



St Joseph His Life and Mission

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CONTENTS

Introduction	2
The Annunciation	5
The Marriage of Joseph and Mary	6
A typical Jewish marriage	8
Joseph's dilemma	10
The Nativity	12
The Circumcision and Naming of Jesus	12
The Presentation in the Temple	13
The Flight into Egypt	13
The Boy Jesus in the Temple	15
When did Joseph die?	17
The Holiness of Saint Joseph	19
The Cult of Saint Joseph	22
Conclusion	26
Bibliography	27
END NOTES	29

ST JOSEPH
HIS LIFE AND MISSION

An Essay by

John D Miller



Introduction

Though prayers to Saint Joseph featured in my life I had never paid great attention to him. I had learnt the night prayer to Jesus, Mary and Joseph for assistance ‘in my last agony’ when at school aged eight. In later life I had developed the habit of asking St Joseph’s help with practical matters such as problems with the car or computer. It was a reference to St Joseph during an Advent retreat in December 2016 that prompted me to explore his life and mission in more detail. The retreat master mentioned two things about St Joseph which intrigued me: within the Holy Family Joseph held ‘a primacy of authority’ while Mary held ‘a primacy of love’¹ and secondly that a recent mystic had experienced inner locutions from St Joseph indicating that he had been sanctified in the womb. A search of the Internet on Sister Ephrem Neuzil confirmed that St Joseph had reportedly said to her that he had been freed from original sin soon after his conception. These matters deserved more study. The search spread to other articles on the life of this saint and the gathering of much data with a desire to correlate it and share it.

The aim of this study is to examine references to Joseph, the spouse of Mary of Nazareth, in the gospels, in the early Christian apocryphal writings, the private revelations of some recognised mystics and the magisterial documents of the Church to determine his role and mission in the history of salvation.

The little we know for certain about the life of St Joseph comes from the gospels of Matthew (1:1-17) and Luke (3:23-38)². However these canonical Gospels are silent about many aspects of the life of Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin and St Joseph. The natural curiosity of the early Christians eager for more detail was to some extent satisfied by quasi-scriptural writings emulating the books of the New Testament referred to as the *apocrypha* (hidden). The apocrypha of Christian origin include works produced by both catholic and heretical writers, the latter from various schools of Gnosticism during the 2nd and 3rd centuries. They were not accepted by the Church as being inspired works.

The Christian apocryphal literature gives us many stories about Joseph some aspects of which may have been based on fact passed on in the oral tradition and elaborated on over time. Among the apocrypha with references to Joseph are: the Gospel of James, the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, the Infancy Gospel of St

Thomas, the Gospel of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, the History of Joseph the Carpenter and the Life of the Virgin and Death of Joseph.

Private revelations are another source for reflection on the life of Christ, His Mother and St Joseph. Visions and apparitions are nothing new in the history of the People of God, but the Church is firm in its belief that messages received during apparitions can add nothing to the public deposit of faith which ended with the death of the last apostle and the faithful are under no obligation to believe in any 'private' revelation. When such a revelation is false the Church will clearly say so. Until the Church is convinced that it is of supernatural origin it will give no approval and when it is convinced will simply say that it is worthy of belief without any obligation to do so. However we should give careful consideration to those which the Church has discerned to be of supernatural origin. Obedience to the Catholic Church has always been the 'litmus test' that the Church uses for discerning the authenticity of a mystic or visionary and their alleged private revelations.

Jesus told his apostles '*... the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.*' Jn 14:26. As the Christian community reflected and prayed about the Sacred Scriptures in the light of Sacred Tradition it came to understand better the implications of Our Lord's teaching and in the fullness of time would respond to controversy or a special need, by exercising its charism of discernment and define its teaching. The Church has come to accept the principle of the development of doctrine under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. So we look to the magisterial documents to learn the mind of the Church regarding matters of faith.

There are two significant Papal documents regarding St Joseph: Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter, *Quamquam pluries*, On Devotion to St Joseph, (1889) and John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Redemptoris custos*, (Guardian of The Redeemer), On the Person and Mission of St Joseph in the Life of Christ and of The Church (1989). Both reflect on the life and mission of St Joseph providing an excellent overview. The mind of the Church may also be discerned in its official Liturgy. For example, in the Preface for the Solemnity of Joseph, Husband of Mary (19 March), where the role of St Joseph is summed up in fifty words.

The Annunciation



When the angel appeared to Mary he told her *'you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David.* (Lk 1:31-32).

In order to establish the legitimacy of the descent of Jesus from King David we are given two genealogies of Joseph, the supposed father of Jesus and legal head of the Holy Family. Matthew traces his line of descent from Abraham and mentions King David in verse 6. Luke traces the lineage of Joseph back to Adam and includes David in verse 31. The ancestry of Jesus is being traced through the male line as was the custom. Luke tells us that Mary is a relative of Elizabeth *'a descendant of Aaron'* (Lk 1:5), but Aaron is not included in either of the genealogies. It would seem that Mary is not a direct descendant of David, but is the daughter of a Levite.

There is one problem in that according to Matthew (1:16) Joseph was the son of Jacob, whereas Luke (3:23) records Heli as his father. Various possible explanations have been suggested by scholars, but cannot be demonstrated with certainty. The two genealogies do show us God's providential plan for the Messiah in the history of salvation and affirm Jesus as being a *'son of David'* in a full legal sense.

It is thought that Joseph was born in Bethlehem, the city of David, but at the time of the Annunciation he was settled in Nazareth a small town some way off the main highway. We learn from Matthew (13:55) and Mark (6:3) that he was a *tektōn* – an artisan craftsman, a wood-worker. He would have been a valued member of an agricultural community making articles such as building frames for small houses, doors, domestic furniture and ploughs. He may also have owned a plot of land growing vegetables and raising chickens or sheep.

During the time of Jesus the city of Sepphoris 6 Km north of Nazareth was being rebuilt by Herod Antipas, the governor, who gave it the new name of Autocratoris – Josephus the historian referred to it as the *'Ornament of the Galilee'*.³ Joseph, as a skilled craftsman, may well have found additional work there and may be Jesus too in due time.

In Jewish society there were three main levels: the rich – the landowners and entrepreneurs; the poor who worked on the land or at a variety of trades; and the destitute who had neither land nor job, and survived by begging. Joseph and his family belonged to the artisan class – they remained poor because of heavy taxation, but never without means.

The Marriage of Joseph and Mary



The marriage of Mary and Joseph probably took place at Nazareth. They were already betrothed when the Angel Gabriel made his announcement to Mary, but the marriage formalities had not been formally completed – Mary had not been taken into her husband’s house. Matthew 1:18–21 tells us very clearly what happened from Joseph’s point of view:

... When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

If Mary’s pregnancy had been the result of sexual intercourse with a man other than her husband she would have been liable to being stoned. Joseph had a duty to report the circumstance to the authorities, but being a righteous man he decided ‘to dismiss her quietly’, that is, to divorce her.

