

**Sermon – 4<sup>th</sup> Advent**  
**Matthew 1:18-25**  
**December 24, 2017**

**“The Sound of Silence”**

Christmas has come to be known by its sounds....carols on the radio 24/7, bells ringing outside stores, the Fed Ex truck pulling up at 10:30 at night, followed by a quick knock at the door before you hear it pull out then slam it's on breaks three doors down the block! Christmas is said to be “*the time of love and good cheer*”, and the sounds of the season are all carefully orchestrated to be a sign of that good cheer. Little wonder then, that the villain of all villains of Christmas, that “*grinchy grinch*”, hated, above all else...the noise, all the blissful, exultant, happy noise coming from “*who-ville*”.

Isn't it ironic I suppose that our best loved Christmas carol is most likely “*Silent Night*”. If our “cultural” Christmas is distinguished by certain sounds, then our “sacred” Christmas might best be distinguished by silence. In preceding weeks we've thought about three “*songs of the season*” from the Luke 1 and 2. After being shut up nine months by command of an angel could the priest Zechariah have been anything but loud when he sang his song of joy at his son John's birth? Is it even conceivable that Mary's song – her “Magnificat”, was whispered? How can you sing “*my soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior*” with a subdued voice?”

Last week, we read of angels singing “*glory to God in the highest*” and shepherds telling all that they had seen and heard through the streets of Bethlehem in what had to have been obnoxiously loud voices. But in our story today from Matthew Joseph hears from an angel, as in the other three stories, and says nothing. The man chosen of God to serve as the father of his Son, and from him there is not one word from his lips. Incredible.

Did you notice the Postal Service has no room for him on their Christmas stamp? It only includes Mary and *her* child. Is it because Joseph is the silent one that he is the forgotten one? In our lesson from Matthew we are only told that Joseph was a “*righteous man* - which in the Hebrew language meant ‘*faithful, devout, honest.*’ He was a man whose actions revealed about him all that needed to be known. Joseph was a performer, he “*stepped up to the plate*” in life. The Bible tells us what in the aftermath of his angelic revelation he did, and what motivated what he did - his faith. Therefore the Bible has no need to supply us with mere words.

What do we learn from Joseph, the Bible's “*strong, silent type*” and the song implanted in his story – the song of the church – the song of reconciliation between God and humankind? First of all, Joseph was strong in the way a man needs to be strong, in the way we all need to be strong - in his religious convictions, in his moral courage, and in his personal character. Joseph “*was a righteous man*”, which means he displayed his religious convictions openly, but most important, influentially. In his religious life, he was steady, not showy. Joseph was a “*righteous man*”, which means he displayed moral courage when told of his fiancée's “unusual” pregnancy. Moral courage is when we listen to God rather than conventional wisdom.

Much would have been whispered, maybe even shouted about Mary. Joseph could have had her stoned to death for being with child outside of marriage. But Joseph chose to listen to what God said about Mary, instead of what her neighbors were saying about her, maybe even what his instincts were saying about her. Joseph was a “*righteous man*”, which means he displayed great personal character, restraining his own justifiable frustration and even anger over his predicament, choosing to take Mary as his wife rather than turn her away. Martin Luther said “*Joseph could have made a bad situation for Mary worse, by shunning her. He could have provoked more anger toward her. He chose instead to protect her even at the cost of his own reputation*”.

“*You shall name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.*” You see, God could have shunned us. Instead God chose to accept us. God reveals his own character in this song of Matthew, this song of the church. God through a man who believed him – Joseph, says he has chosen to love the world that has been unfaithful to him over his righteous prerogative to judge it. Joseph personifies that – through his silent obedience to do as God says over what his own gut may have been telling him. Jesus came to save us from our sins but also offers to us a better way of life. Listen to the sounds of the world, and you’ll hear “*give as good as you get, take what you can, live and let live, and so on and so on.*” This is the way the world does it – it’s the message we’re drenched in every day. Because of Jesus Christ, you don’t have to – live that way that is.

There is a saying – “*silence is golden.*” When we express our faith in the strong, silent way Joseph did, believing God against all else, treasuring even as we wrestle with the word of God in our hearts, then yes silence is golden. Truth is that kind of silence is just the sort of “*sound of Christmas*” this world needs – a church that knows when to sing – and why, but also knows when to knuckle down and just do what God tells us to do. Tonight, tomorrow too, enjoy your celebration of Christ’s birth. But let your life song, the signature you put on the end of each day be the strong, silent witness of the man God chose to be the father of his son - Joseph, and that child of his who saves us all. AMEN