CONCERTO FOR SECOND FIDDLE

IN A FLAT (OR IN A CONDO)

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he New York Philharmonic’s late maestro, Leonard Bernstein, was asked which instrument is toughest to master. “Second fiddle,” he replied. Without it, “no harmony.”

Can you identify these second chairs:

1. #2 to fly solo nonstop across the Atlantic?

2. Second Fuehrer of the Third Reich?

3. Second to step onto the lunar surface?

4. On Line 2 trying to file a patent for the telephone?

5. Next behind TIME’s “Person of the Century?”

***Rich. And Famous.***

From college days in Corvallis to writing movies for Sean Connery, Harrison Ford, Cuba Gooding, Jr., Kurt Russell and Dennis Quaid, That’s Mike Rich’s magic carpet ride. Graduating from Oregon State in ’82, Mike signs on as morning anchor at Portland’s KINK-FM.

By the mid-90’s he’s writing movies! “Finding Forrester,” “The Rookie,” “Miracle,” “Radio,” and now “The Nativity Story.” This pickup-driving, mid-40s, Beaverton, Oregon, dad attends a Bible-centered church which, he says, is "united by a passion for the Word. For us, it's about spending time in the Scriptures and finding how they apply to daily challenges."

While researching Jesus’ stepfather for “Nativity,” Mike found “There’s not much there.” Joseph’s dossier describes him only as “a righteous man.” But he exemplifies what it looks like to *be* one, i.e., uncompromising in his obedience to God. In that pre-NIKE, religious culture, people wanted to “be like Joe.”

In the biblical accounts Mary and her little Boy-child are center stage while Dad keeps the family donkey idling at the curb, checking his do-rag, looking like an outsider just along for the walk.

In the 60’s we dads were as welcome in the birthing *suite* as bird flu. And as needed as a doctor -- Dr. Richard Kimball, the Fugitive.

***What Would Joseph Do?***

**Let’s time-travel back and *zillow* in on this “greatest story ever told” as captured for us by two master storytellers: Matthew 1:17-2:23 (p. 10, The Message) and Luke 1:26-38 and 2:1-52 (p. 120, The Message).**

In this God-comes-to-earth saga, here’s a real guy, facing real changes, making tough choices. Joseph’s in a supporting role, with cameo walk-ons and zero lines (none archived in the Bible), living in the shadow of his child-bride and their wee God-child.

**DISCUSSION: Have you had to play second fiddle? How did it feel? How did the retrofitting work out?**

In the first of four dreams an angel breaks it to Joe that his early-teen fiancée has something cooking in the oven. And, of all things, this outer space visitor says your betrothed is carrying *God’s* baby. Well, you know for sure it ain’t *yours*!

**DISCUSSION: Put yourself in Joe’s flip-flops. Bam, your buttoned-down plans are shattered like a Palestinian pinata. What would you have done with the angel’s news?**

***Stand By Your Woman***

Facing life’s curveballs, Joe obeys God’s signs, doing the unmanly thing of “think first, *then* swing.” He says “No deal!” to divorce, and goes through with the wedding, risking his reputation to save that of his ripening, *virgin* sweetheart – and all because of this what-was-it? immaculate conception? “Uh huh, like the guys down at Woodworkers Local 47 are gonna buy *this*!” (Isaiah 7:14-16; 9:2-7).

He even cowboys up enough romantic self-control to tide him over ‘til after this historic birth, which he could well have been the only warm body around to assist with this divine delivery. Joe sacrifices his good name, career, comfort and future, because he loves and believes both God and Mary. The brother’s got game alright.

Anticipating cheap shots that his little Guy is not legit, he has the Savior-to-be dedicated and circumcised, per the Torah. (Remind me in heaven to ask how you *dedicate* God to God!)

**DISCUSSION: Have you ever felt like a runaway train? How did you restore control? If not, describe the crash.**

Wise men bring gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, then warn our young parents that Herod is out to kill this “newborn King.” Just think -- our Creator, in the helpless body of a baby!  What a humble inconvenience. And we’re bummed when our cable goes down.

