

What makes a man a man?

When the Father's Day comes around, I remember an airman back in my USAF days. This young man one day strutted around with a walking stick, declaring aloud, so that anyone around could hear him: "I'm a man! I'm a man!" In the break room, we would be watching the TV. Then he would blurt out in the middle of the show: "I'm a man!" In the dining hall, while standing in the chow line, he would proclaim: "I'm a man!"

I and a few fellow airmen were wondering: "Hey, what's with this guy?" A few days later, I found out what made him walk around with the self-declaration: his girlfriend in NY got pregnant by him. I was barely over 20 then, but could not believe the mentality of the young man. It sounded so ridiculous to me.

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In one of the churches I served, a family of five began to attend worship. After a few months,

some people began to notice that the father and the mother always sat in the pew with their children in between. That was not strange. What was strange was that they still sat apart from one another, even after the children left for the Sunday school.

Then a year later, I heard that the husband suddenly packed up and disappeared, leaving three kids and wife behind. What I heard was that the man left the state, so that he would not have to pay the child support. It was a difficult situation for the wife, because one of the children suffered from a mental condition that prevented him from participating normally in a social setting; and another, from a rather severe asthma.

Does a man need to be a father, in order to become a man? I believe not. But I think fatherhood of a person serves as an indicator of the manhood of the person. We can tell what kind of a man a man is, by observing the fatherhood the man demonstrates.

No, I do not believe the biological fatherhood makes a man a man. Any four-legged animal with the reproductive capacity can achieve admirably that distinction of the fatherhood. The fatherhood is rather defined by the man's child-rearing commitment, not by the child-making impulse or a sexual conquest.

On that note, we can talk about a man whom we know very little, but nevertheless chose to become a father to a child who was not his own. We know very little about Joseph, Mary's husband. According to the birth narrative, he was hit with the news that his betrothed wife was with a child. He must have felt he was hit in the back of the head with a baseball bat. The implication was big in those days. The family's honor was at stake. His respectability was at stake. But he married the woman, accepted the child as his own, and raised him.

Joseph was not a well-to-do person. He was not an educated

person. He was a working class man living in the hilly region of the northern country, far away from the metropolitan Jerusalem. But he put the meals on the table by working hard as a carpenter.

Most of all, Joseph provided a loving and stable family, where a child could grow up happily and normally. Undoubtedly, there were people in town who pointed finger at this child, calling him names, and snickering at him, when the child walked outside. It takes a certain kind of manhood to stomach such insults. It takes a certain kind of fatherhood to raise a child whose spirit those slanderous and malicious accusations could not influence.

A child needs a stable and loving home, in order to have a normal childhood. A loving and stable home is very important to the healthy formation of a person. Joseph the man provided what was essential for a child to grow up happy and healthy, both in mind and body.

When we think about it, Joseph did not have the patriarchal male ego or the petulance that might have damaged the psyche of the child who was clearly not his own. It is an understandable scenario: if a man was forced to accept the marriage that began with possibly the worst news in his time, he would be inclined to mistreat the woman and the child that happened to cause all his grief. But Joseph did not go that way.

Would you say: "Oh, well, the angel appeared to him and explained *everything!* It should have been easy for Joseph!"? Is it fair to say that Joseph did not have to struggle with marrying a woman who was with another person's child, or with committing to the marriage that just about destroyed all his expectation, because an angel had appeared in the dream? How many men would trust their dream and marry a betrothed wife who is pregnant with a child clearly not their own?

I doubt it strongly. The reality is, although men know a lot about God's will, men do not follow God's will. Instead, men do throw temper tantrums once in a while, and men just plain disobey what they know as God's will, just because men do not feel like obeying. We cannot assume that Joseph did not have to struggle in his marriage or in filling the shoes of a father. Rather, we could assume that many things were stacked against him, against his marriage, and against raising a child who was not his own.

Although the Bible reveals almost nothing about him, it is obvious that Joseph provided a stable and loving home environment, so that the formation of a great mind could take place in the child who, according to the eyes of the contemporary secular society, was a *bastard child of Mary*, no matter how strenuously Joseph or Mary might have insisted he was not. Jesus could easily have grown up a bitter, destructive, and emotionally scarred man. God knows what would have

happened to the history of the humankind, if Joseph rejected Mary and her child.

