

SERMON ON THE SAINT JOSEPH
SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS 29/12/2019

On the Sunday after Christmas, the Church commemorates other saints associated with the Birth of the Lord. Among them is St. Joseph, the man betrothed (engaged) to the Blessed Virgin Mary (one of his titles is “the Betrothed”). He was a carpenter from Bethlehem, who had settled down in Nazareth. It was said that he was a widower with six children. From the Gospels we know the names of his sons: James, Joshua, Simon, and Judas (Matthew 13:55). The Gospels also mention his daughters, who are unnamed (verse 56). We know from Tradition that their names are Mary and Salome (Zebedee’s wife and the mother of St. James and John the Apostles). St. Joseph was a devout and pious man, who would worship at the Temple in Jerusalem for the great feasts. During one of these trips, the priests of the Temple led by St. Zacharias (the father of St. John the Baptist) entrusted the Blessed Virgin Mary to the elderly Joseph through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. She was only 15 years old when she came under his protection, and they were engaged. Following the custom of that time, the Blessed Virgin accompanied St. Joseph to Nazareth, living in prayer and fear of God.

As we know from the Gospel of Luke (1:26-38), the Blessed Virgin Mary received the message from the Angel that she would conceive a Son by the Holy Spirit. In her humility and modesty (that she would become the Mother of the Son of God), she did not reveal this to St. Joseph. After some months and with signs of an advanced pregnancy, he was overwhelmed by great temptation. Having had no marital relations with her, he did not know what to think about the fact that she was pregnant! His reflection attests to the Virginity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. St. Joseph was the guardian of her purity, and the holy patron of both the Theotokos and Our Lord Jesus. He is honored as such by the Church, and was never considered her husband. While he was still thinking about all of this, an Angel of the Lord said to him: “Joseph, Son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:20-21). It is from these words of the Angel that St. Joseph finally understood the mission that God had entrusted to him, to stand by the Blessed Virgin Mary and always be her guardian and protector. This message from God was accepted with humility and faithfulness, respecting His will. St. Joseph affectionately and obediently took charge of the Blessed Virgin and Our Lord.

It is important to note how meaningful this protection was. Since he was considered the Blessed Virgin’s husband in the eyes of society, it protected the mother and child from stoning, which was the penalty for pregnancy out of wedlock declared by Mosaic Law (who among the Nazarenes would believe the truth of the matter?). When the Imperial Census Decree was issued by Rome, St. Joseph undertook the long journey to Bethlehem with the Virgin Mary, who was close to delivery. On the Night of Our Savior’s Birth, St. Joseph arranged for shelter, even in a Cave, to stay overnight. When the Divine Infant was threatened with death by Herod, he took care of the Holy Family by taking them to safety in Egypt. And when they returned to Nazareth, he secured work and the resources to care for their needs. All this was done with love for the Blessed Virgin and Our Lord, faith, and obedience to the will of God. The last time St. Joseph is mentioned in the Holy Gospels is when they visited the Temple of Jerusalem (Jesus was twelve years old at the time). Holy Tradition tells us that not long after this, St. Joseph completed his mission and delivered his spirit to God.

St. Joseph is a model of manhood. He coped with all of these stressful situations in a peaceful way. He did not react with anger when the Blessed Virgin was pregnant and he was unaware of what happened. He willingly took the long journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem and then again for refuge in Egypt. This he did, and much more! He was guided only by his humility and obedience to the will of God.

It is for this reason that the Church honors annually the memory of St. Joseph the Righteous, the betrothed of the Theotokos.

May we all imitate his prudence, selflessness, and his willingness to take on any difficulty or burden in conformity with the will of God. Amen.