

CHRISTMAS 2020: Contemplating St. Joseph

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“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone.”

Tonight we celebrate the glorious Birth of Jesus Christ, who is the great Light that has come into the world – to bring the light of His truth to all of us who walked in darkness and gloom until his coming.

Tonight we rejoice with all in Heaven and on earth; for Jesus Christ, our Savior, is born.

Jesus Christ, Son of God from all eternity and Son of Man by His taking flesh from the Virgin Mary, came:

to remove the yoke of Original Sin that burdened us;

to take away the rod of our taskmaster, the devil;

to free us from slavery to sin and make us sons and daughters of the Father, by giving us a share in His Sonship.

Tonight we rejoice, for a Child is born to us, a Son is given to us.

His name is Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father Forever, and Prince of Peace.

He reigns forever from His heavenly throne, and His dominion is vast and forever peaceful.

Let us contemplate this momentous event, the glorious Birth of our Savior, our King, and our God – who became man while remaining God in order to redeem us from our sins.

Let us enter into the quiet silence of the stable in Bethlehem and ponder this great mystery: the Son of God made man who enters this world of ours as a little helpless Baby, born of His Virgin Mother, Mary.

In this year in which Pope Francis has proclaimed dedicated to St. Joseph, let us take this holy Saint as our model, this beloved foster-father of Jesus and Guardian of the Redeemer, virgin-spouse of Mary.

St. Joseph was a silent spectator to the events of this night a little more than 2000 years ago, contemplating in wonder and awe the Virgin Birth of the Savior by his wife, the ever-Virgin Mary.

Let us imagine ourselves, with St. Joseph, spectators to this great event.

Let us try to identify with Joseph and what he must have experienced that first Christmas night.

We can think of how he must have felt when, after making the long journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem in the cold of winter, with a wife ready to give birth, he can find no room at any inn.

The Holy Family was turned away by all.

Finally, probably out of sympathy for this poor couple, they are told that they can spend the night in a stable within a cave, among the animals.

And it is here, in simple and holy poverty, that the King of Kings and Lord of Lords is born - to teach us that worldly riches matter not in God's eyes; that true wealth is found in the things of Heaven.

We can only imagine the awe and reverence St. Joseph must have felt as a witness to what happened on the night Christ was born.

I've always wondered what Joseph was doing during the time Mary was giving birth to Jesus.

Modesty would have required that Joseph, a virgin himself, not behold this sacred event.

And of course we know that this was no ordinary birth, but a miraculous one, with Mary's virginity left intact.

Here we can turn to the mystics, to whom God has deigned at times to reveal events in the lives of Jesus, Mary and Joseph which were not recorded in the Gospel accounts.

One such mystic is Sr. Maria Cecilia Baij, who was Abbess in a Benedictine convent in Monteflascone, Italy in the mid-1700's.

Jesus Himself revealed to Sister Maria facts about St. Joseph's entire life, which she wrote down and appear in a book, *The Life of Saint Joseph*.

So, what was St. Joseph doing while Mary was giving birth to Jesus?

Well, Joseph was very weary and worn out after the long journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, and from his unsuccessful attempts at finding a place for he and Mary to spend the night.

After settling in at the stable in the cave, Joseph said his prayers and then, on the bare ground, fell asleep. He then had a dream about the Savior being born in this stable and two animals coming to keep the Divine Infant warm by breathing on Him.

At midnight, an Angel appeared to him in the dream and told him: "Go quickly and adore the Savior of the world, who has just been born."

Joseph awoke. Sr. Maria describes the scene:

St. Joseph "saw the Divine Infant enveloped in light, and shining more brightly than the sun. The whole stable became illuminated. The happy Joseph prostrated himself at the feet of the Divine Infant, who was lying on the ground, and adored Him.

"Tears of joy streamed from his eyes, only to be followed by tears of sorrow at the sight of his Incarnate God in the midst of such poverty, and his own inability to do anything for Him. He made acts of love, admiration, and thanksgiving. The Divine Infant look at Joseph with an expression of ardent love

“St. Joseph now received many illuminations which enabled him to understand why the Savior of the world wished to be born in this stable, in such great poverty, and totally unknown to the world at large.

“The angelic choir now intoned ‘Glory to the Most High God [and] peace on earth to men of goodwill.’”

“The Mother of God took her Infant up into her arms . . . Joseph knelt down beside [them] . . .

“Mary wrapped up her little Infant and laid Him in the manger . . . An ox and an ass came to abide in the cave and proceeded to keep the newborn Savior warm by breathing over him. St. Joseph . . . knelt down and adored the Savior . . . and then meditated upon this great mystery.”

As the great Carmelite mystic, St. John of the Cross, says of the Newborn Baby Jesus in a poem: “So He who had only a Father, now had a Mother undefiled.”

Yes, God the Son, who from all eternity had only a Father, now had a mother, too – the Blessed Virgin Mary.

With what love must St. Joseph have gazed upon this scene: Holy Mary looking down on the Son of God as He – whose mighty arms uphold all of creation – rested in her loving arms as a helpless child!

We can’t really imagine St. Joseph saying anything while he beholds this wondrous scene. He just ponders the mystery – in silence.

Pope St. John Paul II says, “The silence of Joseph has its own special eloquence.”

The Saints teach us that the real meaning of Christmas is to foster a rebirth of Christ in our hearts, through faith and good works borne of love.

St. Ambrose, the great fourth century Father and Doctor of the Church whose preaching converted St. Augustine, says: “A soul that believes, both conceives and brings forth the Word of God. . . . Christ has only one Mother in the flesh, but we all bring forth Christ in faith.”

St. Joseph was the first to conceive and bring forth Jesus, the Word made flesh, in faith, because he believed what the Angel told him about Mary, and took her as his wife into his home; and thereafter was Guardian and protector of the Holy Family.

St. Ambrose says: "Every soul receives the Word of God, if only it keeps chaste, remaining pure and free from sin, its modesty undefiled. The soul that succeeds in this proclaims the greatness of the Lord, just as Mary's soul did."

St. Joseph's soul did so as well.

In our second reading for this Christmas Mass, St. Paul writes to Titus: "The grace of God has appeared in Christ, saving all and training us to reject Godless ways and worldly desires, and to live temperately, justly, devoutly, as we look forward in hope to the coming of our Savior."

Let us imitate St. Joseph this Christmas, and contemplate, in silence, the great mystery of the Birth of our Savior.

Let us, like St. Joseph, that "just man" (as Scripture calls him), nurture the life of Christ which we received in the womb of our souls at Baptism, and bring Him forth to others by our lives of purity and holiness.

Only then will we give real meaning to the Birth of our Lord on Christmas.

And let us rejoice this holy night, with all the Angels and Saints, that Christ, our Lord, is born!