Stories concerning Mary’s betrothal and Joseph’s previous marital history are found in the apocryphal writings and those of various mystics. One answer to the problem raised by the biblical reference to the ‘brothers’ of Jesus and a belief in Mary’s perpetual virginity was that Joseph was an elderly widower who had children from a previous marriage and who was unlikely to conceive further children.

The Infancy Gospel of James (n. 8-9) was perhaps the first and most influential of the apocryphal gospels dating from AD 140-70. It tells how when the Virgin Mary who had been raised in the Temple from the age of three reached the age of twelve, the council of priests decided it was time she should be married off and leave the temple. The high priest entered the Holy of Holies to pray about it. An angel of the Lord came to him and told him that he should gather all the widowers from among the people. Each was to bring his staff with him, *and to whomsoever the Lord shall show a sign, his wife shall she be*. Joseph promptly responded to the call of the herald, entered the temple and presented himself with the others to the high priest who took up their staffs and went off to pray. Coming back he returned the staffs to their owners, but there was no sign in them until Joseph took up his staff: ... *Joseph took his rod last; and, behold, a dove came*

out of the rod, and flew upon Joseph's head. And the priest said to Joseph, You have been chosen by lot to take into your keeping the virgin of the Lord. But Joseph refused, saying: I have children, and I am an old man, and she is a young girl. The high priest warned Joseph saying 'fear the Lord your God'. And Joseph was afraid, and took her into his keeping.

A later story suggests that when he was forty Joseph had married a woman called Melcha. They had two daughters and four sons, the youngest of whom was James the Less, 'the Lord's brother'. A year after his wife's death, by which time Joseph was ninety years old, the Temple priests were seeking a suitable man to be the spouse of the young teenage Mary. Joseph was among the candidates and a miracle manifested God's choice.⁴

Alternatively Joseph is presented as a mature adult male who had taken a vow of chastity. We find such an account in the writings of the mystic, Mary of Agreda (1602-65), who records this private revelation in her book *The Mystical City of God*. Mary of Nazareth speaking to Joseph says:

At a tender age, ... I consecrated myself to God by a perpetual vow of chastity in body and soul; this I am and Him I acknowledge as my Spouse and Lord, with fixed resolve to preserve for Him my chastity. I beseech thee, my master, to help me in fulfilling this vow, while in all other things I will be thy servant, willing to work for the comfort of thy life as long as mine shall last. Yield, my spouse, to this resolve and make a like resolve, in order that, offering ourselves as an acceptable sacrifice to our eternal God, He may receive us in the odour of sweetness and bestow on us the eternal goods for which we hope.

Among the number was Joseph, a native of Nazareth, and then living in Jerusalem; for he was one of the descendants of the royal race of David. He was then thirty-three years of age, of handsome person and pleasing countenance, but also of incomparable modesty and gravity; above all he was most chaste in thought and conduct, and most saintly in all his inclinations. From his twelfth year he had made and kept the vow of chastity. He was related to the Virgin Mary in the third degree, and was known for the utmost purity of his life, holy and irreprehensible in the eyes of God and of men.

In *The Poem of the Man-God*¹ the mystic Maria Valtorta (d.1961) records her vision of Joseph with the men who have gathered in the temple and from among whom one will be chosen as husband of the Holy Virgin. He appeared to be a

¹ *The Poem of The Man-God* was placed on the Index of Forbidden Books in 1959. Since Dec 1966 the Index no longer has the force of ecclesiastical positive law, but retains its moral force. We may not take Maria Valtorta's writings to be divinely inspired revelation. However the book reads well, and even if it is fiction and may contain some errors, the author does have some useful insights. Maria's only resources were the Bible and the Catechism of Trent.

handsome man in his early thirties with short, curly, dark brown hair and beard, and rosy brown cheeks. His eyes were dark; his appearance serious though somewhat sad. His was simply dressed in a light brown garment.

Each man had brought a tree branch, his walking staff. These were collected and taken by the High Priest into the sanctuary where he prayed for guidance. When they were returned it was found that one of them had miraculously blossomed. The High Priest announced that the Lord had spoken, that God had appointed Joseph, of Jacob of Bethlehem, of the tribe of David, a carpenter, to be the husband of Mary and ordered Joseph to come forward.

Joseph when told that Mary wished to inform him of a vow she has made replied that he would place his strength and authority at her service, and no sacrifice would be too great. And they were introduced.

Joseph made a long speech telling Mary all that he would do in preparation for the marriage, but added that he had not expected to be chosen as he was a Nazarite and had obeyed only because the High Priest had ordered him to do so. Joseph then proffered his branch to Mary saying, *with it I offer You my heart, that, like it, has bloomed up till now only for the Lord and is now blooming for You, my spouse.* Mary took the branch and encouraged by Joseph's disclosure that he was a Nazirite says:

Also I am all of the Lord, Joseph. ... Since My childhood I have consecrated Myself to the Lord. I know this is not the custom in Israel, but I heard a voice requesting My virginity as a sacrifice of love for the coming of the Messiah. Israel has been waiting for Him for such a long time! It is not too much to forgo the joy of being a mother for that!

Joseph responded saying that he will join his sacrifice to hers and that together they will love the Eternal Father so much with their chastity that He will send His Saviour to the world and will allow them to see His Light shining in the world.

Come, Mary. Let us go before His House and take an oath that we shall love each other as the angels do.

This account of the mutual vows of virginity within a legal marriage is beautifully and sensitively presented.

A typical Jewish marriage⁵

For the Jews marriage is a contractual bond in which a man and a woman come together in a relationship in which God was directly involved with the expectation that it would be fruitful in the procreation of children for in the beginning God had charged the first man and woman to 'Be fruitful and multiply.' (Gen. 1:28).

There were two phases to the marriage process: *kiddushin* (betrothal) and *nisuin* (the actual wedding with the introduction of the wife into the groom's home).

Before the *kiddushin* the two families would meet; a *mohar* would be agreed and a contract drawn up. The *mohar* or bride-wealth is paid to the bride's parents in acknowledgement of the husband's debt to them.

The *kiddushin* ceremony was simple. The families of the betrothed get together as witnesses. As a pledge of marriage, the man gave his betrothed an object of value, such as a ring saying,

‘With this ring You are my betrothed, according to the law of Moses and of Israel’.

