A photograph of a nativity scene. A white baby is lying in a manger made of straw. The manger is set within a dark wooden frame. The background is a soft, hazy light, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The overall tone is warm and peaceful.

Joseph's Joy

December 15, 2019
FUMC, Portsmouth NH

We Gather for Worship

Prelude & Entrance of Christ's Light

Gratitude Moments

***Call to Worship**

L: God touches our lives in many ways.

P: When we worship together, God's Spirit speaks to us in some way or another.

L: Let us open our minds and hearts to hear God's message.

P: Let us worship with openness to the Spirit's call.

***Hymn** "Angels We Have Heard on High" v. 1,3,4 UMH #238

Lighting the Advent Candle Kevin Fickenscher and Suzanne Olbricht

A Time for the Child in all of Us

Ministry of Music

Prayer (unison)

Amazing God, you spoke to Joseph in a dream, and you guided him along the path to Bethlehem, and beyond. We know you speak to us in various ways, too. We are thankful that Joseph paid attention and followed your call in his life. He willingly became Jesus' earthly father, and he was faithful to you, to Mary and Jesus as he cared for them. May we be willing, too, to follow you with faith in your promises and guidance and care for each other as you care for us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sung Response "Emmanuel, Emmanuel" UMH #204

We Proclaim the Word

Reading the Word Matthew 1:18-25

L: The Word of God for the People of God.

P: Thanks be to God.

Message Joseph: Knowing Joy, Spreading Joy
Rev. Dr. Deb Hanson

We Respond to God's Word

***Hymn** "Joseph Dearest, Joseph Mine" TFWS #2099

Prayers of the People

Silent Prayer and Pastoral Prayer

The Lord's Prayer (unison)

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Giving of Our Tithes and Offerings

***Doxology** (*Please join in singing the following*) UMH #94

Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise God, all creatures here below; Alleluia! Alleluia! Praise God, the source of all our gifts! Praise Jesus Christ, whose power uplifts! Praise the Spirit, Holy Spirit! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

***Prayer of Dedication** (unison)

Dear God, Joseph wasn't wealthy or prominent during his life, but he offered what he could to provide for Mary and Jesus. We, too, offer what we can as we seek to care for those who are in need. Use these offerings to touch other lives. Amen.

We Go Forth to Serve

***Hymn** "Joy to the World" v. 1,2,4 UMH #246

***Choral Benediction** (*Congregation encircles the Sanctuary*)

May the Lord, gracious God bless and keep you forever. Grant you peace, perfect peace, courage in every endeavor. Lift up your eyes and seek His face, and His grace forever. May the Lord, mighty God bless and keep you forever.

***Pastor's Charge**

Postlude

**Please stand as you are comfortable*

*TFWS = The Faith We Sing UMH = United Methodist Hymnal
Large print bulletins are available from the greeters*

Welcome!

Whether you are joining us for worship for the first time or after many years of attending here at First UMC, we want you to know that you are welcome!

We are an inclusive community that invites everyone to be part of our church fellowship. Thank you for being here, and we hope that you have had a meaningful experience of worshipping our God so you leave this place feeling that you have been blessed to be a blessing. Please join us again!



