

I went to high school at Cuyahoga Valley Christian Academy, a non-denominational school wedged halfway between Cleveland and Akron, Ohio. And CVCA (as it was called) had a lot to offer. In fact, it was widely regarded as providing one of the best educations in all of Ohio.

And yet, I'll never forget the day during my senior year that a girl named Audrey in my Calculus class marched into the room smiling from ear to ear and waved a piece of paper in our teacher's face proudly. She had been accepted into Cornell. The only member of my graduating class to go to an Ivy League school.

You see, despite being the premiere college-prep academy of northeast Ohio, in the eyes of institutions like Cornell we were still just another Rust Belt high school. It was easy to take pride in ourselves as the big fish of our tiny pond. But truth be told, we weren't in New York or LA. We weren't the grandchildren of congressmen or nieces and nephews of celebrities. And we were never going to have anything handed to us.

As much as we try to deny it in our modern, democratic, equal-rights society, where you're born and who you're related to has a huge impact on the opportunities in your life. Our own founder knew that as well as anyone. There's no telling how the Reformation might have unfolded if Luther had gone to a university in Paris or Rome or Oxford.

But no, those universities were reserved for the children of nobility and status. Peasant monks whose fathers had crawled their way out of the copper mines went to the obscure corners of Germany like Wittenberg, where no one even realized they were writing anything controversial until it had already been published for 3 years.

Things haven't changed that much. The name "Kennedy" will get you anywhere in Washington. The name "Carnahan" or "Blunt" will get you anywhere in Missouri. But the name "Ketelsen"... not so much.

And in that, we have something in common with our Lord. Because he came from a family without a name as well. And when I say "without a name," I really mean "without a name." Other than the fact that he was from an obscure branch of David's family tree, we know nothing about Joseph's immediate family.

The same goes for Mary. We know her cousin was apparently a woman named Elizabeth, who was married to a temple priest who was named Zechariah. But that's about it for her as well.

Then again, why should we know much about Mary and Joseph? They're nobodies. There's a tendency to try and glorify them, but there's really no substance to it.

Take Joseph's profession, for example. We like to say he was a "carpenter." Now, in today's day and age, being a carpenter is a respected profession. Carpenters are skilled engineers, craftsman, even artists. Being a good master carpenter often requires both education and years of experience.

But Joseph wasn't really a carpenter. He was a "tektov." A very general Greek word meaning "builder." Often not in wood, but in stone. And tekton's were not educated, skilled craftsmen. They were grunt labor. Sometimes even slaves. Joseph was at best a low-level construction worker. Nothing more.

Part of the reason we know this is because of their income level. Oh, no, we don't have Mary and Joseph's W-2's. But we have the next best thing. Luke 2:24 says that when the couple went to the temple to have Jesus circumcised, they brought two doves for the required sacrifice.

A pair of doves was allowed as an appropriate sacrifice only to the very poorest individuals in Israelite society. If you had any money at all, you were to buy a lamb or a goat. But no, Mary and Joseph could only afford two meager pigeons.

Then again, there's no reason we should have expected somebody wealthy. Neither Joseph's hometown of Bethlehem, nor his current residence of Nazareth, were anything special. These were not thriving metropolises of commerce and culture.

Bethlehem was a tiny village buried in the mountains outside of Jerusalem. Nazareth, an equally small farming town far to the north in Galilee. It's no wonder that Mary wanted to stick around in Jerusalem to help out her pregnant cousin. Why would she want to go back? As Nathaniel said when he was first called to be a disciple, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

If we're really being honest with ourselves, we each have had 10 times the quality of life that Jesus had. We've had educational opportunities and job opportunities and food on the table every day and cars and smartphones and luxuries the likes of which Mary and Joseph couldn't have even imagined. We worry about things like health insurance and retirement funds, but Jesus died so poor he couldn't even afford his own grave.

And none of this would matter that much if it weren't for the way that we abuse this blessing we've been given. We have so many opportunities and so much to give, and yet time after time the church struggles with budgets and scrounges for volunteers.

Do you know why the early church was persecuted so harshly by the Roman Emperors? There are several reasons, but among them was the fact that they felt threatened. The early Christian church had pooled together so much money and was helping the poor in their communities in so many ways, the Roman government decided it was safer to simply kill them and steal their money rather than try to compete with them.

That's right. The church embarrassed the Roman Empire with its generosity. They looked at that song of Mary and said, "We are God people! We should exalt those of humble estate. We should fill the hungry with good things. We should help those in need."

And so the poor didn't look to the government to pay for a doctor. They looked to the Christians. Widows didn't look to the government to pay for fuel to heat their homes and cook their food. They looked to the Christians. Orphans didn't look to the government for the basics of food and shelter and clothing. They looked to the Christians.

And what would those Christians see if they looked at us today? Sure, they'd see the luxuries. But I think they'd often see what God often sees: impoverished souls. Bodies strengthened by food. But faith weakened by laziness.

And yet, for all that God looks down and sees what is wrong with the church today, he also looks down with compassion. He looks down and says, "I don't care how impoverished your soul has become. I don't care how weak your faith is today. I sent my Son to become the poorest among you so that you might know the richness of my love."

"I sent him to be the humility that you lack. I sent him to know the poverty that you ignore. I sent him to show you the mercy I promised."

He showed Mary herself that same mercy. Just as Mary had no name or family to set her apart to be the mother of our Lord, so also Mary had said and done nothing that set her apart to receive God's salvation. Contrary to what the average Roman Catholic will tell you, Mary was a sinner just like you and me. She had known selfishness and pride. Anger and idolatry.

We know she was a sinner because she herself confesses that she needs a savior. "*My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.*" And yet, God has been mindful of the humble state of His servants. He has acted not because of Mary's thoughts, words, and deeds. He has acted in spite of them. He has shown mercy.

And His mercy has extended from generation to generation. From Abraham's generation to Mary's generation to our generation. God has sent His Son to all generations. No matter our name. No matter our family. No matter our hometown. No matter our thoughts, words, and deeds.

The Son of God came without a name so that we might be adopted by Baptism into the Holy name of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Son of God came without wealth so that we might inherit the treasures of heaven and the richness of His love. The Son of God came without an education so that we might know the wisdom of his Gospel that is foolishness to the world. The Son of God came without a home so that he might return and prepare a home for us. The Son of God came and gave up His life so that we might live forevermore.

The Son of God came to be everything we aren't. Everything we couldn't be. So that through Him, sinners might be saved. So that through Him, you and I might be saved. Amen.