Once *kiddushin* is complete, the woman is legally the wife of the man though they do not live together at this time. The relationship created can only be dissolved by death or divorce. Should the wife be unfaithful during this time it would be treated as adultery punishable by being stoned to death.

The actual wedding – the *nisuin* – would normally take place a year after the betrothal during which time the groom would be preparing a place for them to live in and find the means for the wedding banquet which normally lasted many days, and concluded with the payment of the *mohar*.

For the *nisuin* the bride is dressed in all her finery together with ten girls dressed in white and with lamps in hand, wait at her home for the arrival of the groom's party. The groom with his attendants (cf. Mt 9:15) and musicians proceed to the house of the bride to conduct her in procession back to his house (or his father's house) accompanied by music and dance.

There followed a special rite. The father of the bride takes the right hand of his daughter and places it in the right hand of the bridegroom, saying:

May the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob be with you and unite you.

May His blessing descend upon you and permit you to see your children and grandchildren down to the fourth generation.

One of the elders then invokes the blessing of God upon the couple's relatives and offers a cup of wine to the bridegroom who proposes the toasts. After draining the cup, the bridegroom throws it to the ground, tramples on it and makes an oath to remain faithful until such time as the fragments of the cup should be reunited. The marriage contract would then be read.

After sunset, the bridegroom, accompanied by the guests, leads his bride into her new home where the nuptial banquet commences. The marriage celebrations would usually continue for a week.

Joseph's dilemma⁶

Joseph was faced with a great dilemma when he discovered that *before they came together she was found with child* (Matt 1:18-19). He knew he was not responsible for her condition. Had she become pregnant by another man? Now Joseph was a good man and felt he knew Mary well enough to know that it was most unlikely that she would be guilty of adultery. If she was guilty and he were to divorce her publicly as the law allowed it would put her to shame and make her liable to be stoned to death. Should he take her into his home it would seem like consent and complicity.



He had a deep inner conviction that Mary was innocent. Could it be that she had become pregnant by a divine intervention? If that were so would he dare to live with one so holy that God had worked a great miracle in her – a virginal conception?

Matthew tells us that *being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, [he] planned to dismiss her quietly*; that is, he concluded that he would neither discredit her nor expose himself to ridicule by living with her if she were not good. He would leave her and go away secretly, so that nobody could ask him why. May be that solution might have been a separation rather than a divorce.

As Joseph continued to discern God's will *behold an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary, your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit* (Matt 1:20). He was reassured and when *Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife.* (v 24)

Mary and Joseph

Adrienne von Speyr¹ reflects on the relationship between Mary and Joseph. In regard to their betrothal she sees them as two people who want to serve God and belong to each other. What they have in common is a will to serve God out of pure love.

At that time and in that culture marriage was for a woman a solemn duty. For Mary, surrender to God's will and surrender to the will of the spouse given her by God was the same thing. She knows that she is bound to her husband exclusively and in view of the promise of the angel which does not include a

¹ Adrienne (1902-1967) was a Swiss convert, mystic, wife, medical doctor, and author of over sixty books on spirituality and theology. She entered the Church under the direction of the great theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar who remained as her confessor. See Adrienne von Speyr, *The Handmaid of the Lord*.

physical union with Joseph, she excludes all other human relationships which could be explained by a previous vow of virginity.

Hans Urs von Balthasar affirms a number of the Fathers of the Church and mediaeval theologians hold the opinion that in paradise bodily fruitfulness would not be opposed to consecrated virginity. But for Joseph who is subject to the consequences of original sin there is a contradiction between the married state and virginity. For him betrothal is a prelude to a normal human marriage. Adrienne does not speculate that Joseph, a chaste and righteous man, had previously vowed virginity, but sees that Joseph made a renunciation and thereby strengthened his masculinity. He stands by Mary as a man who knows his own strength.

Joseph freely chose marriage in obedience to God's will. In doing so he gave his assent, his 'fiat' just as Mary did. In that marriage he will experience the real love of a woman, but maintain a state of abstinence. His love for Mary is a fully human love in God. Informed by the angel that '*the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit*' Joseph makes a profound renunciation – a renunciation not a disappointment, for a disappointment would imply concupiscence.

When Joseph discovers that his bride is pregnant he decides with a heavy heart to divorce Mary secretly in order to remain obedient to the law. Mary remains silent for she possesses a secret with God. In her relationship with Joseph her pregnancy is the last thing she could tell him about for she is a virgin both physically and spiritually. Her modesty forbids her to speak.

The moment comes when Joseph is about to act and an angel comes to explain. God ends his silence. Yet a silence remains – the mystery of the incarnation. In their reverence for each other Mary and Joseph maintain their silence. Mary's mystery must be preserved for her commitment to God is profoundly deep and takes precedence.

God is central in this marriage and Mary is bound by obedience. This demands a renunciation of his sexual rights on the part of Joseph – an obedience which he remains free to obey or not. After their betrothal both live in a special obedience to God. Whereas Mary received her personal message in the vision of an angel, Joseph receives his angelic message in a dream which is ordered to his duties to Mary and the Child. Joseph gave his assent and responded immediately. Joseph and Mary participate in the one mission which was conceived in the mind of God and decreed in the one eternal motion of the Divine Will.

In betrothing Mary, Joseph took on a particular task: to be faithful to his bride and to care for her Divine Child as a father, and to remain completely at God's disposal. His mission was quite clear. Mary's *fiat mihi* is a total abandonment to the will of God; she desires only that which God desires. It is

an act of love and obedience in contra-distinction to that of Eve. And Joseph is drawn into this obedience.

Joseph brings *poverty* into the relationship – it is his dowry. With his carpenters skill the family will never be destitute, but they will never be rich; this is ensured by their circumstances – their flight into Egypt and return to Nazareth, and the taxation policies of the Roman governors. Mary brings *obedience* and then *chastity* is brought by both and unites the two.



The Nativity

In obedience to the decree of Caesar Augustus Joseph took Mary to Bethlehem to be enrolled in the census. There they found *there was no room for them in the inn* – the local caravanserai (Lk 2:1-7), but found shelter in a cave where animals were usually stabled. What must have been Joseph’s thoughts as he pondered on the birth of the Saviour, the coming of the shepherds, the visit of the wise men and at the events during the presentation of Jesus in the Temple – we can only guess.

In traditional icons of the Nativity Joseph is usually present, but separated from the main event. He seems to be meditating and somewhat puzzled. Facing him there is sometimes a strange figure in blue said to represent Satan who is raising fresh doubts in Joseph’s mind. May be in this situation Joseph represents the ordinary man who has difficulty in accepting the supernatural reality of the mystery of the incarnation.⁷

The Circumcision and Naming of Jesus

In Genesis 17:12 God commanded Abraham: ‘Throughout your generations every male among you shall be circumcised when he is eight days old’ as a sign of the covenant between God and His people. Luke 2:21 records the fact that in obedience to the Torah and Jewish custom Joseph as father of the family saw to it that Jesus was duly circumcised and given the name ‘Jesus’. In doing so Joseph performed his first official religious duty. In Christian tradition the circumcision of Jesus was the occasion on which Jesus first shed His sacred blood for our salvation.

