

St Thomas and St Thomas of the Air Church
Christmas II
January 2, 2022
rmcneely+

The gospel for today gives us a rare glimpse at Joseph,
the foster father of Jesus.

So this being one of them,
let's look at Joseph
and see if there aren't some life lessons for us.

The Bible tells us little of Joseph
prior to his engagement to Mary.
Jesus points us always to his Heavenly Father and never
spoke of Joseph. About the only thing we know from
scripture about Joseph before the engagement
is that he was of the house of David,
the clan of Judah,
the royal clan of the sons of Jacob.
And we know that Joseph worked as a carpenter,
likely making furniture
and occasionally framing doors and windows in
masonry homes and buildings,
wood being a scarce commodity in the Holy Land.

We know from the New Testament accounts that Joseph
was a devout Jew,
making the required pilgrimages to the temple in
Jerusalem.

He is prominent in the Nativity and the early life of Jesus. And he is prominent in the story of Jesus when he was 12 years old speaking with the elders in the Temple.

But beyond that Joseph disappears in the Gospels. He is not mentioned in the accounts of Jesus' earthly ministry

and is not there with Mary in the several New Testament events in which Mary is mentioned (the first miracle at Canaan, the crucifixion); leading to the suggestion that Joseph died sometime after Jesus was 12 and before His ministry began when Jesus was about 30.

Many suggest that Joseph must have been much older than Mary and that he died somewhere in that interval.

Jesus too worked as a carpenter and we can imagine the patience of Joseph to teach his boy the trade.

Joseph seems to have raised Jesus as a father and taught Him all that a boy from Nazareth needed to know to survive into manhood. But that is all logical conjecture. There is no scriptural mention to prove or disprove it.

There are non-biblical suggestions that Joseph had children by a prior wife, but that she died years before the Biblical accounts of Joseph.

We know more of Joseph's character than we do of his life story.

We first meet Joseph after he has been engaged to Mary. He is presented with a great dilemma.

Mary is with a child that Joseph knows is not his.

He cannot help but question her fidelity.

The ramifications are immense.

To go public with the information

would lead to the accusation of adultery

and the automatic sentence

was that Mary would be stoned to death

and with her,

her child would perish.

But it would make Joseph the object of ridicule

if he did not make it public..

The marriage custom of the ancient Hebrews was simple.

The betrothal was announced and several months later the husband came to his fiancé's home and took his bride into his home

where they lived together as husband and wife.

Joseph and Mary had announced their engagement

but had not yet begun to reside together.

Infidelity at this stage of the betrothal

was adultery,

a violation of the 7th commandment

and came with a death sentence.

And a grizzly painful death at that.

Joseph considered his options.

He could go public
or he could divorce her privily,
that is
quietly,
saving her life.

We don't know whether Mary ever told Joseph of the angel
Gabriel and his words to her

that she would conceive of the Holy Ghost.

Mary is said to have kept it all to herself

the Gospels tell us
she pondered it in her heart
and told no one.

That seems to be Mary,

private,
quiet
and contemplative.

As Joseph was troubling over what he should do,
he had a dream.

A dream that changed his life.

An angel appeared to Joseph in the dream.

The angel told Joseph

that the baby that Mary carried was the child of God
and that he should proceed with her as his wife.

The angel also instructed that Joseph should name the child, Jesus (in Hebrew, Yesuah), Jesus in the Greek which meant
God saves us.

Joseph obeyed
and remained betrothed to Mary
despite the potential scandal.

And he named the Baby, Jesus.
And we begin to see a pattern.

Before Herod ordered the murder of the children,
the Holy Innocents,
Joseph had another dream
in which the angel warned him
and told Joseph to flee with the Child and mother
to Egypt,
where Herod could not reach Him.

Egypt, that place of safety:

For the Holy Family

As it had been for another Joseph

The son of Jacob

Another man who had dreams

Another man whose dreams saved mankind

As Egypt had been for the sons of Jacob and the Hebrews
for 400 years.

As it had been for Abraham and Sarah

Joseph obeyed
and the Christ Child
escaped the murders of Herod.

And then there was a third dream.
The Angel informed Joseph of Herod's death
And that it was safe to return to the land of Israel

And so, like Abraham,
Like Joseph
and like all the sons of Jacob
And like Moses,
Joseph left Egypt and took the young Jesus and Mary
in another exodus
and returned to the Promised Land
in fulfillment of all the prophecies.
Joseph made it all possible.

Joseph obeyed. But before the Holy Family arrived,
Joseph learned that Archelaus,
the son of Herod
ruled Bethlehem.

In his final dream he was told to return.

Joseph obeyed
and returned to his own city;

Nazareth
out of the jurisdiction
and eye of Archelaus.

And the prophecy was fulfilled and Jesus was safe.

We all tend to model our lives based upon our parents and others who have influenced us.

Joseph is a great model.

He exhibits everything of a good father.

He is a man of God.

He is obedient to the Word of God,
the law,
the commandments.

Even at some risk to himself,
he followed the word of the Angels.

He saved the life

Of Jesus

when he saved Mary

from stoning

He defended his family from harm.

He provided for them.

He raised a son,

gave him legitimacy,

a trade,

that he could be self-supporting

and he gave the love of a human father.

He cared for and protected his family throughout his life.

No wonder our Roman cousins view him as the patron saint of fatherhood.

The question for us is this:

How well do we measure up to his standard?

How many of us
would have had the courage
to follow the will of God?

How many of us
have that kind of courage today?

Some people trace the moral decline of our society
to the decline of fatherhood
in our society.

Can there be a better role model for fatherhood,
Than Joseph?