Rev. Deb Hanson

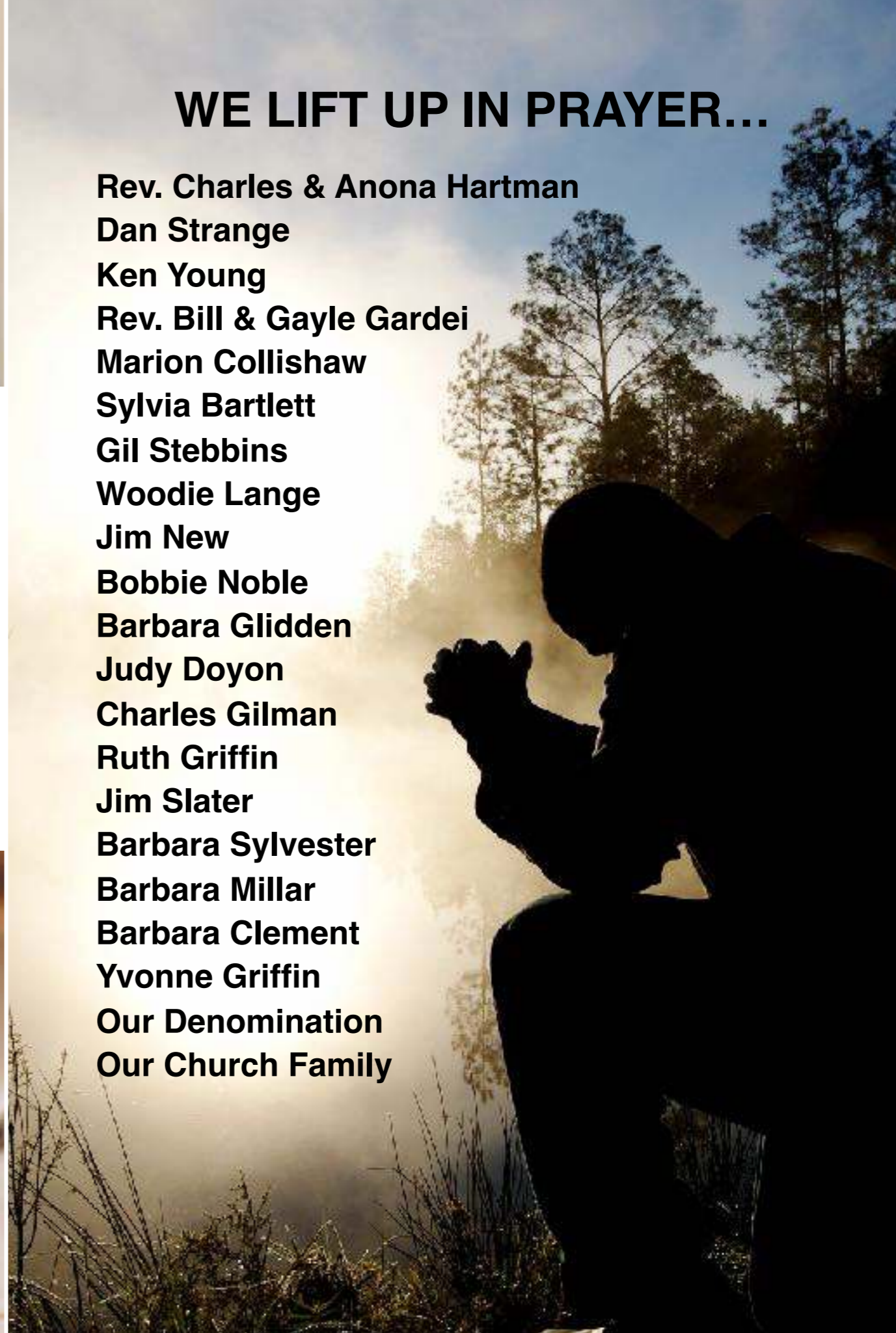
Pastor - Rev. Dr. Debra J. Hanson
Pastor's Assistant - David Richards
Liturgist - Suzanne Olbricht
Lay Leader - Susan Sarosiek
Acolyte - Marilyn Stebbins
Director of Music - Bevan Bloemendaal
Greeters - Kevin Fickenscher & Suzanne Olbricht
Ushers - Nancy Chesser & Art Munson
Sound Tech - Sue Sarosiek
Worship Service Tech - Steve Scott
Photographer - Dave Atkinson
Sunday School - Aerial Sillanpaa, Kaya Sarosiek, Dave Atkinson, Rosie Buswell, Sue & Dave Richards



Come join us for coffee hour after church service in Sanborn Hall. We'd love to catch up.

WE LIFT UP IN PRAYER...

Rev. Charles & Anona Hartman
Dan Strange
Ken Young
Rev. Bill & Gayle Gardei
Marion Collishaw
Sylvia Bartlett
Gil Stebbins
Woodie Lange
Jim New
Bobbie Noble
Barbara Glidden
Judy Doyon
Charles Gilman
Ruth Griffin
Jim Slater
Barbara Sylvester
Barbara Millar
Barbara Clement
Yvonne Griffin
Our Denomination
Our Church Family



UPCOMING EVENTS

12/15 - Giving Tree gifts are due today. Please have them wrapped with the red bell attached on outside. Thank you for your giving spirit this Christmas.

