

The Church of Saint Joseph, Nazareth



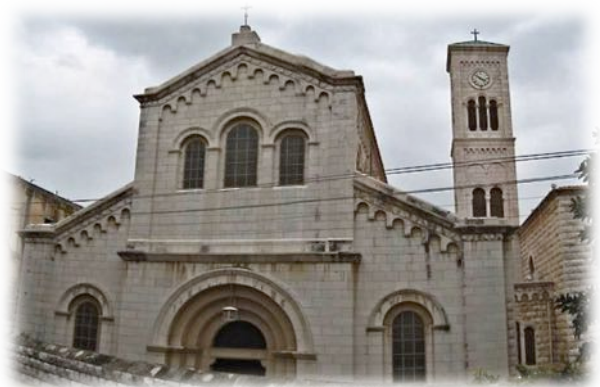
Statue of St. Joseph and Jesus
Church of Saint Joseph

¹⁸ Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. ²¹ She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:

²³ “Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,”

which means “God is with us.” ²⁴ When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.

The Church of Saint Joseph is located over what tradition has held to be the workshop of St. Joseph. Later traditions suggested that it was actually the site of the home of the Holy Family. The earliest church of the site was built during the Byzantine era. It is unclear what happened to this church, but it a new church was built over its remains during the Crusader era. The Muslim destroyed this church when they conquered the Crusaders in 1263 AD. In 1745 the Franciscans purchased the ruins of the Crusader church and built a chapel at the site. The present Church was built by the Franciscans in 1914.



Church of Saint Joseph, Nazareth.



Nave and Sanctuary, Church of Saint Joseph



Painting of the Holy Family, Apse of the Sanctuary



Mosaic of the Holy Family in the cave beneath the Church of Saint Joseph

³ *Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us? ” And they took offense at him. (Mark 6:3)*

When a boy turned twelve years old his father would begin to teach him the skills of the trade. It is likely therefore, that Joseph began teaching Jesus how to be a *tekton* at about this time.

Some biblical scholars believe that Joseph and Jesus may have taken the fifty-minute walk from his workshop to the town of *Tzippori* (or Sepphoris) where there were many building projects at the time. It is also possible that Joseph settled in Nazareth after their exile in Egypt because of these building projects in Nazareth which had been started by Herod Antipas.

⁵⁵ *Is he not the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother named Mary and his brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? (Matt 13:55)*

From this verse, and a similar one in the Gospel of Mark, we learn just a little more about Saint Joseph. He was a carpenter. The Greek word, *tekton*, which has been mostly commonly translated as carpenter actually means builder or artisan. In Joseph’s day this generally meant someone who worked in both wood and stone. Tradition holds that this excavated site is either the workshop of Saint Joseph or even the home of the Holy Family. Did Jesus follow in His father’s trade? Scripture and Tradition suggests that He did:



The Workshop of Saint Joseph beneath the Church of Saint Joseph



Rest on the Flight to Egypt by Luc-Olivier Merson's 1879

There are only three other stories that mention Saint Joseph in the Scripture:

¹³ *When they had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him.”*

¹⁴ *Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt. ¹⁵He stayed there until the death of Herod, that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled, “Out of Egypt I called my son.” (Matt 2:13-15)*



Icon of the Presentation of the Lord

The other two stories are both from the second chapter of the Gospel of Luke:

²²When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord,²³ just as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord,”²⁴ and to offer the sacrifice of “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons,” in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord.

²⁵Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the holy Spirit was upon him.²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Messiah of the Lord.²⁷ He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him,²⁸ he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying:

²⁹“Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word,³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation,³¹ which you prepared in sight of all the peoples,³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel.”

The other passage, which like the previous does not name Joseph directly, is when Mary and Joseph lost Jesus when they were returning from Jerusalem:

⁴¹Each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover,⁴² and when he was twelve years old, they went up according to festival custom.⁴³ After they had completed its days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it.⁴⁴ Thinking that he was in the caravan, they journeyed for a day and looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances,⁴⁵ but not finding him, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him.⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions,⁴⁷ and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers.⁴⁸ When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, “Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety.”⁴⁹ And he said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he said to them.⁵¹ He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart.⁵² And Jesus advanced [in] wisdom and age and favor before God and man.



