

**Joseph the Carpenter**  
**Georges de La Tour, 1642**  
**Louvre Museum, Paris**



**Introduction:** Begin by spending time just looking at the image. Who is depicted, what might the story be and are there interesting details.

**The Content of the image:** We see in this painting a touching scene of Joseph the Carpenter working on a piece of wood while the Child Jesus holds a candle to give light. On the surface it appears to be showing us a loving scene between a father and his son working on a project together. Yet, there is deeper meaning and message for the viewer. First we know this is no ordinary father and son, but St. Joseph who is a carpenter and the Child Jesus.

**Symbolism of Light/Dark:** Our eyes right away notice the contrast between the light and the dark, but light overcomes the darkness in this room. The darkness of the room represents sin in our world. As the Child Jesus holds the light which illuminates the space, the darkness is overcome. This is meant to show us that Jesus is the light of the world and can conquer sin. If you look closely you will notice that Joseph is not looking at Jesus but instead at the flame of the candle and Jesus is looking at the top of the flame.

**Follow the Eyes:** Both of their eyes are directed to the light and therefore so should ours. The painter made sure the flame was exaggerated so that the viewer's eyes go right to it. That light signifies what Jesus will accomplish for us through his death and resurrection; he saves us from the darkness of sin and death.

**Symbolism of the Wood:** We are also meant to notice the piece of wood that Joseph is working on, this too should remind us of the wood of the cross as well as the shape of the auger Joseph is using, it too is in the shape of a cross. This all foreshadows what is still to come.

**Glow of the Flame:** At first glance it might seem that Jesus is holding his hand against the flame to protect it from going out, but actually his hand is raised in the same way that he would give a blessing. Also notice that we can see through his fingers, another detail that draws our eyes to his hand. It is meant to tell us who he is and what he is really about. No ordinary boy. The other way the painter wants to signify the importance of this child is by having his face glow with the light from the flame. In reality there would probably be some shadow on the side of his face, but his face is completely full of bright light.

**The message:** Is given to us in the Gospel of John where Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (Jn 8: 12)

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