**Sunday after Nativity**

 There is something beautiful in the combination of the different types of people described in the gospel accounts of our Lord’s birth.  We have spoken of the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos many times in the weeks leading to Christmas, as we must, for she is the first to receive Christ, the one through whom the Son of God is born as a human being.  All generations call her blessed and we seek to follow her example of purity, obedience, and humility.

            But today we especially commemorate Joseph the Betrothed. We know from the *Protoevangelium of James*, an early Christian writing, that when it was time for Mary to move out of the Temple where she had grown up, an angel directed the high priest to assemble all the widowers for one to be chosen by a miraculous sign as the guardian, the protector of Mary, the holy virgin.  Joseph was the one chosen; but when he was told of this duty, he refused, saying:  “I have children, and I am an old man, and she is a young girl. I am afraid lest I become a laughing-stock to the sons of Israel.”  Yes, there is something a bit shocking about an old man who is betrothed to a young girl.  But the high priest reminded him of the importance of fearing and obeying God.  So Joseph did as he was told and took responsibility for Mary as her betrothed.

           Joseph’s life had certainly been complicated by taking Mary as his betrothed.  He had to take the pregnant Mary with him to Bethlehem, where she gave birth in a cave used as a barn for farm animals. And once the baby was born, Joseph found himself at the center of an international crisis with both wise men from Persia and King Herod looking for the child.  Then, the old man had to lead his family by night to Egypt, where they hid out until it was safe to return to Israel, to the town of Nazareth in Galilee.

            Joseph must have wondered many times how he got himself into all this unwelcomed excitement and why God had chosen him for such an unusual responsibility.  But he still obeyed and risked his life in protecting the young Jesus and His virgin Mother.

Joseph put aside his own wishes and preferences and did what needed to be done, and thus played a crucial role in the unfolding of our salvation.

            During this season of Christmas, I hope that we will all take Joseph the Betrothed as a model for how to live.  His story shows us that we don’t have to be young or free from worldly cares in order to serve God; neither do we have to be especially enthusiastic volunteers.   Instead, we simply have to obey His calling.  We may not always like it and may refuse at first, as did Joseph. But God can be patient and persistent and use us to His glory nonetheless.

            As we celebrate the season of Christmas this year, let us remember that the Son of God took flesh in a world where people make choices.  It’s a world where we all have our priorities, our goals, our vision of what would be nice in life.  The problem is that God’s calling doesn’t always fit with our preferences.   We, like Joseph, are called to obey nonetheless, to respond in freedom, and to play our role in the unfolding of God’s salvation in the world.

            I know that it may seem a bit much to compare our calling with that of Joseph.  It’s hard to compete with being the adopted father of Jesus Christ.  The good news is that it’s not a contest; we don’t have to compete.  Instead, we just have to remember that the Lord was born for us too, that we also are brought into the eternal life of the Holy Trinity through Him.  He invites and calls us all to share in His life, to raise us the joy and blessedness of the kingdom even as we live and breathe.  But in order for this glorious transformation to occur, we must embrace Him, we must respond to Him, we must hear and obey His calling. Amen