My Father's Business
by Harold Copping

Kevin's Reflection

I am the father of two wonderful daughters. As with any family there were times when being a father was a challenge. My older daughter, Megan, who has two very young sons tell me that “I have no idea,” that raising boys is far more challenging than girls. I will have to take her at her word. I can think of something perhaps more challenging than raising a son or even two sons, and that is being responsible for raising the Son of God. Really, you don't think so? You think that because Jesus is the God-man that he was the perfect child? That He darned near raised Himself? Let me, if I may be so bold, to propose an alternative hypothesis. Consider the last story about Saint Joseph, that of losing Jesus on their journey back to Nazareth.

There must be no greater trauma for parents than to have your child go missing. The trauma Jesus put His parents through is evident by His mother's response to her Son when they found him: “*Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety.*” I can well imagine Mary spoke this with eyes filled with tears of joy in finding her Son and in frustration over her Son's behavior. To this Jesus responded, “*Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?*” Really Jesus?

The scripture does not record what Joseph's response to his Son was, but it does tell what happened afterwards: *He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus advanced [in] wisdom and age and favor before God and man.* I've highlighted two parts of this passage. The first is that Jesus was “obedient” to His parents. Might the juxtaposition of this scripture with His wandering off in Jerusalem suggest that the young Jesus was less than obedient?

We can look to other scriptures to validate the idea that Jesus was a real human boy who needed real human parents to guide, and to teach him and for Him to be obedient to. The Book of Hebrews tells us:

Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered; and when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, (Heb 5:8-9)

Where did Jesus learn obedience? Clearly He learned it from His parents and apparently the Heavenly Father chose this pedagogy to perfect His Son's human nature and He used Joseph and Mary to accomplish this mission. This is a Mystery: that the eternally begotten Son of the Father chose to empty Himself (*kenosis*) and took on our human nature. The Church Father have taught us the *Logos* took on a perfect human nature, that is, it was *prelapsarian* like Adam's before his *Fall*. It is a beautiful teaching, which perhaps I will discuss elsewhere, as we can gain even a greater appreciation of the divine sacrifice that was made for us by the God-man, Jesus Christ.

It is also the teaching of the Church that Jesus had within His Person a divine will and a human will. Had Jesus allowed His divine will to override His human will there would have been no need for Him to “learn obedience from what He suffered,” but neither would He have become a source of eternal salvation for all who *obey* Him.

What a responsibility the Father gave to Mary and Joseph by entrust them with preparing His Son to complete the mission of the salvation of the world. Wouldn't be amazing to have scriptures that described the interactions between Joseph and Jesus? It would give us so much more appreciation for Joseph. What if I took the liberty to speculate about such interactions? What might some of these stories look like? I plan to write four stories, which I hope may give us insight into the type of interactions that may have transpired between Joseph and Jesus assuming the theological principles discussed above.

* * *

For two days I did just that—I wrote four “apocryphal” stories showing Joseph being a father to Jesus in the context of the scriptures and the reflection above. I was pleased with the stories; I thought they were interesting, although perhaps just a bit provocative. I read them to Jan and she expressed some unease about them, and to be honest, I reacted negatively to her assessment and I was pretty determined to leave them in. Over the next day I thought and prayed about it, and I came to the conclusion not to include them in this reflection. Why? Because of a still, small voice that said to me, “That to which the Scriptures are silent are not for you to give voice.”

That being said, I still have to admit a certain dissatisfaction with the situation; it tends to be my nature to want to know and understand things; to peer behind the curtain of mystery. It is a humbling experience to stand unthinking and mute before the Mystery of Silence which *is* the hidden life Joseph. And perhaps that is the way it ought to be: to stand humbly, unknowing, and mute before the Mystery of the Incarnation and the parents who loved and raised Him to be our Bridegroom.

