya, we can put these in our Christmas, yet only as an appendix that is not really necessary.

The world, however, sees all such things as these not as an appendix, but as a vital part of the body. Jesus is seen as an appendix, and the world is only too happy to remove Him not only from Christmas, but from their life entirely. "Take Him out and throw Him away!"

Sad, isn't it? Yet aren't we tempted to do the same? Oh, we'll keep Jesus in Christmas. But once Christmas is over, we can act as if He is more of an appendix than the most vital part of our body. It's important for us to admit and confess such things, for then we truly see ourselves as sinners who need Jesus, and not just in December.

And friend, He is your Savior now and always. Not an absent Savior, but one who is very much present. "*They shall call His name Immanuel, which means God with us.*" God is with you in the one you call Savior. He is with you in the good times and in the bad times. He is with you when everyone and everything is against you. He is with you when the bottom falls out and you are falling in despair and brokenness. He is with you through the tragedies of life, and through the valley of the shadow of death.

Jesus is with you to uphold you, to steady you, to lead you. He is with you, fellow sinner, to forgive you. And He does. He doesn't check to see if you have been naughty or nice. He forgives you no matter what. Your God forgives you because He looks to Jesus hanging from the cross for you. That's why He forgives you, not because of how you live and behave.

This is no pipe dream. God's angel, His messenger, is telling you, just as he told Joseph, that everything is right again, even if it doesn't feel right. All is well, my friend. Jesus is your forgiving Savior. And He is with you always. Amen.