

# ***Joseph - the Unsung Hero***

***Fourth Sunday in Advent (A)***

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## **Sunday, December 18, 2022**

Perhaps it has been the circumstances, perhaps it is a sign of my maturing in outlook, but I have begun this year to appreciate the season of advent. Advent has always had the twin themes of hope and anticipation, but because of the proximity of Christmas, there is a tendency to see this season in terms of anticipation of the Christmas season. This is not helped as a number of groups have taken Advent to mean the lead up to Christmas, and all sorts of events advertised as "Advent" are really Christmas events. If we were to actually put things into perspective, it is the other way round - Christmas is actually the anticipation of Advent - the hope that we invest in the Second Coming of Jesus.

With the deaths of parishioners this year, I have been reminded of the primacy of the hope that is our faith. We are not simply a people who celebrate a good time or an historic event, we are people who are living with the expectation of something which is to come, something better. Indeed, there is the sense of a world, which will become a better place.

Enter Joseph. Often we talk of Mary in terms of her faith, which is demonstrated in her willingness to say Yes to God. But there is more than just Mary involved. Joseph also had to exercise great faith and like Mary, had to trust in the voice of the Angel. Like Mary, he risked scandal and ridicule. His initial response, to put Mary away quietly was a sign of his decency, for he had every right to have her ridiculed and stoned.

He is a bit of an unsung hero for he is not mentioned beyond the childhood of Jesus and those who like to speculate in these things have suggested that he had died well before Jesus had begun his ministry. Simply put, we do not know, but we know that God entrusted the raising of his Son to him.

It would be easy for us to drift today into the telling again of the Christmas story, for Christmas is only a week away. The story of Joseph is told, not to bring us to Bethlehem, but to remind us that Joseph's participation in the great Christmas story, in the story of faith, saw him act with the hope of things to come.

Joseph played his part in the divine drama, and he is a reminder that we are also called to play our parts - to exercise our faith. God has plans for us - both as individuals and particularly as a district. We are called to play our part in the building of the kingdom - like Saul, we may be tempted to point out to God that we are the least among the least - the smallest diocese in the Australian church, but God has called us to be faithful to the task. God often calls us the small and the overlooked to shame the great. Mary and Joseph were very ordinary people living in an ordinary if not mediocre village, yet they had extraordinary faith. And because of this, God could use them in the plan for salvation of the world.

I believe that we as a district have a similar opportunity - a calling to bigger and better things, things greater than I think we can imagine. This is the hope that springs out

of Advent, and Joseph is a reminder that the only criteria are to be listening to God's voice and saying yes.

The two criteria are listening to God's voice and saying yes. As a ministry unit, we have to hear what it is that God is saying to us. This involves active listening and discerning the opportunities that are God-given. Yes, although God does speak to me, and to the Councils and leaders, each of us has the role to listen. Sometimes a chance remark or half an idea has been enough to help us identify what God is saying.

But without us saying yes - taking up the opportunity, there is little point. Advent points us to the future. It is a future that may be unknown - but a future with the certainty of God's presence. I know I have asked a lot from our Christian family - or more to the point from various parishioners, and we are seeing some of the fruit of that obedience. But I believe that there is more to come.

I would like to say I had a total vision for the future, but there is a lot more going to happen than I can imagine - I do know that if we are obedient to the call, things will happen.

Perhaps like Joseph, we may not see the recognition of our part in the process, but we will know in ourselves that we have been obedient to the call.

Advent asks us not only to anticipate Christmas but also the things that are to come and God walking with us in our Journey into the Future. We face the unknown, but in the certainty that God will be part of us. No doubt Joseph had his doubts, but in the end all that mattered was that he trusted God.

Will that be our epitaph also?

**AMEN**