The Presentation in the Temple

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.” Luke 22:2-24.



Joseph fulfilled his obligation to the precept of Exodus 13:13-16 that every first-born son was to be consecrated to God. Pope John Paul II explains it this way:

Represented in the first-born is the people of the covenant, ransomed from slavery in order to belong to God. Here too, Jesus – who is the true ‘price’ of ransom – not only ‘fulfils’ the Old Testament rite, but at the same time transcends it, since he is not a subject to be redeemed, but the very author of redemption.⁸

In a traditional ceremony, the father brings the child to the priest, recites a formula indicating that this is the mother’s firstborn son and he has come to redeem him as commanded in the Torah. The redemption price of five silver shekels, or a lamb, or for the poor ‘two young pigeons’ is handed over. The priest declares that the redemption price has been received and accepted in place of the child who is then blessed, and returned to the parents.

The Flight into Egypt⁹



Immediately before this narrative Matthew tells us how a group of ‘wise men from the East’ had come to worship the new-born king of the Jews. Naively they enquired of Herod where he might be found and were directed to Bethlehem.

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” And he rose and took the child and his mother by night, and departed to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt have I called my son.” (Matt 2:13–15).

The phrase ‘when they had departed’ would suggest that this happened the night after the departure of the Magi. The message was clear and urgent, and Joseph’s response was immediate – ‘he rose and took the child and his mother by night, and departed to Egypt’. He had learnt to trust his prophetic ‘dreams’ and demonstrates his prompt obedience to God. Joseph was to have two more ‘dreams’:

But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.”

And he rose and took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus reigned over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth. (Mt 2:19–23).

God was still in charge and Joseph faithful to his mission.

It was about 40 miles, a three day journey, to the Egyptian border and safety from Herod yet still hazardous to travellers in a foreign land.

The gospels do not tell us where the Holy Family stayed in Egypt, but there are many ancient legends about happenings on the way to Egypt and some thirty place names associated with their stay in that country. If they had indeed visited all those places it is estimated that their journey would have covered 1243 miles over a period of 3 years.

The Coptic Church of St Mary in Zeitoun, a busy Cairo suburb built near the route associated with the travels of the Holy Family was the site of many appearances of the Blessed Virgin during the years 1968-71. The visions were witnessed by large crowds – Muslims and Christians alike. Many healings occurred, but there were no messages. It is believed that the Church was built at the prompting of the Mother of God in a dream to a devout Coptic man in 1920, that the church was to be dedicated to her and that she would in fifty years’ time bless it in a singular way.¹⁰

A modern miracle is reported to have occurred at *Maady* a suburb of Cairo where there is an historic church dedicated to the Blessed Mother, built on the banks of the River Nile commemorating the spot from which the Holy Family embarked. It is known as ‘Al-Adaweya’, the Virgin’s Church ‘of the Ferry’. *Maady* derives from an Arabic word meaning ‘the crossing point’.

On 12 March 1976 a Bible of unknown origin was carried by the waters of the Nile to the bank below the Church where it was found opened at Isaiah 19:25 declaring: ‘*Blessed be Egypt my people*’. That Bible remains in a glass case in the Sanctuary of the Church for all to see.

The Boy Jesus in the Temple



The final incident relating to Joseph as recorded in the Gospels is the anxious quest for the twelve year old Jesus who remained in Jerusalem after their annual Passover visit. (Lk 2:41-51). ‘*Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety*’ said his mother. It is thought that Luke may have met Mary and learnt about the early life of Jesus from

her.

The story is well known as we meditate on it in the fifth Joyful Mystery of the Rosary and the third Mystery of the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows – the ‘agony and the ecstasy’ we might say and particularly for Joseph. In the above quotation Mary affirms Joseph in his role as ‘father’. It is he who carries the responsibility and so his anxiety must have been acute and the relief great when Jesus was finally found.

The parents went up to Jerusalem for the festival every year we are told. The obligation was on those who lived a day’s journey from Jerusalem whereas Nazareth was a three day journey. Nor did it apply to women and children under the age of twelve – this may have been Jesus’ first time.

In the narrative we have the first recorded words of Jesus and the story is about Jesus. What was so special about this visit to the Temple – the House of God – when he was aged twelve?

For a modern Jewish boy his Bar Mitzvah ceremony is a very important occasion. According to the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*¹¹, *bar/bat mitzvah* is ‘a term denoting both the attainment of religious and legal maturity as well as the occasion at which that status is formally assumed for boys at the age of thirteen plus one day and for girls at twelve plus one day.’ Associated with puberty, it marks a coming of age and evolved as a ritual ceremony from the 14th century onwards marking his or her first formal participation in the synagogue service.

By *bar mitzvah* one means the status of one who is obligated to do the *mitzvah*. *Bar* meaning ‘son’ (*bat* – ‘daughter’) and *mitzvah* – ‘commandment’ or ‘law’ by which is understood the precepts found in the Torah and the 613 rabbinic laws; hence ‘Son of the Law’.

From that time on he becomes a full member of the community and assumes full responsibility for himself. Now he may be counted as one of the ten adult males needed to make up the number necessary for community prayer in the synagogue. He is entitled to wear the *tefillin* or *phylacteries* – two small black leather boxes containing scrolls of parchment inscribed with verses from the Torah worn one on the arm and one on the forehead by male observant Jews during weekday morning prayers – and may be called during a synagogue service

to recite a blessing over the Torah or read from the sacred Scroll. From now on He is obliged to keep the prescribed fasts.

Talmudic sources make it clear that while a child was obligated to perform these rituals once he had attained the specified age if, however, he understood their significance prior to that time and was considered capable of performing them, he could do so, even though he had not yet reached the age of majority. The Talmud (Sukkah 42a) explicitly states,

‘If a minor knows how to wrap himself in the *tallit*, [the prayer shawl], he is subject to the obligation ... if he knows how to look after *tefillin*, his father must acquire them for him.’

As the custom of a formal Bar Mitzvah ceremony is of relatively recent origin it is highly improbable that Jesus would have had a Bar Mitzvah ceremony. But the question remains: had Jesus become aware of a change of his status within the Jewish community during his time in the Temple? Had he assumed the status of *bar mitzvah*?

