

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church  
 First Sunday after Christmas  
 December 31, 2023  
 rmcneely+

Then Joseph . . . did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him

We spend 4 weeks in the solemn contemplation of the coming of Christ

Then we spend a short time in glorious celebration of His birth

But immediately thereafter,

we are given the example of St Stephen, the first martyr,  
 Saint John, the Apostle  
 and then the commemoration of the Holy Innocents,  
 the children murdered by Herod in Bethlehem  
 in a failed effort to extinguish the rise of Jesus.

It is a lot to assimilate in such a short time;

An emotional roller coaster.

But today, the Gospel focuses on Joseph.

And we return to the Nativity Story

But from Joseph's perspective.

Joseph is something of an enigma.

He speaks not a word in the Bible

We know nothing about his life before his betrothal to Mary

And he vanishes without a trace and without fanfare

After the story of Jesus being lost

for three days when He was 12 years old.

Yet, Joseph was central to the life of Jesus.

And one of the reasons that Jesus survived childhood

To be able to reach the Cross

And our salvation.

Even before Jesus was born,  
    Joseph faced a life altering decision,  
    A crisis actually  
Can we imagine the conversation between Joseph and Mary  
    When she told him of the Child she carried?

Joseph knew he could be the father of the child.  
Could Mary's story of the Angel, the circumstances of the  
conception  
    The Fatherhood of the child  
    Be believed?  
Could any man accept such a thing?

The consequences were life altering.  
    The embarrassment of it when family and friends found out.  
    The shame brought to Joseph's and Mary's family  
    The potential for prosecution  
        It was a prima facia case of adultery.  
        For which the sentence was death by stoning.  
It would mean the death of Mary  
    And the death of the unborn Child.  
    There would be no Cross  
    No salvation for the world.

Joseph had few options.  
    He could renounce Mary for her infidelity  
        Essentially divorce her.  
        That would expose her adultery.  
    He could proceed as if the Child were his.  
        Do nothing.  
        Let people believe the Child was his.  
        That would expose both of them for immorality  
        But would save the life of the Child and Mary.

While contemplating his dilemma,  
Joseph had the first of a number of dreams in which  
he was visited by an angel of God.

The Angel, Gabriel told Joseph not to fear taking Mary for his wife  
Further, the Son of God, would be named Jesus  
Yeshua in Hebrew  
Meaning “God Saves”.

Joseph obeyed the instruction  
Saving the Christ Child,  
the first time but he would do so again.

He took Mary to Bethlehem  
Where the days were accomplished  
And she brought forth a son, the Christ Child.  
Fulfilling the prophecy  
A virgin will conceive.  
He will be born in the City of David  
And be of the house and lineage of David.

Not long thereafter there was a new threat.  
Herod ordered his troops  
to kill all the children of two years or younger  
in the town of Bethlehem.

The Holy Family had to escape.  
In yet another dream  
Joseph was forewarned of the slaughter  
And he took them to Egypt  
to safety  
Just as another Joseph and another dreamer  
Was taken to Egypt for safety.  
And as all the sons of Jacob fled a drought  
To the safety of Egypt.

And so, Joseph saved the Christ Child a second time  
This time from the murderous intentions of Herod.

In yet another dream the angel of the Lord appeared telling Joseph  
That it was safe to return to Judah.  
Joseph took the Holy Family to Nazareth  
Where they set up housekeeping to raise a family.  
And Joseph fulfilled another prophecy  
“and He shall be called a Nazarene”.

Here Joseph supported the Family as a carpenter  
And taught the trade to Jesus  
That He would be self-sustaining  
and able to provide for Mary.

We catch our last glimpse of Joseph as he makes the annual trek to  
Jerusalem at the Passover.  
Jesus is 12 years old now  
And already showing His prowess  
among the elders of the temple.

Then Joseph vanishes from scripture and from recorded history.  
The most important Step-Father ever.

We have learned a good deal about Joseph.  
He is a man of God  
Obedient to God's will.  
Devout.  
Observant of the Jewish customs and traditions;  
Every obligation of the faith.  
He is a diligent worker and father.  
Protector of the family  
Supporter of the family.  
He is a father to Jesus in every way but biologically  
A mentor. A teacher. A guide. An example.

Is it any wonder that our Roman Catholic cousins  
Have named Joseph the patron saint of fatherhood?

We need Joseph and his example dearly today.  
Sociologists and psychologists tell us  
fatherhood is in steep decline in our society.  
We can only speculate as to the cause.

Today, 2 out of 5 children grow up without a father.  
Children without a father account for 90% of all homeless  
And runaway kids.  
71% of the kids who drop out of high school did not have a father  
in their household.  
63% of all youth suicide victims grew up without a father.

I was shocked to learn of a recent study that found  
some 90% of the men in US prisons  
grew up in a household that had no father.

Our Country has never been so desperate for fatherhood.  
It is clear that God's plan for us has been short-circuited.  
And we are living the consequences.

So the time has never been more right for a return to the character  
of a man like Joseph.

The Church has been pointing to his life  
Work and  
Example  
For over 500 years.  
Can we hear it?

