

Saint Joseph, Husband of Mary

March 19

(first century)

If there were a photo album of Jesus' family, what pictures would be in it? Neither Mary nor Joseph appear much in Scripture, but some beautiful images are found there.

The Gospels of both Matthew and Luke show Joseph as the gentle but strong protector of Mary, the Mother of Jesus. When Matthew traces Jesus' human ancestry, Joseph's family is given (Matthew 1:16). Luke identifies Mary as the betrothed of Joseph, of the house and family of David (Luke 1:27). This "righteous man" does not know of the miracle worked in Mary, who is to be the Mother of God, and so he faces a terrible dilemma when he realizes that the woman he loves and to whom he is engaged is pregnant (Matthew 1:18–25). Through a dream Joseph is informed of what has occurred, and his loving protection of Mary increases. As the time for Jesus to be born draws near, Mary and Joseph must go to Bethlehem—not only to be enrolled among the members of the house of David, but also so that the Messiah will be born in the city of the great king, as prophecy foretold.

At Jesus' birth Joseph guards Jesus and Mary (Luke 2:4–20). Joseph is present also, protecting Mary as her legal husband, when the child is circumcised and when he is offered to his Father at the Presentation. With Mary, Joseph hears Simeon's prophecy about Mary's sufferings (Luke 2:21–35). When the child is in danger

because of King Herod's hatred, Joseph guards and provides for his family in Egypt until he can safely take them back to Nazareth (Matthew 2:13–23). During one of her keenest sufferings, Mary has Joseph to rely upon. When Jesus is lost in Jerusalem, Joseph and Mary seek him and take him back to Nazareth (Luke 2:41–52). After this, Joseph slips out of the Scriptures, except for a few references to Jesus as the "carpenter's son." The word for "carpenter" used in Scripture means a worker in stone, metal, or wood. It is thought that Joseph died before Jesus began his public life.

These scriptural pictures of Joseph reveal him as a "just man," an obedient man, a good and loving husband and father.

Little attention was given to Joseph, but then people began to consider his role and his virtues. Public veneration of Saint Joseph existed in the Eastern Coptic church in the fourth century. The Western church began to celebrate his feast in the sixth century. Pope Pius IX proclaimed Saint Joseph the Patron of the Universal Church in 1870. Since then Saint Joseph has been named patron of different groups and countries. In 1955 Pius XII made May 1 the feast of St. Joseph the Worker. In 1961 Pope John XXIII proclaimed Joseph the protector of Vatican Council II and in 1962 included his name in Eucharistic Prayer I of the Mass.