Jan's Reflection:

There is little said of Joseph in the scriptures. He came from the line of David and was an older widower when he took Mary as his wife. Obviously, he was perfect for Mary because God had chosen him. And when Joseph tried to get out of the marriage betrothal, God intervened. It's interesting how God worked in Joseph's life through dreams. In the first dream an angel tells Joseph not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife because that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. This fulfills Isaiah 7:14, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: behold the virgin will conceive and bear a son and you shall call His name Emmanuel."

Joseph has another dream later on, again instructed by an angel to flee to Egypt and remain there until further instructions. When Joseph has his third dream it is to take Mary and Jesus back to Israel thus fulfilling the prophecy, "Out of Egypt I have called my son." And finally, Joseph has a fourth dream warning him not to go to Judea so he took his family to the region of Galilee and settled in Nazareth thus fulfilling the prophecy, "He shall be called a Nazarene" (Matt 2:23).

I love how God spoke to Joseph in dreams. In being obedient to all of the dreams we see how Joseph fulfilled the scriptures and prophecies of both Old and New Testaments.

Prayers to Saint Joseph

St Joseph Prayer and Promise (A Roman Catholic Prayer to St. Joseph by St. Alphonsus Liguori)

O Holy Patriarch, I rejoice with thee at the exalted dignity by which thou wast deemed worthy to act as father to Jesus, to give Him orders and to be obeyed by Him whom Heaven and earth obey.

O great Saint, as thou wast served by God, I too wish to be taken into thy service. I choose thee, after Mary, to be my chief advocate and protector. I promise to honor thee every day by some special act of devotion and by placing myself under thy daily protection. By that sweet company which Jesus and Mary gave thee in thy lifetime, I beseech thee to protect me all through life, so that I may never separate myself from my God by losing His grace.

Mt dear St Joseph. pray to Jesus for me. Certainly He can never refuse thee anything, as He obeyed all Thine orders while on earth. Tell Him to detach me from all creatures and from myself, to inflame me with His holy love, and then do with me what he pleases. And by that assistance which Jesus and Mary gave thee at death, I beg of thee to protect me in a special way at the hour of my death, so that dying, assisted by thee, in the company of Jesus and Mary, I may go to thank the in paradise, and in thy company praise my God for all eternity. Amen.

Glory be (three times)



The Death of Saint Joseph
Church of Saint Joseph, Nazareth

Prayer to St. Joseph the Betrothed (an Eastern Orthodox Prayer to St. Joseph)



Statue of St. Joseph in the courtyard of
The Church of St. Joseph, Nazareth

O holy, righteous Joseph! Whilst still living on earth, thou hadst great boldness before the Son of God, Who was pleased to call thee His father, as thou wast betrothed to His Mother, and to obey thee: we believe that now, taking up thine abode with the choirs of the righteous in heavenly habitations, thou wilt be heard in thine every request to our God and Saviour.

Therefore, taking refuge in thy protection and help, we ask and humbly entreat thee, that as thou thyself wast delivered from the storm of doubtful thoughts, so too deliver us who are beset by the stormy waves of our troubles and passions; as thou didst guard the all-pure Virgin from human slander, guard us likewise from all false witness; as thou didst keep the incarnate Lord from all harm and evil intent, keep also His Orthodox Church and all of us from all malice and harm.

Thou knowest, O Saint of God, that the Son of God too in the days of His incarnation had need of bodily things, and thou didst serve Him; for this cause we pray thee: aid us in our temporal needs by thine intercession, granting us all good things needful unto us in this life: and especially we ask thee to pray Him Who was called thy son, Who is the Only-begotten Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, to grant us remission of our sins, that we may be worthy of inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, so that, taking up our abode in the higher habitations with thee, we may always glorify the God Who is One in the Holy Trinity: the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and unto ages of ages. Amen.