

**“Playing Our Role”
(A Dramatic Sermon)**

Luke 2:1–20

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First Baptist Church, Raleigh
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Would you rather have a leading role in a play of little significance or a bit part in a magnificent production? It’s somewhat like the question — “Would you rather be a big fish in a little pond or a little fish in a big pond?” – not that a fish gets a choice... Well, I have a bit part, but it’s in a big production, the biggest of all time!

My name is Joseph, yes, that Joseph, and yes, I look older than you expected... I am the father of Jesus, that Jesus, and we all know where fathers stand, right? In your time when any person accomplishes something great and is interviewed, what does that person say? “Well, I have to thank my mother who has always been there for me...”

Mom is the person they think of, not Dad, and I get that... not just intellectually but experientially. Mary gets all the attention, and well she should. She does the heavy lifting of not just getting Jesus into the world, but also looking after him when he is young. I do a few things that matter along the way, and then just fade out of the story.

I have a small part, but I am OK with that, given the scope of this story — as in making possible the salvation of the whole world! I just want to play my role well, and I think I do.

I confess that I am more than a little confused when Mary tells me she is pregnant, all things considered... if you know what I mean... And we are not married, only engaged. Most of the men I know would be infuriated by this, so much so that they would embarrass her in public.

In fact, they question my manhood when I decide not to do so but to dismiss her quietly. A real man wouldn’t put up with this! Well, a real man carries a pocketknife, and I don’t have one of those either. I think for myself about all things, including manhood. I wonder if my friends are revealing true strength or insecurity. I try to be fair and extend kindness to others. That seems pretty strong and manly to me.

I don't know where people get these toxic views of masculinity. Do you? Surely you don't still have to deal with this problem in your highly advanced time...

In any event, I decide not to embarrass Mary but to dismiss her quietly, no matter what my friends think, but before I do, an angel appears to me in a dream. You can read about this in this in the Gospel According to Matthew which includes more details about me. Not surprisingly, you have read from Luke's version of the story which emphasizes Mary's role. Mom gets all the attention.

But an angel appears to me in a dream and explains what is happening. This is God's doing. Mary will give birth to a special child, we will name him Jesus, and he will save his people from their sins. And while I don't know about you, I don't hear from a lot of angels, though I do have these dreams that provide insight... but I believe the angel and do what I am told – stay with Mary and become a father.

I still have my critics. Not everyone believes me. An angel spoke to you? Sure! The kid, your kid, he's gonna' save the world? Right! But I don't care what they say. Everyone has a right to an opinion, informed or not. Everyone is a critic. I don't allow them to define my life. Do you?

But you know the rest of the story. I'm as present and helpful as I can be as a father. I listen to an angel's warning in another dream and get us all out of town before Herod can kill Jesus, and when Herod dies, I listen to yet another angel in a dream who tells us we can return home from Egypt where we have been living as undocumented immigrants. Sometimes I just wish I could sleep, but the dreams are helpful.

And then, in a story you will read next Sunday, when Jesus is twelve and wanders away in Jerusalem, I am with Mary to give him a little talking to... I guess we can't call this a "come-to-Jesus" meeting since he is Jesus! But being a parent can try a person's soul. It is among our highest callings, and I give my best to it, though Mary is probably better, but imagine that your child is also Divine. This is not an easy task, but I give my soul to it, to him.

I do not play a major role in this story, but I play it as well as I can, and that matters, I think, it does matter.

So, what is the message for you here? You have helped me by letting me vent a little. So, thanks for that, even though you haven't had a choice... But what is the message for you? I don't know what your role is in your work or your family or in God's larger plan, nor do I know how you feel about your role, but play it well, play it well. Someone once said that we can sweep the floor to the glory of God, and indeed we can, though I wonder how many floors that person swept. But what matters is that we do our best at whatever we do each day.

Some people may seem to have more important roles than you, and they may think they are more important, but here's the thing – Jesus is the lead character in this story, and the rest of us are in supporting roles, even Mary (though for goodness sakes, don't tell her I said that!). Jesus is the focus - his love for the world, his service to others, his vision of better way of living together in peace, his willingness to give all for us – he is the focus and the rest of us point to him.

A lot of people over the years have thought otherwise. They have thought that they are what it's all about, and some of them have been very popular for a time, even powerful — athletes, entertainers, political and military leaders, business leaders who accumulate great wealth. Many have had their day in the sun, and it has been impressive. But only one person has inspired the worship and adoration of billions for 2,000 years. Only one person has transformed broken lives into whole children of God. Only one person gets these songs of praise and moves people to serve others in need. Jesus, my Jesus, your Jesus.

So, play your role, whatever it is, and point to him, to the better possibility of human existence, to the way of kindness and compassion, that there may be peace on earth and goodwill among all whom God favors. Mary treasures the words that are spoken to her this sacred eve by angels and shepherds alike. So do I. So should you. It is the greatest story ever told, the greatest production of all time, and we all have a part in it, a role to play.