Matthew begins his Gospel with the genealogy of the Messiah, with the names of the fathers who preceded Jesus in the patriarchal lineage. The Gospel's beginning with the genealogy usually bore the readers to sleep. I am glad that all of us have managed to stay awake:

³ and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah *by Tamar*,...
⁵ and Salmon the father of Bo'az *by Rahab*, and Bo'az the father of Obed *by Ruth*, and Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶ and Jesse the father of David the king. And David was the father of Solomon *by the wife of Uri'ah*...

Matthew tells the readers that Jesus was born according to the patriarchal lineage of King David and Abraham. But then, one might wonder, why would Matthew include the seemingly oblique reference to the four women, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and the wife of Uriah, while he was

narrating the patriarchal lineage of Jesus.

Why would Matthew bother to include the names of those women in the list of the patriarchal lineage? Why would Matthew specifically note these women, while ignoring other women?

Tamar was the widow of Judah's first two sons, whom Judah promised to give to his third son in marriage, but never fulfilled his promise. So she remained a widow. She was then found with a child, and was accused of harlotry. Judah then ordered her to be burned to death. Then Tamar produced the evidence that convicted him that the john who committed the harlotry with his daughter-in-law was indeed he himself (Gen 38).

Rahab was the Gentile prostitute who helped the Hebrew spies when they entered Jericho (Jos. 2-6). She became the mother of Boaz. Boaz took Ruth the Moabite, a Gentile woman, as his wife (Ruth). Boaz and Ruth

turned out to be King David's great grandparents.

The story of the wife of Uriah was perhaps the most heinous one of all. The wife of Uriah was Bathsheba, whom King David *raped* (some say, "seduced," but that is not correct), while her husband was fighting the war, from which King David was taking the leave of absence, although he should have been at the frontline as the king should have. Bathsheba became pregnant, and King David came up with a "neat" plan. He called his captain, Uriah, from the frontline, and suggested to him, in a rather lewd way, to "go home and wash his feet." "Feet" is a euphemism for genital. But the faithful captain slept at the gate of King's palace with his subordinates and soldiers. So David had sent a letter to the Commander Joab, and made Uriah hand-carry it to him. The letter ordered Joab to place Uriah at the very front of the attack in the most risky tactical maneuver, in hopes of having him killed. And it worked. He and many

other soldiers died in that combat maneuver (II Sam. 11).

Matthew wanted the readers to understand that the patriarchal lineage was neither patriarchal nor pure. The lineage of the Messiah included a prostitute, Gentile females, a female victim of the patriarch of the clan who broke the promise, conspirators and a murderer-king. The patriarchal line lacked the authority to be patriarchal. There was no purity of race in the lineage for the Messiah. The lineage threaded through the Gentiles, and even a prostitute. When it came to Joseph, it jumped over to the female line of succession in Mary.

In the Messianic lineage, God has included the Gentiles, a prostitute, a rejected widow, and even a despicable murderer-king in order to fulfill God's promise of the Messiah. Matthew witnesses to the readers that God's grace is transmitted through the lineage, despite the human weakness, shame, sin, and imperfection. God consummated

God's promise in Jesus, and God achieved it through all these imperfections and failures.

But if Joseph had failed his fatherhood, all these would have become naught. Joseph did not realize the consequence of his action, but his faithful fatherhood allowed God's promise to be fulfilled in Jesus.

God does not care for the purity of a particular race, but acknowledges the plurality of race. That principle is profoundly expressed in the Messianic lineage. From a prostitute to a king, from the bottom of the society to the top, God made sure everyone and every class was represented in this so-called patriarchy. Matthew puts the new light on the meaning of the traditional patriarchy.

The traditional patriarchy still exists today in the forms of sexism and sexual exploitation, just as the characters in the stories of the Old Testaments exploited and victimized women

and men. The stories of Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba speak eloquently to the violence which the traditional patriarchy perpetrated against both women and men.

The traditional patriarchal model is not a healthy one for us any more. I do believe that we need the new model of the manhood, or the fatherhood today. I hope to find it in the example of Joseph who raised Jesus to be a man.