

Merry Christmas! On this vigil of the birth of our Lord, we take time to appreciate St. Joseph and his role as the stepfather of Jesus. We look at how a **carpenter's life becomes extraordinary** as he accepts God's will and becomes the father of the King of the Universe.

Joseph is a man of faith. Today's gospel begins with Joseph becoming aware that, "Mary, was found with child through the Holy Spirit." According to St Thomas Aquinas, Joseph believed Mary, but feared to live with her because he was UNWORTHY to live with this miraculous child, Jesus, and his mother." Joseph believes, but like many of us, feels unworthy to accept God's calling.

So, Joseph decides to quietly divorce Mary, but God sends an angel to speak to him in a dream. Joseph's fear explains the angel's first words, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived." This is what Joseph needed to believe in himself and accept God's will. We are told, "When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home." Did he get the answers to all of his questions? No, yet he persevered in his new role as a husband and a father.

It isn't always clear why God calls us. Why did he call a carpenter, to be the Father of his son? I'd like to think that God called Joseph and calls all of us for both what we can do but more so, for how we do it. As a carpenter, Joseph was a master builder, capable of taking not only wood, but stone and iron and other materials to design and create things from the ground up. We know God's intent was for Jesus to build a Church starting from the ground up. So, growing up around Joseph gave Jesus insight into how ideas turned into functioning items like buildings, plows, and yokes. As a son of Joseph, Jesus would learn the art of building. But more importantly, Joseph would model the Christian virtues God wanted Jesus to master in the way he did his work as a carpenter and as a parent. Like Joseph, we have virtues and talents. In following Joseph, we put the human aspect of work ahead of the work itself, with a focus on the impact of those around us in all we do.

Joseph trusted in the Lord. In his book, “The True Meaning of Christmas,” Catholic Scholar Michael Barber says, “Joseph was in the dark about the nature of Mary’s pregnancy. Yet as soon as the angel comes to him and informs him of what has happened, he responds in faith. Joseph gives us an example to imitate. Like him, we can find ourselves placed in situations that make no sense. Nevertheless, like Joseph, we are called to trust in the Lord and remain ‘righteous.’ In Christ, the puzzles in our lives find their resolution. This is true even if we do not always understand how that resolution can be realized.”

What are God’s challenges tugging at our hearts this Christmas? How can follow Joseph’s example of trust and acceptance to move forward in the darkness of the unknown? These are difficult lessons to apply, but we can also turn to St. Joseph as source of guidance.

Though, he has no spoken words in any of the gospels, his impact as a saint is profound. Most saints are known as patrons of one or two areas, but Joseph’s list is endless. He is the patron saint of the Universal Church, families, fathers, expectant mothers, travelers, immigrants, house sellers and buyers, craftsmen, engineers and working people, among others. He is the Swiss Army Knife of patronage, so, if you ever feel stuck in life, a prayer to St Joseph is a great way to move forward.

Merry Christmas! May your new year be inspired by the virtues of HUMILITY and FORTITUDE we see in St. Joseph. Let’s take on HIS spirit as we lead our families and communities to continue building the kingdom of God in 2024.