



Near and Now

When My Calling Requires Difficult Choices – Joseph
By Kelly Rayner

Warm-up Question

What is a tradition that you have? Share where this tradition started if you know it.



Photo by Alex Lvrs on [Unsplash](#)

Discussion Questions

1. What do you see in this image?
2. What do you feel looking at this image?
3. What stories from your own life does this image bring to mind?
4. What stories of the world does this image bring to mind?

Joseph planned to dismiss her quietly.... When he awoke, he did as the angel commanded

Read [Matthew 1:18-25](#)

Bible Story Reflection

Traditions are a valuable tool that we use in everyday life, inside and outside of the church. Maybe you were taught a specific recipe that was a tradition to have at family gatherings or maybe it was a prayer/song that is sung every Sunday in church. When we are younger, we are often taught not to question these traditions too closely. Maybe you didn't even think to question them at all. In this scripture we see the importance of traditions, but we also experience a call to be open to the call to go beyond our traditions.

We are told that Joseph was a humble and righteous man. He engaged deeply with the traditions of his faith and was betrothed to Mary. Unlike the engagements of current modern practices, their betrothed was a deeply contractual relationship, legally binding them together. Then he finds out that she is expecting a child. It is not unreasonable for his first thought to be that Mary had committed an act of adultery and traditionally, this was punishable by stoning. Joseph could have dismissed Mary publicly, leaving her to the judgement of their community, but he decides instead to dismiss her quietly, saving them both from public scorn. While this might seem harsh to us today, he was following the laws and traditions he had been taught.

After this decision, God sends an angel to Joseph, explaining that the child came from God and that this child was sent to save humanity. It is also revealed to him that this child will be a boy and will be named Jesus. Despite what tradition might have dictated, Joseph is encouraged to marry Mary and take this child as his own, not only naming him, but declaring him as his first-born son, a position that held power in society. Joseph could have closed himself off to this call, sticking strictly to the traditions and laws that he knew. Instead, he opened himself to the call, accepting and raising Jesus as his and teaching him the traditions and customs of his faith. Our traditions are important, helping us to make sense of the world and pass on knowledge, but we are also called to an openness to those things that lay outside our traditions, embracing the magnificent work of God in all things.

Discussion Questions

1. Think of a tradition in the church. How does it inform you about faith?
2. Do you know what resources you have to learn more about traditions? Share some places/people who can be helpful to learn from.
3. How do you see traditions changing over time?
4. Have you experienced a change in tradition that was welcoming? One that wasn't?
5. How might our traditions create barriers when answer God's call?
6. How would the story differ if Joseph was writing it?
7. What is your favorite tradition? Do you have a favorite you were recently introduced to?
8. How do our traditions effect the way that we view the world?

Activity Suggestions

Design a poster that showcases a tradition that you have. Get as creative as you want when designing. If working in a group, present these posters. How do others perceive your tradition? What was it like having to make a representation of that tradition?

Imagine you are in a group deciding how to decorate for Christmas. One person says “This is our tradition. We always do it this way.” Brainstorm ways to approach this situation that both honors tradition but welcomes people to potential changes.

Draw a figure on a piece of paper. Fill it and the spaces around it the culture and traditions that make you who you are.

Prayer Concerns

Those that teach and guide us in traditions, the tradition breakers, those whose traditions differ from our own

Closing Prayer

Your call can be surprising, O God. Help me to hear your voice and embrace your call today, even if it is unexpected. In the name of +Jesus, Amen.