The fact that His mother and father found him ‘*sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions; and all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers*’ would suggest that Jesus fully understood the significance of the obligations of an adult male in the Jewish assembly by the age of twelve years and would be considered capable of performing them.

When his mother asks ‘*Son, why have you treated us so?*’ his answer ‘*Did you not know I must be in my Father’s house?*’ (RSV, Lk 2:49) or as the Authorised Version says ‘*about my Father’s business?*’ would suggest that he had indeed become *bar mitzvah*.

At that time a Jewish child was considered to have three teachers: the mother was the child’s teacher until weaned, the father until he reached puberty, and the Torah with all its laws, was the third and final teacher for each person. Therefore the Bar Mitzvah ceremony formalizes the change from the teachings of one’s earthly father to the heavenly Father – that is truly His Father’s ‘business’. Furthermore the boy is required to continue to study and learn from the Torah with the aid of teachers hence Jesus was found *sitting among the teachers*.

Was Jesus being disobedient by remaining in his ‘Father’s house’? If indeed Jesus had attained the status of *bar mitzvah* his putative father would have been relieved of his responsibility for the further religious development of his foster son and Jesus’ loyalty and obedience would now be directed to his heavenly Father especially while in his ‘Father’s house’. But then we learn that *he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them*. On return to the family house in Nazareth, Jesus’ loyalty and obedience is once more to the head of the family. Joseph had been chosen and appointed by God as the ‘father’ of the family and in that situation Joseph had a primacy of authority and Mary

a primacy of love.¹² Jesus would continue to find God the Father's will for himself mediated by his foster father.¹

When did Joseph die?

According to the *History of Joseph the Carpenter*¹³ Joseph died aged 111 on twenty-sixth of the month Abib [July] A.D. 18 or 19, but there is no historical record. The probability is that he died and was buried at Nazareth, but legend has it that he was buried in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, that is, the Kidron Valley which lies between the Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives – the supposed site of the Last Judgement as suggested by Joel 3:2:

I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat, and I will enter into judgment with them there, ...

It is generally assumed that Joseph died before the beginning of Jesus' public life.

Extracts from 'The History of Joseph The Carpenter'

The writer represents our Saviour as seated with his disciples on the Mount of Olives, and repeating to them the story which is here told. In this account Joseph was 90 years old when he was betrothed to Mary.

The old man arrived at the advanced age of 111 yet remained sound in mind and body. But an angel of the Lord made known to him that the hour of death was drawing near. Fear and great trouble of mind came over him. But he arose and went to Jerusalem, and having entered the temple of the Lord and poured out his prayers there before the sanctuary, he said:

O, God! judge most just, who wilt judge mortals in justice and equity, and repay to every one according to his works, my Lord and God! Let thy mercy be with me, and enlighten thou my way that I may attain to thee: for thou art a fount abounding in all good and glory for ever. Amen!

Jesus went in to see Joseph and found him to be greatly troubled. After greeting him he asked 'how art thou? And he answered, 'verily, the pain and fear of death already surrounded me; but as soon as I heard thy voice, my soul found rest.'

Mary entered the place where Joseph was and Jesus sat at his feet. As death approached and all Gehenna with it, Jesus repulsed Death and all the host of followers which attended him. Jesus went on to address the Father of all mercy and ask that Michael, the prince of angels, and Gabriel, the herald of light, come to bring the soul of Joseph to the Good Father. As his body lay prostrate and lifeless Jesus closed his eyes and mouth.

¹ I have been unable to find confirmation from scholarly or magisterial writing for this hypothesis re the Bar Mitzvah of Jesus, but it seems plausible.

Jesus addressed Joseph saying: the odour of death shall not prevail in thee, nor shall worm ever proceed from thy body, but it shall remain entire and uncorrupted, until the banquet of a thousand years.

The chief men of the city came to the place where the body of Joseph was laid and they brought with them mourning garments to wrap it in according to Jewish custom. Jesus embraced the body of Joseph and wept over it. The sepulchre was opened and Joseph's body was laid beside the body of his father Jacob.

Another version of Joseph's death is found in the Mystical City of God by the Venerable Mother Mary of Jesus of Agreda (1602-1665)¹⁴

In a beautiful account Mary of Agreda tells us how Joseph had suffered from his infirmities for eight years and was approaching death. During this time his soul had been purified in the 'crucible of affliction and of divine love'. His Spouse assisted and cared for him, and when she perceived that the end was near she came to Jesus asking for his help 'so that he may depart in peace and in the certain hope of the eternal reward ...' Jesus agreed saying that He would 'assign him a place among the princes of my people¹⁵, so high that he will be the admiration of the angels and will cause them and all men to break forth in highest praise.' For nine days the Son and His Mother never left the bedside of Joseph.

'On the day before he died, being wholly inflamed with divine love on account of these blessings, he was wrapped in an ecstasy which lasted twenty-four hours.' During this event Joseph clearly saw the divine Essence and came to understand the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption, the militant Church and its sacraments. When he 'issued from this ecstasy his face shone with wonderful splendour and his soul was entirely transformed by his vision of the essence of God.'

Joseph asked Jesus to bless him which he did. His Spouse Mary besought her husband to bless her which the man of God did. In humility Joseph asked pardon of his Spouse for all his deficiencies in her service and love and begged her intercession in this hour of his passing away.

Jesus received Joseph in his arms and blessed him saying:

My father, rest in peace and in the grace of thy eternal Father and mine; and to the Prophets and Saints, who await thee in limbo, bring the joyful news of the approach of their redemption.

At these words of Jesus, and reclining in his arms, the most fortunate Joseph expired and the Lord himself closed his eyes.

Mary of Agreda concludes this account by explaining that the true cause of Joseph's death was the intensity of his love, the violence of which had required miraculous assistance by which his natural forces were enabled to withstand the violence of his love during his lifetime. The Lord had suspended this assistance

allowing nature to be overcome by his love so the bonds with which the soul was detained in the body were dissolved and separation of soul from body took place. Love was the real cause of Joseph's death. He died at the age of sixty years and a few days.

The Holiness of Saint Joseph

Mary of Agreda¹⁶ observes that in the case of 'our blessed Patriarch' all the divine favours he received enabled him to grow in holiness so as to be the more worthy of being the spouse of Mary. 'He was to be a miracle of holiness,' and this commenced before birth. The providence of God ensured that he was blessed with a body 'fit for the abode of an exquisite soul and well balanced mind.'¹⁷ 'He was sanctified in the womb of his mother seven months after his conception, and the leaven of sin was destroyed in him for the whole course of his life, never having felt any impure or disorderly movement.'

