

Joseph of Nazareth 2

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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: **'When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him'**.

How good is your memory ? I think because, like Father Richard, I'm that much older than when I first met him back in September 1973, my memory is not as good as it used to be.

So let's have a test to check out how good your memory is ! Last week, what did we celebrate in church ? What was the theme of Father Richard's sermon ? Well, of course, I wasn't here but I'm guessing that, as it was Mothers' Day, Father Richard's sermon had something to do with mums, possibly the BVM, possibly our mother the church or even all three if he was feeling particularly good ! Well, if that was your starter for ten, how about this one ? What did I preach on here at St Barnabas last year on 19th March ? And, if you are truly exceptional – as I know

you guys must be to be part of the congregation at St Barnabas', Old Heath – then you will know the answer: Joseph of Nazareth, Mary's husband, Jesus' step dad. So today I, a day before the day we celebrate St Joseph on 19th March, let me see if I can say something new, something of relevance about this man I admire.

To be honest, there's not that much in the gospels about him. It's only really in the opening chapters of Matthew and Luke that we have some idea of what Joseph did. For a start, he was a carpenter, living in Nazareth and his family was of the house and lineage of King David so that is why he made that journey south with a pregnant Mary to be registered for tax purposes – nowadays, he would have done it on line ! We know he was present when the shepherds then the wise men came, that he was present when Jesus was circumcised when his boy was 8-days-old and that he took Jesus and Mary to the Temple in Jerusalem to make the required sacrifice of two turtle doves for a first-born male child when Jesus was just 40-days-old. We know he took Mary and Jesus to Egypt having been warned by an angel in a dream to leave Judea right away and then he brought his family back to Nazareth after Herod had died. We know he was present when Jesus, aged twelve, went AWOL in Jerusalem after the family's visit to the city for Passover. And we can guess that since Joseph wasn't present in any of the stories of the adult Jesus, like the first miracle at a family wedding in Cana in Galilee, when Jesus changed the water into wine, that Joseph had probably died some time before.

But, today, let me share with you the question which struck me so forcefully in the run-up to Christmas last year – what on earth did Joseph feel when he found out

that the girl he loved was pregnant and the child was not his ? How did Joseph cope ? Let me share the poem I wrote – an exercise in imaginative empathy:

Bad news ?

‘ . . . found to be with child . . . ’

Matthew 1 v18

I was so upset, so sad, so angry:
Mary, my fiancée, the girl I loved,
was pregnant with child not mine.
Blushing, eyes lowered,
she spoke of an angel
who'd appeared to her,
told her of God's plan –
for her to have His son,
a boy, born to be king,
our longed-for Messiah.
If only that were true !
But how can I believe her ?
And if it were true,
what should I do ?
We can't go on like this.
I love her; she loves me
but surely it's not right ?
Well, let's not make a fuss,

put her to shame in public.
Just shut up, keep quiet,
say nothing but, privately,
break off our engagement.
I'm so tired.
First I need to sleep.

Well; we know what Joseph did. He did as bid. He did marry Mary. He, like his wife, said yes to God. And that's why admire him. He is an example of doing the right thing by doing what God wanted him to do and thereby encouraging us to do the same. His is a real challenge for all of us today. So let me end with a question: am I ? are you ? are we ? prepared to follow Joseph's example of Godly obedience ?

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

Preached at the Eucharist

St Barnabas, Old Heath

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