

CHAPTER 8: JOSEPH: THE STORY OF REPUTATION

GOSPEL READINGS: Matthew 1:18-25

Joseph doesn't have much - but he does have his *name*. Through the encounter with the angel, he is told "do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife." (1:20) And so Joseph's obedience is transferred from the "law" (the way things *ought to be* done) to the instruction of God. He is *tested* (along with Mary) to take the words of the *Shema* and put them into practice.

1. What is the *risk* for Joseph in taking Mary as his wife? (see Matthew 1:19-21 and p.77)
2. What are the consequences of his reputation changing from that of a *righteous man* to a *person of the land*?¹ (p.77)
3. Can you think of a time when keeping God's instructions contradicted the rules of your world (be it religious, vocational, social, economical...etc)? What happened?

What's in a name?

On page 81, McKnight says that "God too, 'loses his reputation' when he chooses his Son to be born to parents with bad reputations – Mary as an adulteress and Joseph as a disgraced *tsadiq* righteous man)."

4. Why might it be helpful to us to observe God's own willingness to surrender his reputation/name?
5. How would you describe your reputation in your community? How important is that reputation to you?
6. How is it beneficial to God's greater mission to ask us (or men like Joseph) to be willing to surrender our *name*?

Discuss together this excerpt from p.79:

"Sometimes the implication of listening to the voice of God is that we ruin our reputation in the public square. Loving God, as the Jesus Creed teaches, involves surrendering ourselves to God in heart, soul, mind, strength—and reputation. The minute we turn exclusively to the Lord to find our true identity is the day reputation dies. We learn, as Thomas à Kempis puts it, that when you surrender your reputation, "you won't care a fig for the waggings of ten thousand tongues." This is what Joseph and Mary learn."

7. Are *you* willing to surrender your *name* to find your true identity?

Next week: Chapter 9, Mary: The Story of Vocation

¹ In Hebrew: from a *tsadiq* ("tsa-DEEK") to an *am ha-aretz* ("am-ha-a-RETZ"). The latter connotes a put-down and the idea of a person being shunned (religiously or socially) based on their lawlessness. See *glossary in book for more*.