Joseph was born with a most beautiful and perfect body. 'The Lord hastened in him the use of his reason, perfecting it in his third year.' He came to know God by faith and natural reason so that by the age of seven he was already adult in the use of reason and in holiness. His disposition was kind, loving and affable. He practised the highest forms of prayer, grew in virtue and led an irreproachable life.

When the Blessed Virgin learnt that Joseph was the man chosen by God to be her spouse 'She earnestly besought the Lord to sanctify Joseph and inspire him with most chaste thoughts and desires in conformity with her own.' The Lord listened to her prayer and 'infused into his soul the most perfect habits of all the virtues and gifts.'

Mary of Agreda goes on to say that she had been informed that in view of his great holiness God had conferred on Saint Joseph other privileges – that his intercession was particularly powerful:

- for attaining the virtue of purity;
- for help to overcome sin;
- for increasing love and devotion to Mary;
- for securing the grace of a happy death;
- for inspiring the demons with terror at the mere mention of his name by his clients;
- for gaining health of body and assistance in all kinds of difficulties;
- for securing issue of children in families.

The Blessed Virgin revealed to Mary of Agreda that: 'The whole human race has much undervalued the privileges and prerogatives conceded to my blessed

spouse and they know not what his intercession with God is able to do. I assure thee, my dearest, that he is one of the greatly favoured personages in the divine presence and has immense power to stay the arms of divine vengeance.’

The Sanctification of Joseph in the Womb

In the previous section we learnt from Mary of Agreda that Joseph was sanctified in the womb seven months after his conception and that he led a sinless life. Saint Luke 1:39-45 tells us how Mary brought the newly conceived Saviour to the house of Zechariah and the infant in Elizabeth’s womb leapt for joy from which tradition holds that John was sanctified *in utero* in the sixth month.

A more recent private revelation suggests that Saint Joseph also was sanctified before birth. This comes from Sister Mary Ephrem Neuzil¹⁸ (1916-2000) a member of the congregation of the Sisters of the Precious Blood in Dayton, Ohio. This sister was privileged with apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary who announced herself as *Our Lady of the United States*, from 25 September 1956 onwards.

Sometime shortly after that date, Sister Ephrem received locutions from St Joseph. He revealed to her that immediately after his conception, through the merits of Jesus and because of his exceptional role as Virgin-Father, he was cleansed from the stain of original sin:

My pure heart was from the first moment of existence inflamed with the love for God. Immediately at the moment my soul was cleansed from original sin, grace was infused into it in such abundance that excluding my holy spouse I surpassed the holiness of the highest angel in the angelic choir.

St Joseph revealed to Sister Mary Ephrem that his heart suffered with the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, for he knew beforehand of their passion yet would not be there to console them. He became, in union with his holy spouse, co-redemptor of the human race.

The Holiness of Mary and Joseph

The holiness of Joseph may be better understood in the light of the holiness of Mary which theologians have studied in detail and the Church has defined its position.

The holiness of Mary the Mother of Jesus was never in doubt; she was entitled *Panagia* – the All Holy One – by the Eastern Churches from very early on. That Mary was conceived immaculately, that she never was stained by original sin was debated in the Church from the eleventh century until finally it was defined as a dogma of the Church on 8 December 1854 by Pius IX in his Apostolic Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus*.

We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful.

According to scripture the Virgin of Nazareth was the ‘*highly favoured one*’ of God. The spiritual instinct of the faithful and the Fathers of the early Church led them to believe that the dignity of Mother of the Lord was such that she was second only to God in holiness and purity. Indeed that she was free from all actual sin. John the Baptist had been sanctified in his mother’s womb therefore the Blessed Virgin must have been sanctified before birth. Could it be that Mary was sinless from the moment of her conception?

Augustine’s view of original sin precluded this possibility. Mary was the product of a human sexual union. Original sin is transmitted by propagation therefore Mary was conceived in a state of original sin.¹⁹

Anselm (d. 1109) argued that as sin pertains only to the soul and the will, sin cannot come from the physical conception of the flesh. The weakened human condition at birth is accounted for by an absence of original justice (original grace) which they would have possessed had Adam not sinned.

This separation of sin from the creation of the flesh allowed Eadmer, Anselm’s pupil (d. 1126), to show by analogy that it was possible for God to create a person completely immune from sin. God would not wish to withhold from Mary any good thing that is possible. It was possible for God that Mary should be conceived without original sin and he would have willed it – for God to will something is to accomplish it. So if God willed that Mary should be immaculately conceived then indeed she was.

Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) objected that if Mary had not been conceived in sin she would have had no need of redemption therefore Christ could not have been the perfect universal Saviour. Robert Grosseteste (d. 1253) was the first to suggest the possibility that sin might be prevented. William of Ware in 1293 reasoned that it was possible that God could have preserved Mary from the contagion of original sin by purifying her body before animation. It was fitting for God to do so, He was able to do it, therefore he did it. *Decuit, potuit, ergo fecit.*

Whereas William held to Augustine’s teaching, Duns Scotus (d. 1308) adopted Anselm’s position that original sin is the privation of original justice. In answer to Aquinas, Scotus maintained that Mary as a daughter of Adam needed to be redeemed. If Christ is the perfect and universal redeemer it must be possible that someone be prevented from original sin for to prevent sin is a more perfect act than to save a person from their sin. Applying this to the Blessed Virgin it

can be said that Mary's immaculate conception does not detract from the dignity of Christ and his universal redemption, but guarantees its perfection.

Now that there was a reasonable theological argument to support the celebration of the feast of Mary's conception it became possible for the Magisterium to accept and proclaim a doctrine of the immaculate conception of the Virgin of Nazareth and ultimately its dogmatic definition.

That Mary should be preserved from all stain of original sin is of fundamental importance in that it ensures the perfection of Christ's redemption. Furthermore it was only fitting that the incarnate Son of God should be conceived in a perfectly pure and chaste womb.

Similar arguments may be proposed in the case of Joseph. If John the Baptist was sanctified in the womb – why not Joseph? As the divine mission of Joseph was just as important as that of John may be he too was sanctified before birth. Joseph had been chosen by God from all eternity to be the Spouse of the Blessed Virgin and head of the Holy Family with all the responsibilities that entailed.

An important principle is that when a man is given a particular mission by God he is given all necessary grace to fulfil that duty. To be head of the Holy Family and exercise parental rights over the Son of God required exceptional grace. It was fitting for God to do so, He was able to do it, therefore he did it.

It was fitting that Mary be preserved from all stain of original sin for her intimate role as mother of the Divine Child; Joseph was conceived in original sin and then, it is alleged, he was immediately cleansed from original sin. The Church has not spoken in regard to this concept. We do not have to believe it, but it would be entirely fitting. We accept that Joseph was a very holy man, but the degree of holiness of Mary was of a whole order of magnitude greater than that of her husband.

