

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA

December 18, 2022 – ADVENT 4, YEAR A

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Homily: *“Learning from St. Joseph’s PEACE”**

Isaiah 7:10-17	(A Virgin shall bear a child, God with us)
Canticle 15	(Mary’s song of praise)
Romans 1:1-7	(St. Paul’s prayer of thanksgiving for Christ as the Incarnation of God)
St. Matthew 1:18-25	(The Child foretold is born and named Jesus—the One Who Saves)

On this fourth Sunday in Advent, traditionally dedicated to the Virgin Mary, you might expect me to talk about our Blessed Mother. However, in Matthew’s account of the birth of Jesus, St. Joseph is actually the main character. For it is his faithfulness that ties together the elements of the story, as he follows God’s direction concerning Mary and the Christ Child. So, today’s Gospel offers us an opportunity to look into what we know from Scripture about the husband of Mary and the foster father of Jesus.

First, we know Joseph was a carpenter, a working man, for in Matthew 13:55, the skeptical Nazarenes inquire about Jesus, “Isn’t this the carpenter’s son?”

We also know that Joseph wasn’t rich. When he took the infant Jesus to the Temple to be circumcised, and Mary to be purified, Luke 2:24 says he offered the sacrifice of two turtledoves, or a pair of pigeons—an offering that was only allowed for those who could not afford a lamb.

Despite his humble work and means, Joseph was descended from a royal lineage. Luke and Matthew disagree somewhat about the details of Joseph’s genealogy. However, they both confirm that King David, the greatest king of Israel, was his ancestor (Matt. 1:1-16; Lk. 3:23-38). Indeed, the angel who first tells Joseph about Jesus greets him as “son of David”—a royal title also used in Scripture for Our Lord.

We know Joseph was both a moral and a compassionate man. When he found out Mary was expecting a child after they were betrothed, he knew the baby was not his. But as yet, he was unaware that she was carrying the Son of God. So he planned to divorce Mary according to the law, even as he was concerned for her safety. He knew that women accused of adultery could be stoned to death, so he decided to sever their relationship quietly, and not expose her to shame or cruelty (Matt. 1:19-25).

We know Joseph was man of faith, obedient to whatever God asked of him without having to know the outcome. When, in a dream, the angel told Joseph the truth about the child Mary was carrying, he took her as his wife, immediately and without question or concern for gossip.

When once again, the angel appeared to warn him that his family was in danger, without delay Joseph left everything he owned, along with his family and friends, to flee to a strange country with his young wife and the baby. He waited in Egypt—again without questioning—until another angel told him it was safe to return to Galilee (Matt. 2:13-23).

We know Joseph loved Jesus. His primary concern was for the wellbeing of this child entrusted to him. Not only did he leave his home to protect Jesus, but upon his return settled in the obscure town of Nazareth out of fear for Jesus’ life. When the young Jesus was left behind at the Temple, Luke 2:48 tells us that Joseph, along with Mary, searched “with great anxiety” for three days for the boy. We also know that Joseph treated Jesus as his own son, for repeatedly, the people of Nazareth say about Jesus, “Is this not the son of Joseph?” (Lk. 4:22)

We know Joseph respected God. He followed God’s commands in handling the situation with Mary, and in journeying to Jerusalem to have Jesus circumcised and Mary purified after Jesus’ birth. We are also told that he took his family to Jerusalem every year for Passover, a lengthy journey that could not have been easy for a working man.

In the gospels, Joseph does not appear in Jesus' public life, at his death, or resurrection. And St. Paul's letters speak of Jesus' mother, Mary, but never mention her husband.¹ Therefore, many historians believe Joseph likely died before Jesus entered public ministry.

Saint Joseph is the patron of the dying because, assuming he died before Jesus' public life, he died with the Lord Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mary close to him. And isn't that the way all of us would like to leave this earth?

There is much more we would like to know about Joseph—where and when he was born; how he spent his days; when and how he died. But the Bible has left us the most important aspect of his biography: His character. St. Matthew tells us in chapter 1, verse 18, that he was “a righteous man.”

At this time of year, you're likely to hear a sermon about the humility, faithfulness, and obedience of the Blessed Virgin Mary. And yet, Saint Joseph exemplifies for us those same virtues. If it were not for Joseph's humble submission to the Lord's command to take Mary as his wife (18:20), Jesus' mother could have been stoned to death for presumably having committed adultery. And, in Matthew, Chapter 2, Joseph's obedience to the divine decree to flee King Herod's murderous rampage literally saved Jesus' life.

Much later, when it was time to take His family back to Israel, Joseph's discerning faithfulness led the Holy Family to Nazareth, so that the Scriptural prophesies about the Messiah could be fulfilled.

Because of his unquestioning, faithful obedience, Joseph is the unofficial patron saint against doubt and hesitation.² And, he is the official patron of fathers, carpenters, and social justice.³

Overall, he was a man who knew the *peace* of God, because he *listened* to the Lord; *believed* what he heard, and *acted* on it. We, too, can know the peace of God when we listen, believe, and act on the Word of God—whether we hear and receive it through Scripture, prayer, meditation, music, the Sacraments, or the counsel of fellow Christians.

And last but not least, at several crucial points, Joseph was open to the interventions of God's angels in his life. If we, too, take seriously the ministry of angels, trusting that God will send them to help and direct *us*, that confidence in the Lord's help can be another source of *peace* in our hearts and lives.

Let us pray:

Father God, we give thanks for Saint Joseph, an upright, caring, and faithful man, to whom our Lord Jesus owes much, and who so lovingly provided for the Blessed Virgin Mary. We pray that he would watch over us as carefully as he watched over Jesus and His Mother. And we ask his guidance and protection for our parish, just as he gave his adopted son, in whose Holy Name we pray. *Amen.*⁴

* Adapt. N. George-Hacker, “Learning from St. Joseph,” 19 December 2010. St. Christopher's Episcopal Church, Cobleskill NY. Used with permission.

¹ “St. Joseph” 30 November 2022, [Wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Joseph) <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Joseph> 10 December 2022.

² *Ibid.*

³ “St. Joseph” © 2022 <http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=4> 10 December 2022.

⁴ Adapt. *Ibid.*