12/17 - Church Council meeting at 6 pm in the office.

12/22 - This will be the Children's Pageant. This year it is The Shiniest Star. The children have been working hard on this so please come to the service to enjoy and see the finished results of their dedication.

12/22 - All are invited to be part of the lighting of the Menorah at the Temple downtown, it is the the candle of Peace.

12/24 - Christmas Eve service will begin at 7 pm.

There are only a few hand painted Christmas ornaments featuring FUMC in the office for sale at a price of \$14. Please feel free to drop in and see them. It might be just what your holiday tree needs.


Staff Donation - The Staff Parish Relations Committee will be collecting money for staff gifts through the month of December. The staff works tirelessly to make our church and worship special. From Maureen in the office, Bevan providing music, Cathy who keeps the church clean and Rev. Deb who is leading and teaching our church family. If you are interested in contributing, please see Marilyn Stebbins on Sundays or leave your donation in an envelope in church office. You can also mail to church, attention SPRC. Thank you in advance for your generosity. Blessings, SPRC.

FRIENDLY REMINDERS

Donations are being accepted for computer updates. Computers are used in the office, our financial systems, our worship service and the Narthex. The amount needed for this upgrade is \$2,000. Please prayerfully consider donating to computer upgrade. Thank you.

Church Conference News

Please pick up your Church Conference booklet in Sanborn Hall. They are alphabetical by last name.



**In loving memory, Daughter & Sister,
Jennifer Sarosiek
by Sue & Kaya**



FUMC PORTSMOUTH A RECONCILING CONGREGATION

We, the congregation of the First United Methodist Church of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, are dedicated in worshipping, learning, and serving with all people as we embrace Jesus Christ's message of love and acceptance. As a United Methodist Church we stand fully behind the statement "Open Hearts, Open Minds, and Open Doors". We celebrate our diversity and invite all persons regardless of age, gender, racial or ethnic background, sexual orientation, marital or socioeconomic status, nationality, physical or mental ability into full membership and participation in the life of this community of faith.



New England Annual Conference Tri-State District
The Rev. Sudarshana Devadhar, Bishop
The Rev. Taesung Kang, District Superintendent

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
129 Miller Avenue - Portsmouth, NH 03801
Office Phone 603-436-6038 office@fumcportsmouth.net
Pastor office hours - Tuesday and Thursday 9 am - 12 pm
[call to ensure availability]
Pastor - Rev. Dr. Debra J. Hanson

Check out our website at www.fumcportsmouth.com

Like and Follow Us On:   



SERMON TRANSCRIPT GIVEN BY
REV. DR. DEB HANSON

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 1:18-25

THEME: Because Joseph answered God’s call, he was blessed to be Jesus’ earthly father.

Have you ever known someone who married a woman who was pregnant with someone else’s child? Or maybe we know or have experienced something like it ourselves such as becoming a stepmother or stepfather or adopting children. There isn’t a biological relationship, but we are given the responsibility of being a parent to a child that is our spouse’s or someone else’s. While often these relationships work out, there can also be challenges that go with it. Yet, in many cases, we come to love the children and care for them in whatever way possible.

This is the situation in which Joseph of Nazareth found himself with his betrothed wife, Mary. We might be tempted to romanticize the story of Mary and Joseph becoming the earthly parents of Jesus, but that would mean not really reading between the lines about what is in these very short verses in the gospel of Matthew concerning the events around Jesus’ birth. There probably was no romantic love in their relationship, at least not at first anyway, since they were most likely betrothed either by an arrangement between their parents or Joseph approaching Mary’s parents to contract with them for her to be his wife.

What we do know, according to Matthew (and Luke) is that she was engaged to him. Of course, being engaged in the first century was very different from our day. Once the contract was mutually agreed upon, they were considered married but not living together until after the marriage ceremony. It was a binding agreement without love ever mentioned. Joseph needed a wife, and Mary was who he either chose or who was chosen for him.

