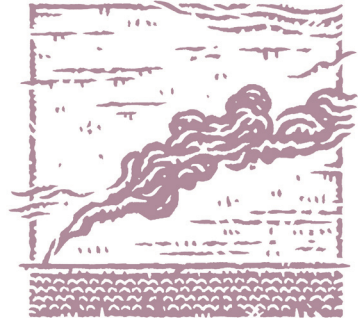


# Unfather Christmas

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*And he gave him  
the name Jesus.*

MATTHEW 1:25

Joseph's biggest claim to fame is who he wasn't. We know him as "not the real dad" of Jesus. Matthew emphasizes how little Joseph had to do with the unfolding redemption story, from Mary's pregnancy to the location of Christ's birth to the events that led to the family's flight into Egypt.

Scripture also renders Joseph conspicuously silent. He utters not one recorded word. As a result, Joseph is often either glossed over or is the subject of our conjecture. We want to know more. Yet perhaps Joseph's non-contribution is the very thing God would have us remember.

This man's most significant role is his apparent lack of one. His diminished involvement encapsulates a central tenet of the gospel: Salvation

belongs to God alone. Joseph's story reminds us we are not the orchestrators of our own rescue. The angel didn't tell Joseph, "Here's what God wants, so now go make it happen." He said, essentially, "Here's what *God* has made happen, and here's how to receive that truth."

It would have been understandable for Joseph to resent life not unfolding as he'd expected. But rather than focus on all he was being asked to give up, Joseph made room for a greater reality: This child was the Promised One, the key to God's redemption of the whole world. And if Jesus was truly good news for all people, that included him. The bigger plan for humanity also meant salvation for him personally.

So it's worth noting that Joseph's silence is broken with a single word. He's not quoted directly, but we're told he spoke it, and the word was *Jesus*. Joseph alone had the honor of giving the child a name that means "God saves."

Matthew links this name with the text in Isaiah identifying the Messiah as Immanuel—God with us. *Jesus* and *Immanuel* are virtually interchangeable names; God's presence makes our salvation possible, and our salvation allows us to stand in his presence.

For Joseph, assigning this name was more than following the angel's

orders. It was a declaration. The man who says nothing speaks loudly here. In his helplessness, when his world went sideways, Joseph's response was *Jesus. God saves.*

As events unfolded over which he had little control, Joseph could personalize the words of the prophet: *Immanuel. God is with me.* And when he would soon face such peril that he and his family would have to run for their lives, Joseph carried the truth in his arms. *Jesus. God saves. Immanuel. God goes with us.*

Though the space allotted to Joseph in the narrative is small, maybe that's a good thing. In Joseph, we can see our own smallness and remember that salvation belongs to the Savior who is with us to the end.

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### *Reflect on Matthew 1:18–25.*

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How does Joseph's act of naming Jesus speak to you? What do you imagine this name meant to Joseph as he took care of the infant Jesus?