

## SAINT JOSEPH: MODEL FOR MISSION

The Liturgy of the Church designates two feasts in honor of Saint Joseph. The solemnity of Joseph, Husband of Mary, is celebrated on March 19; the feast of Joseph the Worker is on May 1.

Historical knowledge about Joseph is limited. In fact, his role is described in detail only in the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke. His name appears in a few other places, where Jesus is identified as “Joseph’s son” and as “the carpenter’s son.” This lack of detailed biographical data reminds us that the Gospels are primarily “faith summaries,” written to engender a faith commitment. In this context, one may ask: is it valid to assert that Joseph is a model for mission?



Joseph, according to Gospel accounts, was a village carpenter; he was also a descendant of King David. Joseph’s life in Nazareth was that of a quiet, humble, consistent worker. His village life-style was simple and settled. He was betrothed to Mary according to traditional Jewish custom. Joseph, like all evangelizers and missionaries, sought to faithfully and humbly serve the Lord in the many daily, routine tasks of life. Mission demands faith and humble service.

A tremendous crisis disrupts Joseph’s life-plans: Mary is pregnant. Joseph faces a great dilemma: What does he do in this confusing situation? He formulates a simple plan: a “quiet divorce.” This way of proceeding has Joseph faithful to the Jewish law and also protects Mary (by law she could be stoned to death). Joseph plans a “middle course.” He does the “right thing,” assuring that no one will suffer; Joseph is truly the “just” man. Mission inevitably faces challenges and crises; thus, great discernment is demanded. Mission always seeks everyone’s welfare; no one will be harmed by decisions or actions taken.

Just when Joseph seems to have everything in place, God intervenes in an unexpected way, in a dream. Joseph is commanded to change his personal plans: Take Mary as your wife! Alter your course of action. Place radical trust in God. *Do not be afraid!* Believe in God—in spite of everything to the contrary. Yes, all evangelizers need to have faith, to believe.

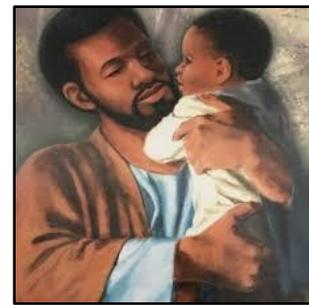
*“Mission is an issue of faith”* (RM 11). Missioners believe that God **always** brings good out of difficult situations.



Joseph remained committed to Mary—even though it entailed living through many difficulties. There were suspicions and probably even gossip around Nazareth. Joseph took the pregnant Mary on the perilous, lengthy journey to Bethlehem. They faced rejection, and in a crude, dirty, foul-smelling stable Mary gave birth. They fled as refugees into Egypt and for years lived as foreigners in a strange land. Only later did they return to Nazareth. Mission demands fidelity to one’s commitments—in the midst of trying, frustrating circumstances.

Joseph dutifully raised Jesus into manhood; however, he most probably died before Jesus began his public ministry. In short, one notes that Joseph did not see the fruits of his labors. Joseph faithfully served and gave all to God; he did not seek for recognition. He allowed events to happen on “God’s time.” Mission demands the same humility and self-effacing service. When and how one’s efforts in mission will bear fruit is to be left in God’s hands.

As one reflects on the birth of Jesus, one realizes that it was Joseph who *first* held the newly born child in his hands; he is the first human to hold Jesus—even before giving him to Mary. What a unique privilege! But, Joseph also desired to share Jesus with others, the shepherds, the magi. Mission demands both “holding” and “sharing” Jesus. Like Joseph, evangelizers make their home with Jesus and Mary; from this intimacy they share Jesus with others.



The meaning of the name Joseph is “let God add.” Joseph, a model for mission, allowed God to add and increase, to fill his life with marvelous and unexpected gifts. Friends, through baptism we all are missionary; we look to Joseph as our model for living mission. Saint Joseph was declared patron of the universal Church in 1870, 150 years ago. Pope Francis has commemorated this event by declaring a year dedicated to Saint Joseph and gifting us with his apostolic letter, *Patris Corde*. We look to Joseph as a model for living as “missionary disciples” (EG 120) within our missionary Church.

**James H. Kroeger, MM**  
**Manila, Philippines**

### **Reflection Questions**

- 1) Joseph had to discern a course of action when he learned that Mary was pregnant. How is his discernment a “model” for mission?
- 2) Missionaries are called to have a full-bodied faith – trusting that good will come out of difficult situations in a context that is new to them and absent of many of the familiar supports of their home country. How is Joseph a model of that type of faith?
- 3) How are missionaries called to “hold Jesus” and “share Jesus?”



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