The covenant could only be broken if the wife was unfaithful to her husband, and if she was pregnant, she could be stoned or dismissed, that is, the man could divorce her. When Joseph learned that Mary was pregnant, he also knew he wasn’t the father, so his only assumption was that she had been unfaithful to him. He didn’t wish to cause a public scene, so he decided to divorce her quietly. Our scripture passage says that Joseph was a righteous man, which means that he was faithful in following God’s laws and knew what he had to do to avoid the humiliation not only for himself, but also for Mary.

But there is more than just knowing what he had to do. Regardless of whether or not we bring love into the picture, he had to have been devastated to learn about Mary’s pregnancy. Anyone who has experienced the hurt and pain of broken relationships knows what it is like to have someone betray them, whether it’s a friend, spouse, fiancé, family member, or co-worker. Betrayal hurts. Betrayal plunges us into a dark place where we find grief, anger, tears, and pain. In the movie, “The Nativity,” after Joseph learned about Mary’s pregnancy, he tried to go to sleep that night and all he did was thrash around, tortured not only by what to do but what he thought had happened. At one point, he stood and just hollered, “Noooooooooooo!”

After finally falling into a restless sleep, as we read in Matthew, Joseph had a dream in which an angel told him to take Mary as his wife because she was carrying God’s child, conceived of the Holy Spirit. Not only was he told to stay with her, but he was also told what to name the child: in Hebrew “Josh-u-a”, *Jesus*, because he was to be the Savior of the world. Oh my.

Imagine Joseph's thoughts when he awoke. He could have dismissed the dream, thinking maybe it was a product of his imagination, but he didn't. Remember, the scripture tells us he was a righteous man who obviously had respect and common sense as well as a strong faith in God's presence.

What did Joseph give up to be Mary's husband and Jesus' earthly father? What did Mary give up? Matthew gives us a picture of a family that began their lives together surrounded by controversy and challenges. Joseph chose to remain with Mary in spite of the fact that they hadn't lived together at that point, and he didn't have relations with her until after Jesus was born. Other places in the gospels tell us that they went on to have other children, but until Jesus entered the world, their marriage remained unconsummated.

More than that, Joseph would have mostly likely been ridiculed for his decision, and they would have been the subject of gossip, finger pointing, shunning, and accusations. From the very beginning, Jesus faced controversy and difficulties. His earthly parents entered their marriage relationship in all its complexity, confusion, upset, and tenuousness it could have had. This was no easy decision for either Joseph or Mary, but then being called by God to serve God in the world is not an easy call to answer. No matter where God's calls us to be or what God calls us to do, we most likely will face challenges because we have made a commitment to put God first in our lives.

Our calling almost always pushes our boundaries, like agreeing to teach Sunday school, being a liturgist during worship, heading a committee, going on a mission trip, increasing our giving to the church, witnesses to others in word and deed, speaking out against injustices, or standing up for someone who experiences racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia, poverty, bullying or any other human conditions that tend to drag others down. Many people stay in their comfort zones because it feels safe, but, in case you haven't noticed, God can enter those zones, too.

God invaded Joseph's comfort zone (and Mary's) and gave them a life-time task of raising the Savior of the world. Both of them were strong, grounded in their faith, and both were brave people who were willing to take the risk in spite of all that the world would throw at them. They listened to God and accepted their calling in life, giving their lives to God's work.

It takes commitment and passion to do such a thing. Many of you have probably heard of Greta Thunberg, the teenager from Sweden who advocates for saving the environment and who was named *Time* magazine's person of the year for 2019. Whether we agree with her and her tactics or not, we only need to listen to what she says to hear the passion behind it. She doesn't care about being well-known; she is not intimidated by world leaders; she only knows that she has a message to share, one that many people agree with. Her courage comes from deep within where she believes and knows that something needs to change or our earth will eventually be destroyed by climate change and abuse of the environment. Greta's life has gone a very different direction, one she may never have anticipated or imagined.

