**4 Advent, Dec. 22, 2013** [**Isaiah 7:10-16**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah%207:10-16&version=NRSV)**;**[**Psalm 80:1-7, 16-18**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%2080:1-7,%2016-18&version=NRSV)**;**[**Romans 1:1-7**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%201:1-7&version=NRSV)**;**[**Matthew 1:18-25**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%201:18-25&version=NRSV)**, Rev Mary Trainor**

When you think of Christmas pageants the images that quickly come to mind are of Mary and the baby Jesus, the three kings bearing gifts, shepherds and angels, maybe even oxen and sheep. Joseph is usually not even in that mental picture -- he is almost an afterthought. When parts get picked for the pageant, boys prefer to be kings or even the shepherds over being Joseph. Mary is the star, but not Joseph. He is just not seen historically as a major player. Yet, today's Gospel highlights Joseph. What can we learn from the example of Joseph? Through his quiet, unassuming, faithful role as husband, father, provider Joseph served God and accomplished extraordinary things. This example is worth looking at for us, because after all we are ordinary people called to do extraordinary things for God. Paul said in our Romans reading today, "***To all God's beloved, who are called to be saints:"*** That's us, whether we like it or not!

Now Joseph was a law abiding religious man, and the traditions of the day were to have an engagement period of one year where the couple is legally committed to each other but not yet living together. Oh dear, Mary shows up pregnant during this time -- and the baby was conceived from God and not from him. People were not going to understand this back then, and people don't understand it now either; it is a holy mystery and we accept it on faith. Well, Joseph decided to do the honorable thing and dismiss her quietly (he could have had her punished instead), but poof right then while he was sleeping- an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and explained the whole thing to him, and told him what to name the baby! Whew -- what an amazing thing to experience! He could have woken up and, like most of us do after a weird dream, just tried to forget about it and move on with his day as planned. But it did not work out this way. Joseph recognized in his heart that this was no ordinary dream, this was God speaking to him. So, what did he do? We are told that Joseph, "***did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus."***

We so often reflect about Mary's obedience to God, but don't reflect on Joseph's. Joseph, in spite of this not really making sense to him, abided by the Lord's will. We too can have God sending messages to us about how we can serve Him. We too can be challenged by being asked to do things in the Name of God that sure seem unreasonable, and we are to say yes --just as Joseph did. Maybe you have already experienced this, or maybe you had a sense that God was leading you but you weren't sure so you ignored it. If it is God speaking, that message will come back to you again in some other way -- God does not give up in trying to communicate with us. For us it can be through dreams, or through other people, or in our prayer life. When a person senses that they have received a mission, some sort of a call from God, the first thing one says is, "**What? You have got to be kidding!"** Yet, we are all called to serve the Lord, we are all called to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to reveal God's love in our environments. And, just as it worked for Joseph and the legacy of his faithfulness carries on to today, the legacy of your faithfulness will lead on into the future.

Make yourself available to God and say "yes" as Joseph and Mary did -- and then lean on the everlasting arms of the Lord, and you will lead a faithful life as God intends for you to live. Amen.