In the Gospel of Luke 2:51 we are told that after being found in the Temple the twelve year old Jesus *went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them* – to Joseph and Mary. It is unthinkable that the incarnate Son of God should be obedient to a human person who was in any way separated from God, fulfilling his human will rather than God's will. Joseph had been chosen by God to be the head of the family and exercise parental authority. He had been gifted with all necessary grace for this mission and was himself obedient to the heavenly Father in fulfilment of the Divine Will. Thus it was that Jesus would know the Will of His heavenly Father through the head of the family.

The Cult of Saint Joseph²⁰

Joseph was 'a just man'. The fact that he was chosen by God to be the foster-father of Jesus and the spouse of the Virgin Mother is sufficient reason for the Church to give him great honour.

The cult of St Joseph was slow to develop. His feast was kept by the Copts in the early 4th century. There was an oratory to the honour of St Joseph in the great basilica built by St Helena (d. 330) at Bethlehem. A feast of *Joseph the Carpenter* on 20 July is found in a Coptic Calendar of 8th century.

In the West the name of the foster-father of Our Lord is found in the Irish Féilire of St Oengus of 9th century. The feast of St Joseph was celebrated in England before 1100. The first church dedicated to his honour was in Bologna 1129.

Private devotion to St Joseph grew under the influence of St Bernardino of Siena and St Bridget of Sweden (d. 1373). John Gerson of Paris composed an *Office of the Espousals of Joseph* during the Council of Constance (1414) thus promoting the public recognition of the cult of St Joseph. During the pontificate of Sixtus IV (1471-84), the feast of St Joseph (19 March) was added to the Roman Calendar. From that time devotion to St Joseph continued to grow. Pope Benedict XIII added the name of St Joseph to the Litany of the Saints in 1726.

Teresa of Avila chose St Joseph as the Patron of the Reformed order of Carmelites in 1621 and was allowed to celebrate his Patronage on the 3rd Sunday after Easter in 1689. The feast of the *Espousals of the Blessed Virgin and St Joseph* (23 January) was granted to all countries that solicited it in 1725. This devotion spread throughout Spain and was extended to the whole church in 1847 by Pope Pius IX. In December 1870 St Joseph was declared ‘Patron of the Universal Church’ by Pius IX in response to the wishes of the all the bishops and the faithful with his feast day on 19 March. The feast of ‘St Joseph the Worker’ on 1st May was established by Pius XII in 1969. The name of St Joseph was added to the Roman Canon of the Mass – Eucharistic Prayer I in 1962 by Pope John XXIII and in May 2013 to Eucharistic Prayers II, III, and IV initially by Pope Benedict XVI and confirmed by Pope Francis.

St Joseph is invoked as the patron of fathers of families, of bursas and procurators, of manual workers and of all who desire a holy death. It may be from the legendary account of the death of Joseph in the *History of Joseph the Carpenter* that we turn to Joseph for a happy death.

Devotion to St Joseph

In 1889 Pope Leo XIII wrote an encyclical letter²¹ promoting devotion to St Joseph for:

‘you know the times in which we live; they are scarcely less deplorable for the Christian religion than the worst days, which in time past were most full of misery to the Church. We see faith, the root of all the Christian virtues, lessening in many souls; we see charity growing cold; the young generation daily growing in depravity of morals and views; the Church of Jesus Christ attacked on every side by open force or by craft; a relentless

war waged against the Sovereign Pontiff; and the very foundations of religion undermined with a boldness which waxes daily in intensity. ... In circumstances so unhappy and troublesome, human remedies are insufficient, and it becomes necessary, as a sole resource, to beg for assistance from the Divine power.’

The Pope went on to encourage the Christian people to implore with increased zeal the aid of Almighty God through Our Lady of the Rosary during the month of October and continued:

We judge it of deep utility for the Christian people, continually to invoke with great piety and trust, together with the Virgin-Mother of God, her chaste Spouse, the Blessed Joseph; ... We have seen the devotion to St Joseph, ... gradually increased, grow into greater proportions in Our time, particularly after Pius IX ... proclaimed ... this holy patriarch the patron of the Catholic Church. And as, moreover, it is of high importance that the devotion to St Joseph should engraft itself upon the daily pious practices of Catholics, We desire that the Christian people should be urged to it above all by Our words and authority.

He went on to explain that St Joseph had been proclaimed Patron of the Church because he was the spouse of Mary and foster Father of Jesus Christ and it was on account of this he acquired his dignity and holiness for when God gives a particular mission He always gives the necessary grace.

In giving Joseph the Blessed Virgin as spouse, God appointed him to be not only her life’s companion, the witness of her maidenhood, the protector of her honour, but also, by virtue of the conjugal tie, a participator in her sublime dignity.

Since that time Mary has been formally declared ‘Mother of the Church’ and Joseph continues his earthly mission from heaven as the guardian, the administrator, and the defender of the ‘Mystical Body of Christ’ – the Church.

When in 1870 Blessed Pope Pius IX solemnly proclaimed St Joseph as Patron of the Church²² he compared St Joseph to that other Joseph:

As almighty God appointed Joseph, son of the patriarch Jacob, over all the land of Egypt to save grain for the people, so when the fullness of time had come and He was about to send to earth His only-begotten Son, the Saviour of the world, He chose another Joseph, of whom the first had been the type, and He made him the lord and chief of His household and possessions, the guardian of His choicest treasures.

The first Joseph won the favour of his master, the Pharaoh, and was so successful as an administrator he made him chief steward and guardian of His household

and possessions. In like manner the second Joseph was destined to be the guardian of the Christian religion, protector and defender of the Church.

The Gospel of Matthew²³ affirms that Joseph was of royal descent and united by marriage to the mother of our Saviour. Thus in law Jesus is confirmed as a descendant of David in fulfilment of the ancient prophecy even though Joseph is not the biological father. Pope Leo XIII ends his letter saying:

We prescribe that during the whole month of October, at the recitation of the Rosary, for which We have already legislated, a prayer to St Joseph be added, the formula of which will be sent with this letter, and that this custom should be repeated every year.

POPE LEO'S PRAYER TO SAINT JOSEPH

To you, O blessed Joseph, we have recourse in our affliction, and having implored the help of your thrice holy Spouse, we now, with hearts filled with confidence, earnestly beg you also to take us under your protection. By that charity wherewith you were united to the Immaculate Virgin Mother of God, and by that fatherly love with which you did cherish the Child Jesus, we beseech you and we humbly pray that you will look down with gracious eye upon that inheritance which Jesus Christ purchased by His blood, and will succour us in our need by your power and strength.