**DISCUSSION: Why gold, frankincense and myrrh? What gift did the adult Jesus give us (Romans 6:23)?**

An angel tells Joseph in Dream v.2 to jet to Egypt. So, being their protector, but clueless about how he’d feed and house them, or how they’d be received, Joe whisks his family south of the border.

Two years later Dream #3 tells JoJo to get back to where they once belonged. “Dirty Herod” has left the building, to meet his Maker. (“Herod, ole buddy, see ya; I wouldn’t wanna be ya!”)

**DISCUSSION: Ever had to relocate at a time or to a place not to your liking? What was that like?**

God’s messenger in Dream #4 tells Joe to take Mary and their (how could *He* be “terrible”) two-year-old and to resume their “normal” life while *raising God*!! They settle in Nazareth, a backwater shard of real estate ignored by even Wal-Mart.

**DISCUSSION: Have you had to be responsible for someone or something that you hadn’t bargained for? How’d it go?**

***Not Your Average Joe***

We don’t hear of Joseph after Jesus turns 12, or see him at the crucifixion with his Mary (John 19:25-27), or find him burying Jesus. So we assume he dies before his sinless Stepson launches His meteoric miracles-and-teaching career. Can you imagine Joe’s welcoming celebration when he arrived in heaven!!

Had raising the honest-to-God Creator always been on Joe’s To Do List!! This humble tradesman from Nowheresville, whose grandpa twenty-six generations back was Israel’s beloved King David (Genesis 12:3; 22:18; 2 Samuel 7:12; Psalm 89:3; 132:11)! It seems God had gone to Shalom Depot and hand-picked a simple carpenter who was willing to swap his plans for God’s, not out to save the world himself, but to simply be faithful. Now *there’s* a “righteous man.”

Taking his family to Jerusalem annually for Passover was a big sacrifice. When he put down the hammer, the income dried up.

Joseph had four biological sons: James, Joses, Simon and Judas – not THAT Judas (Matthew 12:46, 13:55). He and Mary also had daughters, the Bible noting at least two (Matthew 13:56).

**DISCUSSION: What dynamics are in play in Joseph’s blended family, especially since one of them was perfect?! What’s it like to have a sibling who never screws up?**

A good citizen, Joe shutters his shop to trek to Bethlehem for the census demanded by Caesar Augustus, potentate of the planet (Micah 5:2). That’s like walking your donkey from Seattle to Bellingham! Many unhappy Jews protested Roman occupation by ravaging the homes of those who left town to obey the authorities.

**DISCUSSION: What’s God asking you to do or be that you hadn’t planned on? As a righteous, second fiddle player, what counsel would Joseph offer you?**

### “Come to Bethlehem and See….”

Nobody aspires to be second chair, but it’s the best assigned seat in the house since God wants first chair in our lives. He does so, as Barry Rowan told us, so that life makes sense, harmonizing in a “symphony of the soul.” God insists, “I am the Lord, and apart from me there is no Savior (Isaiah 43:11). Playing second fiddle to Him is why He created you (Proverbs 3:5-7).

Let’s take down the “No Vacancy” sign and make room for the Lord Jesus who came to us not to be served …but to serve, by giving His life for you and me. As the ear-muffed, rosy-cheeked carolers sing:

***How silently, how silently the wondrous Gift is given!***

***So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heaven.***

***O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray.***

***Cast out our sin and enter in. Be born in us today.***

Got room for Jesus? God longs to hear you say, “Sir, thank You for sending Your Son into my world to save me, to die for me. Thank You for trading *all* my sin for Your *total* forgiveness. I believe You’ve prepared me all my life for this moment as I now give myself to You because You gave Your Son for me. Amen!”

His Deal

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Answers to FunTrivia.com questions on p. 1:

1. Amelia Earhart

2. Admiral Karl Doenitz’s first official act was to surrender to the Allies.

3. Edwin “Buzz” Aldrin

4. Elisha Gray filed on Valentine’s Day 1876, two hours after Alex Bell whose patent became the single most valuable ever.

5. Three-term U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and India’s former Premier and non-violence pioneer, Mohandas Gandhi