Joseph, too, moved in a different direction and put aside his own plans, taking on God's plans for the world. He became Jesus' father, and from what we can tell, he had a great influence on Jesus. As a righteous man, he would have made sure that Jesus had instruction in the Torah,

the laws, and being raised as a faithful young man. Joseph not only raised Jesus as his own, and probably loved him as his own child, but he legitimized Jesus because he gave a name, put him in the line of David, and provided him with a family.

Most of the time the father named the child, and it was often a name from the family, but Jesus was his name even before he was conceived, and Joseph followed God's instructions to name him Jesus "because he would save his people." Even in the dream, the angel indicated that Jesus was Emmanuel, "God with us" and referred to the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14. In accepting his call to be Jesus' earthly father, Joseph must have known great joy and spread that joy with pride in his son.

When we look behind the scenes, we see the humanity of Joseph and Mary. They weren't rich people; they weren't royalty; but they were faithful followers who trusted in God and God's direction in their lives. They were hardly wimps because it would have taken a lot of courage and strength to face the challenges they encountered from the disruption of Jesus' birth, the flight to Egypt to protect Jesus' from Herod's rage, and the return to Nazareth where they would raise Jesus, among their families.

So, whatever happened to Joseph? We don't know. Somehow, for the most part, he just disappeared from the gospel accounts. Luke talks about the Holy Family's journey to Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve years old, and in a few places, Joseph is mentioned as Jesus' father, but mostly he is silent. Because he was older than Mary, we also guess that he must have died by the time Jesus started his ministry, but we really don't know for sure.

Regardless, we can learn from Joseph's acceptance of his calling and his strength in facing all the things that he would have had to face as Jesus' father. We can be thankful for his part in bringing Jesus up and how he taught Jesus about being faithful and righteous – in right relationship with God. He set an example for Jesus and probably shared the story of Jesus' birth with him. Joseph also would have continued to respect and care for Mary, as well as helping Jesus to understand the importance of caring about other people. Joseph gave his life to and for Jesus, and Jesus gave his life for the world. This Christmas, may we remember not only Mary, but also Joseph. These two ordinary folks teach about humility, giving of ourselves, making tough decisions, trusting in God, being courageous, and setting an example for others.

Joseph was an important part of Jesus' life, even if the scripture writers didn't say much about him. I like Ann Weems' poem called, "Getting to the Front of the Stable" (from *Kneeling in Bethlehem*, p. 50)

Who put Joseph in the back of the stable?

Who dressed him in brown, put a staff in his hand,

and told him to stand in the back of the crèche,

background for the magnificent light of the Madonna?

God-chosen, this man Joseph was faithful

in spite of the gossip in Nazareth, in spite of the danger from Herod.

This man, Joseph, listened to angels and it was he who named the Child Emmanuel.

Is this a man to be stuck for centuries in the back of the stable?

Actually, Joseph probably stood in the doorway

guarding the mother and child or greeting shepherds and kings.

*When he wasn't in the doorway, he was probably urging Mary to get some rest,
gently covering her with his cloak, assuring her that he would watch the Child.
Actually, he probably picked the Child up in his arms
and walked him in the night, patting him lovingly until he closed his eyes
This Christmas, let us give thanks to God
for this man of incredible faith into whose care God placed the Christ Child.
As a gesture of gratitude,
let's put Joseph in the front of the stable where he can guard and greet
and cast an occasional glance at this Child who brought us life.*

We are only ten days from Christmas, and that gives us time to meditate on Jesus' early life about which we really don't know much. Maybe we can put ourselves into the scene a little and allow our minds to enter their lives enough to see that they are like us in many ways: very human, but striving to be faithful to God's call in their lives. May we take this ten-day journey, trusting that God is leading us to even greater things because of those who have taught us about Jesus and given us the Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love that only he can offer.

Let us pray:
Today, O God, we are thankful for Joseph, Jesus' earthly father, who teaches us about perseverance, courage, and faithfulness in following you. Thank you for his example and fatherly presence to be part of Jesus' upbringing. Be with us as we travel this Advent and Christmas journey, remembering all that Joseph and Mary can teach us, and all that they did for Jesus. We pray in his name. Amen.