

Six days from now, many churches will be portraying the Nativity scene. Children will be in costume dressed as angels, shepherds, and magi. There may be one child playing the innkeeper. And, of course, a girl in the role of Mary, and a boy in the role of Joseph.

All these will gather around a manger while those in the pews sing Silent Night. These are the essentials. You cannot have Christmas Eve without shepherds, angels, Mary and Joseph, and the Baby Jesus. You could dispense with the innkeeper, but magi and the singing of carols you cannot go without.

Yet, consider Joseph with me. According to our Matthew Christmas account which we heard this evening, Joseph is hardly an essential character. He has nothing to do with Jesus' conception within the womb of the Virgin Mary. In fact, he learns of it after it happens. And when he does learn of it, he plans to quietly exit the Nativity scene by slipping out the back door. Joseph wants no part of it.

And can we blame him? He is not involved in even the smallest way. The angels sing and proclaim the good news of Jesus' birth. The shepherds hurry to Bethlehem. The magi come with their gifts. Mary gives birth to Jesus and lays Him in a manger.

But Joseph? He just stands there. He does nothing. He is just a warm body taking up space. In fact, his instructions are quite simple. Basically, the angel tells him, "Do not interfere. Do not divorce Mary. Don't do anything! You have no role to play. Just make certain that you do not ruin Christmas for everybody else."

Do you ever feel like Joseph? More like a bystander than a player? Someone who observes what's going on without any actual role? Maybe your job is to mash the potatoes, or bring the salad to the Christmas dinner. But hey, anyone could do these things. They just give you this task to keep you from interfering. And even if you are in charge of the Christmas ham, or making the dessert, when it's all over you realize that your part in Christmas was not an essential part. Christmas happened two thousand years ago in Bethlehem. What does having a Christmas dinner have to do with that?

You're Joseph. I'm Joseph. Christmas is one short week away. You and I will be little more than warm bodies taking up space.

Except...there is one thing Joseph does. One task the angel gives him. Did you catch it when you heard St. Matthew read earlier? "*She will bear a son,*" says the angel to Joseph, "*and you shall call His name Jesus.*"

He's not just a warm body taking up space after all! He does have a part to play. The son that Mary will bear – Joseph is to give Him a name. Jesus. Joseph is to call His name Jesus.

And so are you, my friends, so are you. Jesus means *Savior*. “*He will save His people from their sins,*” says the angel. Just like Joseph, more than anything, God wants you, yes, He invites you to call Mary’s Son Jesus; to name Him Savior, your Savior.

Your role, your part in Christmas is essential. You are the reason why there was Christmas. Because of you, Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Because you need to be saved from your sins, Jesus came in order to suffer and die on a cross. He didn’t just come for everyone else. He came for you.

You want proof? It’s all in the name. Jesus is *Savior*, yes. But you, your name. When you were born anew in Baptism, Jesus gave you a name. God’s child. A sinner redeemed by the blood of Jesus. One who is forgiven, completely forgiven of all sin.

Your name is forever connected to Jesus’ name. Jesus – He saves His people from their sins. You are His people, His child through your baptism; the sinner He came to save.

You need Jesus and He needs you. Christmas brought Him here to you, and your baptism has brought you to Him. Amen.