

# YEAR of SAINT JOSEPH



*“Show yourself a father, and guide us in the path of life”*

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## The astonishing life of St Joseph – Spouse of Mary and Father of Jesus

*Robert Falzon reflects on how St Joseph may have responded to his astonishing call to be the foster-father of Jesus and spouse of Mary.*

*What does it mean for fathers and husbands in today’s world?*

Joseph, son of Jacob, was born in Bethlehem and was a descendant of King David (Matt 1). He lived in Nazareth in Galilee, where he worked as a craftsman/tradesman, often referred to as a carpenter. He was married to Mary, daughter of Joachim; he had been to the father of Mary and paid the “dower” with the promise of marriage, but had not taken her into his home yet, as was the custom.

Mary, a few months into her betrothal, rushed off to the high country in Judea just outside Jerusalem to visit her relative Elizabeth, who is pregnant with John. It was the first of several astonishing events.

The rumors started. Why had she gone during her time of waiting for Joseph to come for her? What had happened? Was something wrong? Mary returned about three months later and the life-changing news was brought to Joseph. His betrothed spouse was pregnant!



Can you imagine what he was going through and thinking?

“How could she do this? What could have happened? Why? Who? What will I do?”

He decided to divorce her quietly because he was unwilling to expose her to public disgrace and possible stoning (Matt 1:19).

Then, in the midst of this drama, an angel appeared to Joseph and told him that the child was the Son of God! Conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Remarkably, he obeys God’s messenger and takes Mary as his spouse, into his home. Doing this, Joseph completes the marriage, gives Mary his name and becomes the father of the child in her womb.

Before the birth of their child, Caesar Augustus called a census for the whole land. Joseph was obliged to take the very pregnant Mary with him and travel to Bethlehem in Judea to fulfil the requirements. A son was born and Joseph, his father, gave him the name Jesus, in accordance with the angel’s instructions.

So, this son was born in a manger in Bethlehem because there was no room in the town, to Joseph and Mary in the line of David, in accordance with the ancient prophecies.

If the actions of Joseph and the birth of Jesus weren’t astonishing enough, after the birth there were some amazing events. The shepherds came to visit, proclaiming the vision and the words of the angels. Then three rulers (Magi) visited this newborn “King” of the Jews.

Can you imagine what was going on in Joseph’s mind and heart? Having walked for 10 days, with no sleep that night and all the strange happenings, he must have been confused, awestruck, amazed and, in his quiet moments, wondering what he had got himself into.

“I don’t understand. Who is this woman? What about the mysterious son who is supposed to be the saviour of the world?! What were the shepherds going on about? Why did these rulers visit, prostrate themselves before my baby son and give us such incredible gifts?”

Soon after, Joseph took the child and mother to the temple in Jerusalem and presented their first-born son, in accordance with the law. They encountered Simeon and Anna, who again disturbed Joseph and Mary. "What a strange prophecy! Who is this son and what will he be?"

It is already evident that this family is not destined for a settled life and, as if this is not enough, an angel wakes Joseph up again and tells him to take his wife and baby and escape to Egypt because the most powerful man in the land wants to kill Jesus!

Anyone would be forgiven for thinking: “Come on! Give me a break here. I did not sign up for this!” This good man gets up, wakes his wife Mary, explains the drama and the necessary urgency. He loads up the family and heads off on a flight into Egypt – except it was a long walk of hundreds of kilometres and would have taken weeks.

As he walks, he wonders: “How will I provide and protect my precious family? How will I know which way to go? Did I really hear an angel, or was this just my lack of sleep? But it was the same angel that came earlier and told me to take Mary as my wife.”

So many questions.

As they walk in silence, he prays. He repeats the psalms in rhythm with the steps. Possibly he remembers Isaiah 7:14: “The Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Emmanuel (which means ‘God is with us’).”

This was no holiday journey and no ordinary life. The terrain was difficult and the danger imminent from bandits, brigands and wild animals. Joseph listens, discerns and makes decisions with the objective of guarding, protecting, providing for this precious family. He listens to the voice for guidance.

Some years later, the angel appears again and tells him to pack up and go home to Nazareth. All is well; Herod is dead. He obeys like many times before. Another long journey is embarked on. They settle in Nazareth and then all is mostly quiet for nearly 30 years, except for one story about Jesus getting lost on a visit to Jerusalem. These are the “hidden” years. We know almost nothing of Joseph, Mary and Jesus during this time.

There is so much to be learned from St Joseph – so much we need right now in this present age! It is prophetic that Pope Francis calls us back to St Joseph with his apostolic letter *Patris Corde (With a Father's Heart)*.

Being a husband and father is possibly the hardest and greatest task I have been given. St Joseph teaches me, and us, much about these noble roles. Below are some of my reflections:

- 1. Listening** — God speaks often and has much guidance for me. I/we need to find silence and stillness everyday so I/we can hear from the sacred that resides in our soul. We call this prayer. I need this time with Jesus every day.
- 2. Obedience/Action** — The need to understand/know is often an obstacle to faith. Doing what is right leads to righteousness. Do what you are told and take the appropriate action. Reject the pervading passivity of our culture and accept responsibility. Then do something. Say "yes, because you say so, I will".
- 3. Selflessness** — Live for the other (wife/mother/child). Give your life away for the benefit of your spouse and family. Your life is for them. This is heroic love. This will change the world. Grow up.
- 4. Courage** — Manage yourself; find ways to be calm in the chaos and stress of life. Avoid the strong pressure to reactivity, anger, uncharitable responses and immaturity. I can have faith in my fears, frailty and weakness. God is with me/us.
- 5. Humility** — Be prepared to live through the small hidden years, the time when mostly what you do is serve, love, provide and protect. This is the martyrdom of waiting for God to act/speak. These years are the home of holiness.

Go on an astonishing journey with this great man.

St Joseph, Pray for us. AMEN

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