December reflection for the Year of St. Joseph: Son of David—Joseph and the covenant

Our call to be Spirit-filled sons and daughters

In 2 Samuel 7:12-17, God promises David that through his descendant, God will establish his kingdom forever. And yet, the Davidic dynasty ended in 586 BC when Babylon conquered Jerusalem. After that, Old Testament prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophesied that God will fulfill his promise of an everlasting kingdom through an anointed or Spirit-filled Son of David. Jesus fulfilled these prophesies through His earthly sonship to St. Joseph.

Joseph was a descendant of David, so Jesus is legally a descendant of David, too. Additionally, tradition holds that Mary was likely a descendant of David as well. Therefore, Jesus would have been a descendant of David not only by law but also by blood. When Joseph discovered Mary’s pregnancy, he resolved to divorce her quietly. Meanwhile, “an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, Son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife.” (Mt 1:20a) In his moment of trial, the angel reminds Joseph of his identity: son of David. This title affirms his dignity in the eyes of God and reminds Joseph of the close relationship between God and his ancestors and their participation in God’s saving plan.

The angelic message also indicates that Joseph will play a role in the fulfillment of the covenant promise to David. Matthew describes Joseph as a just man, implying that he lived according to the law. Such a man would have been familiar with Old Testament prophecies, especially those involving his ancestor David. Since it was an angel that declared to Joseph, the son of David, that his son was conceived by the Holy Spirit, we can be reasonably certain that David was aware that his child was not just any son of David but the Spirit-filled son foretold by the prophets. Being called “son of David” in his moment of trial, Joseph is reminded of his own noble blood and accepts the role and responsibility to which he is called: to take Mary into his home and to raise the prophesied Messiah. Jesus is called “son of David” 17 times in the New Testament. The only other person in the New Testament referred to as “son of David” is Joseph. Although the prophesied “son of David” and Messiah king was undoubtedly Jesus and not Joseph, Joseph was graced by God to participate in the fulfillment of this prophecy and the actions by which God saved his people. Joseph played the role of guardian, father and head of the Holy Family for the formative years of Jesus’ life. Although Jesus is the messianic son of David, Joseph was the one set over the household of the Holy Family. He led by example, living his identity as son of David and being docile to the Holy Spirit.

Raising God is undoubtedly a daunting task and yet God entrusted this to St. Joseph. This truth reminds us that God provides us with the grace to do what he asks. In paragraph 1831, the catechism points out that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are to be bestowed upon the prophesied son of David. Although this is a reference to Jesus, it also seems to apply to St. Joseph, who chose to follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit throughout his life. Drawing from St. Thomas Aquinas, the catechism gives a helpful description about what the gifts of the Spirit actually do. It tells us that, while they do not replace the virtues, the gifts of the Spirit “complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them. They make the faithful docile in readily obeying divine inspiration.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1831) Let us ask for the intercession of St. Joseph, the Spirit-filled son of David. As our spiritual father, may he teach us to be sons and daughters and to respond to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.
January reflection for the Year of St. Joseph: Take your family—Joseph and the vulnerable

St. Joseph’s flight to Egypt: Consolation for the defenseless

An image of the Holy Family hangs over the mantle in our living room, Mancini’s “Rest during the Flight to Egypt.” St. Joseph sits on the right side of the painting, where he holds out berries for the Child Jesus, who is seated on Mary’s lap, to eat. Three angels hover behind Mary, bringing protection and comfort. It’s a beautiful painting, full of rich, flowing colors, and so expressive of the love within the Holy Family. I’m left with a question when I look at it, however: Can Mary and Joseph see the angels?

We know from Scripture that both Mary and Joseph have great confidence in God. After all, by this point they have both said “yes” to God’s surprising and confusing plans for their lives. Even so, the situation the Holy Family faces in this painting is frightening even to contemplate: take your family and what you can carry, leave everyone and everything you know and go. Go to a place where you don’t speak the language, where it’s possible you aren’t wanted, where you will be met with frustration and dismissal at best, with hatred and abuse at worst. And yet somehow this is preferable to staying in your own home, your own country. Obviously, it makes sense that St. Joseph is the patron of migrants and immigrants. He lived through the same hardships migrants still deal with every day.

With all this in mind, I wonder if the painting above our mantle isn’t sugar-coating the flight to Egypt a little. In reality, I have no doubt that there were angels with the Holy Family every step of the way. Yet the trip must have looked very different to Joseph and Mary’s earthly eyes. It must have taken great trust in God for them to continue on this difficult journey without visible signs of God’s protection to reassure them. I can relate to their journey somewhat—our family has moved eight times since my husband and I were married. Even when we had been very careful in our decision and made extensive preparations, it always felt like a leap of faith. My worries often sounded a lot like Joseph’s must have: Would we be welcomed? Would this new job work out? If not, would we have to move our children away from their friends and ourselves away from our community again?

There was only one way for us to deal with these questions, and I think it is where I feel the greatest connection to St. Joseph: utter dependence on God. Joseph trusted that if God wanted this child to live, He would guide the journey. He would lead them to housing. He would show him someone who was willing to employ a day-laborer from a foreign land. St. Joseph obeyed God’s will, and trusted that, in His love and goodness, God would stretch out His hand to meet his family’s earthly needs.

Personally, when I recognize God’s hand in my life, it is nearly always in retrospect, and often several years in retrospect at that. We can’t see the angels walking beside us. Yet the “coincidences” that led my husband and I to meet, that have led us to different cities to build lasting, life-giving friendships, that allowed my baby and I to survive a harrowing childbirth—God was there with us each time. I like to imagine Joseph and Mary remembering the flight to Egypt much like I remember the difficult moments of my life: with the hand of God and His angels, unseen, guiding us every step of the way.

Reflect and Participate

As the Diocese of Lafayette celebrates the Year of St. Joseph, reflecting upon the virtues of adoration, obedience and service, several events have also been planned in which all are invited to actively participate. Events scheduled for December and January include:

- Dec. 2-3 (6:00 p.m.): Parish Mission (St. Joseph, Iota)
- Dec. 5, 19; Jan. 2, 19: Opportunity to gain Year of St. Joseph indulgence (any St. Joseph Church)
- Dec. 30 (6:00 p.m.): North Deanery Celebration (St. Anthony, Eunice)
- Jan. 14 (6:00 p.m.): Parish Mission (St. Joseph, Rayne)

Additional information about the Year of St. Joseph may be found at diolaf.org/stjoseph.