

## Joseph of Nazareth

19 3 17

God our Father,  
who from the family of your servant David  
raised up Joseph the carpenter  
to be the guardian of your incarnate Son  
and the husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary:  
give us the grace to follow him  
in faithfulness to his commands.

Our text this morning may be found in Matthew chapter 1 and verses 23 and 24:

**'When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him:  
he took Mary as his wife, but had no marital relations with her  
until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.'**

March 19<sup>th</sup> is one of two days on which the Church remembers Joseph of Nazareth. The other is May 1<sup>st</sup> which is dedicated to St Joseph the worker. Now this year, the 19<sup>th</sup> March is a Sunday so St Joseph's Day is transferred to tomorrow. But since neither you nor I will be here in St Barnabas then, I hope you won't mind us remembering Joseph here and now today.

I'm not sure when exactly I first came to admire Joseph. As I boy at primary school, I got to play one of the three kings. The boy who played Joseph, was tall, strong, good-looking and silent - a non-speaking part ! And outside of the

gospels, there is little known about the man who married the Blessed Virgin Mary with the exception of the apocryphal Protoevangelium of James that makes Joseph an old man at the time of his marriage to Mary.

The name Joseph (yôsep) is a form of the Hebrew verb 'yasap' – to add – literally meaning 'may he add' and, by extension, 'May God add sons' – a nice prayer for a good Jewish lad !

Well Mark never mentions Joseph and John only mentions him a couple times, naming him as the father of Jesus. Most of our information about him comes early on in Matthew and Luke's gospel.

Matthew tells us that Joseph is a descendent of King David but, being a carpenter in Nazareth, he's no longer royal or rich. Matthew tells us of Joseph's shock in finding that his fiancé Mary is pregnant; of knowing that the boy-to-be can't be his because he has not yet slept with her; of his resolve to settle the matter quietly by discreetly breaking off the engagement; and of the dream in which an unnamed angel – I like to think it's Gabriel working overtime – tells him that Mary is carrying God's child – 'Emmanuel, God with us' – and that Joseph should go ahead and marry her. And, as you know, of course he does but Joseph doesn't have marital relations with Mary until after the child is born. Matthew tells us of the visit of the wise men, the flight of the Holy Family to Egypt and the massacre of the innocents. Joseph's absence at the time of Jesus' ministry suggests that he has already died. Matthew also tells us the names of his four brothers: James and Joseph, Simon and Judas and that there were also some unnamed sisters.

Luke tells us of the journey to Bethlehem, of the birth in the stable because there was no room in the inn; of the visit of the shepherds, of Jesus' circumcision on the eighth day, of Jesus' presentation on the Temple when 40 days old and, at the age of 12, of his visit to the Temple and the shock of hearing Jesus say as an excuse for going AWOL, was he not bound to be about his father's business ?

So why do I admire Joseph ? Because he loves the child who is not physically his own. He loves the Son of God who is born of the Virgin Mary who was once his fiancé and then his wife because Joseph was prepared to do what God told him to do. Like Mary, Joseph was prepared to be obedient to the will of God. And his reward – to be and to act as guardian to Jesus as he was growing up.

There is a beautiful terracotta statue in the St Martha's Convent, Monken Hadley. Joseph is standing over Jesus who is stretching his arms up to his adopted dad who is at the same time lightly resting his hand on the boy's head. Beautiful or what ? And that is precisely what Joseph is: a beautiful soul. And my prayer ? That we may be like him, inspired by his example.

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist*

*St Barnabas, Old Heath*

*19<sup>th</sup> March 2017*

G: Sermons 35 :Joseph