Defend, O most watchful guardian of the Holy Family, the chosen off-spring of Jesus Christ. Keep from us, O most loving Father, all blight of error and corruption. Aid us from on high, most valiant defender, in this conflict with the powers of darkness. And even as of old you did rescue the Child Jesus from the peril of His life, so now defend God's Holy Church from the snares of the enemy and from all adversity. Shield us ever under your patronage, that, following your example and strengthened by you help, we may live a holy life, die a happy death, and attain to everlasting bliss in Heaven. Amen.

A new devotional practice

Reverting now to Sister Mary Ephrem, we learn that on March 30, 1958, St Joseph asked to be honoured on the First Wednesday of each month:

Jesus and Mary desire that my pure heart, so long hidden and unknown, be now honoured in a special way. Let my children honour my most pure heart in a special manner on the First Wednesday of the month by reciting the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary in memory of my life with Jesus and Mary and the love I bore them, the sorrow I suffered with them. Let them receive Holy Communion in union with the love with which I received the Saviour for the first time, and each time I held Him in my arms. Those who honour

me in this way will be consoled by my presence at their death, and I myself will conduct them safely into the presence of Jesus and Mary.

Conclusion

The Preface for the Solemnity of Joseph, Husband of Mary gives us a brief profile of Joseph which summarises his mission:

He is that just man, that wise and loyal servant, whom you placed at the head of your family. With a husband's love he cherished Mary, the virgin Mother of God. With fatherly care he watched over Jesus Christ your Son, conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Saint Joseph was a holy, wise and loyal servant chosen by God from all eternity to be the Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, guardian of Jesus the Son of God, and Head of the Holy Family. It was entirely fitting that God should endow him with very grace necessary for the fulfilment of this divine mission which he carried out in exemplary fashion in obedience to the Divine Will. At the end of his earthy life he continues his mission in heaven as Patron and Guardian of the Mystical Body of Christ – the Catholic Church. He was and is in an intimate relationship with Our Lord Jesus Christ. We may therefore seek his intercession with full assurance that his petitions will be heard.

Saint Joseph pray for us who have recourse to you. Amen.

Postscript from Pope Francis

‘I would like to tell you something very personal. I like St Joseph very much. He is a strong man of silence. On my desk I have a statue of St Joseph sleeping. While sleeping he looks after the Church. Yes, he can do it! We know that. When I have a problem or a difficulty, I write on a piece of paper and I put it under his statue so he can dream about it – this means St Joseph please pray for this problem.’



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Illustrations

All the photographs are those of the author.

The ceramics are the work of Adam Kossowski and are to be found in the Chapel of St Joseph at Aylesford Friary, Maidstone except the Annunciation which is one of the stations on the Rosary Way.

Also in St Joseph's Chapel is the life size oak carving of St Joseph by Michael Clark (1963).

The wood sculpture of the Holy Family is kept in the Gate House at Aylesford. Provenance undetermined.

The wood carving of Joseph the Carpenter on the front page is on display in the Church of St Stephen, Welling, Kent.

The 'Sleeping Joseph' was found on the Internet.

END NOTES

- ¹ See Pius XI, Encyclical Letter, *Casti conubii* (1930)n 26, Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter, *Quamquam pluries*, On Devotion to St Joseph, (1889) n.3. Now the divine house which Joseph ruled with the authority of a father, contained within its limits the scarce-born Church. From the same fact that the most holy Virgin is the mother of Jesus Christ is she the mother of all Christians whom she bore on Mount Calvary amid the supreme throes of the Redemption; Jesus Christ is, in a manner, the first-born of Christians, who by the adoption and Redemption are his brothers. And for such reasons the Blessed Patriarch looks upon the multitude of Christians who make up the Church as confided specially to his trust – this limitless family spread over the earth, over which, because he is the spouse of Mary and the Father of Jesus Christ he holds, as it were, a paternal authority. It is, then, natural and worthy that as the Blessed Joseph ministered to all the needs of the family at Nazareth and girt it about with his protection, he should now cover with the cloak of his heavenly patronage and defend the Church of Jesus Christ.
- ² Mention of Joseph also found in Mt 13:55; Lk 3:23, 4:22; Jn 1:45, 6:42.
- ³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sepphoris>
- ⁴ The Catholic Encyclopedia (1914), sv St Joseph.
<http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=6476>
- ⁵ Sr Maria Francesca Perillo FI, *Missio Immaculatae International*, Oct 2005, pp. 3-4; Marriage according to Jewish Custom. Also Wikipedia s.v. Jewish views on marriage.
- ⁶ O'Carroll, Michael, *Theotokos: a Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, s.v. Doubt, St Joseph, pp 123-24.
- ⁷ See Appendix Three.[Not included in this booklet]
- ⁸ Apostolic Exhortation, *Redemptoris custos*, n 13.
- ⁹ An informative article on the flight into Egypt is to be found at: <https://udayton.edu/imri/mary/f/flight-into-egypt.php> See the Gospels of *Pseudo Matthew* and *St Thomas* for stories relating to Joseph and various miracles performed by the child Jesus during this time.
- ¹⁰ Francis Johnston, *When Millions saw Mary*, Augustine Publishing, 1980, ISBN 0 85172 631 3
- ¹¹ Vol. 4, pp. 243-45
- ¹² See Encyclical *Casti conubii*, Pius XI, 1930, nn 26-27.
- ¹³ For a full version of *The History of Joseph the Carpenter* see;
http://www.masseiana.org/history_of_joseph.htm. Probably written 5th or 6th cent.
- ¹⁴ Ven. Mary of Agreda, *The Mystical City of God*; Abp Santa Fe, February 9, 1949.
- ¹⁵ Ps 116.15 Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints. (RSV)
- ¹⁶ Ven Mary of Agreda, *The Mystical City of God*, Santa Fe, February 9, 1949.
- ¹⁷ Wisdom 8:19-20, As a child I was by nature well endowed, and a good soul fell to my lot; or rather, being good, I entered an undefiled body.
- ¹⁸ <http://www.mysticsofthechurch.com/2016/06/sr-mildred-mary-ephrem-neuzil-and-our.html>
- ¹⁹ Saint Augustine of Hippo lived 354-430. One of the most important of the early Church Fathers.
- ²⁰ *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, OUP, 1997, s.v., Joseph, St.
- ²¹ Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Quamquam pluries*, (1889)
- ²² Pius IX, *Quemadmodum Deus*, (1870)
- ²³ Matt. 1:18-25; 2:13-15



St Joseph has been rather neglected until relatively recent times. That he was the Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary and fulfilled the role of ‘father’, though not biological father, to the Divine Child makes him worthy of the greatest honour. The aim of this study is to determine his role and mission in the history of salvation.



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