

JOSEPH, THE STEPFATHER OF JESUS

BACKGROUND

We know that Joseph was a lowly carpenter (cf. *Mt* 13:55), betrothed to Mary (cf. *Mt* 1:18; *Lk* 1:27). He was a “just man” (*Mt* 1:19), ever ready to carry out God’s will as revealed to him in the Law (cf. *Lk* 2:22.27.39) and through four dreams (cf. *Mt* 1:20; 2:13.19.22). After a long and tiring journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, he beheld the birth of the Messiah in a stable, since “there was no place for them” elsewhere (cf. *Lk* 2:7). He witnessed the adoration of the shepherds (cf. *Lk* 2:8-20) and the Magi (cf. *Mt* 2:1-12), who represented respectively the people of Israel and the pagan peoples.

Joseph had the courage to become the legal father of Jesus, to whom he gave the name revealed by the angel: “You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (*Mt* 1:21). As we know, for ancient peoples, to give a name to a person or to a thing, as Adam did in the account in the Book of Genesis (cf. 2:19-20), was to establish a relationship.

In the Temple, forty days after Jesus’ birth, Joseph and Mary offered their child to the Lord and listened with amazement to Simeon’s prophecy concerning Jesus and his Mother (cf. *Lk* 2:22-35). To protect Jesus from Herod, Joseph dwelt as a foreigner in Egypt (cf. *Mt* 2:13-18). After returning to his own country, he led a hidden life in the tiny and obscure village of Nazareth in Galilee, far from Bethlehem, his ancestral town, and from Jerusalem and the Temple. Of Nazareth it was said, “No prophet is to rise” (cf. *Jn* 7:52) and indeed, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (cf. *Jn* 1:46). When, during a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Joseph and Mary lost track of the twelve-year-old Jesus, they anxiously sought him out and they found him in the Temple, in discussion with the doctors of the Law (cf. *Lk* 2:41-50).

~ Patris Corde

YOU WILL NEED:

- a basket (to put all of the following in)
- white felt underlay
- small hammer or picture of ancient carpentry tools (see below)
- picture of first century betrothal (see below)
- an angel (from the Nativity scene)
- Christ child in manger (from Nativity scene)
- 2 more angels or some pictures of the other 2 dreams (see below)
- Magi
- shepherds
- globe of the world or map of the Middle East in the times of Jesus (see below)

Remove the underlay from the basket. Unroll it from your right to left, leaving enough room for the first object to be placed on it.

This is a story about Joseph, Jesus' father on earth – his stepfather – because Jesus' real father is God. Our cloth is white because Joseph was a very good and holy man who believed in and listened to God.

Place the hammer/image of carpentry tools on the underlay.

Joseph was a carpenter – someone who made things for people and helped to build things. He would have travelled around helping people who needed things made for their houses and animals.

Unroll the underlay a little more and place the picture of Mary and Joseph's betrothal on it.

Joseph was promised to marry Mary.

Unroll the underlay a little more and place the angel on it.

An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him that Mary was going to be Jesus' Mum and he was to be Jesus' Dad on earth/stepfather.

Unroll the underlay a little more and place the baby Jesus in the manger, the Magi and the shepherds on it.

Just as the angel told Joseph, Mary had a baby boy and Joseph named him Jesus. Joseph was there when the Wise Men and the shepherds came to see Jesus – as they all knew he was a very special baby.

Unroll the underlay a little more and place an angel/picture of the angel appearing to Joseph on it. Trace a path between Israel and Egypt on a map or globe.

After Jesus was born, he was in danger. Joseph had another dream and the angel told him to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt so Jesus would be safe. Egypt was a long way away, but Joseph trusted in God's message to him.

Unroll the underlay a little more and place the angel/picture of the final dreams on it.

When it was safe again, an angel came to Joseph in another dream and told him that it was safe to go back to his country again and that they should live in Nazareth. So Joseph took Mary and Jesus to Nazareth, where they lived. Jesus was Joseph's son and Joseph would look after him and teach him and help him grow up to be a good man.

Sit for a moment to let the story sink in. Then begin the wondering.

I wonder what your favourite part of the story of Joseph is...

I wonder what it would have been like for Joseph to take his family to another country...

I wonder if Joseph was ever scared to do as God wanted him to...

I wonder if God has ever spoken to you...

Name each object and say a brief word about it as you place it back in the basket. For example, "Here is the angel that reminds us that Joseph always listened to God in his life." Roll up the underlay carefully and put it in the basket, then return the story to its place on the shelf.





