

Customs and Traditions (Cont'd)

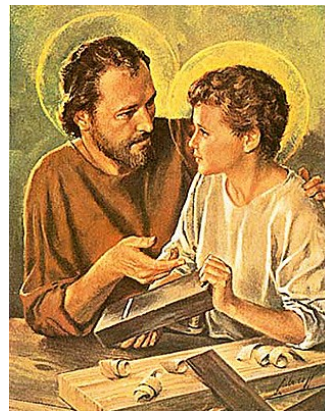
Families can celebrate Saint Joseph in many other ways. Since his day (March 19) always falls during Lent, Catholics may put aside their Lenten practices for the day and enjoy a festive meal together. Or, perhaps more in keeping with Joseph's legacy, they could go and serve lunch or dinner in a local soup kitchen. It is also a good day to contribute time, money and/or goods to a homeless shelter in memory of the fact that Joseph and his family were often homeless. Saint Joseph's Day is also a good time to:

- Pray for your own father, try to call or visit
- Pray for our pastor, another "father" in our life
- Invite a father who is alone to have dinner; if he is a single father, invite his children too
- Say a prayer of thanksgiving to our Father in heaven
- Give thanks for work and the ability to provide for your family
- Pray for the grace and strength to be a good father, husband, and provider.

Prayer to Saint Joseph

Joseph, faithful husband of Mary and foster father of Jesus, I ask your blessing on all fathers. May they love and cherish their children, and may they be examples of goodness and honesty in all they do. Bless, too, all who are spiritual fathers: our parish priests, our missionaries, religious brothers, and all who reach out with compassion in your name. Saint Joseph, pray for me and my loved ones.

Amen.



Saint Joseph's Day

March 19

"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her."

Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24a





History

The foster father and protector of Jesus and his mother, Mary, Joseph has long been viewed by Catholics as the epitome of patience, strength, and fatherhood. A seemingly ordinary man, Joseph was selected by God to accept a responsibility greater than what was asked even of Abraham and Moses: the care and nurturing of the Son of God.

From the beginning, this calling was filled with challenge. Shortly after their engagement, Joseph found out that Mary, a virgin, is pregnant. It's difficult to imagine what Joseph must have felt when, in the midst of dealing with his young fiancée's inexplicable pregnancy, he is given a dream from God that explains the whole thing. It was hardly an easy explanation for Joseph to believe, much less embrace: Mary, a virgin, is pregnant with the Son of God through the Holy Spirit. But he did accept it, and with it, an increasing number of even more difficult situations.

Soon after, Joseph and Mary are forced by Roman decree to travel a great distance from Nazareth to Bethlehem in order to register for the census. Mary was nearly at the end of her pregnancy, and the rough trip would not be easy for her. When they arrived in Bethlehem, Joseph could find no respectable place to stay because the small city was overcrowded with others who had come to Bethlehem for the census. Instead of giving in to despair, he kept searching until he finally convinced an innkeeper to lend out his stable. It was there, that same night, that Jesus was born.

When Herod learned from his own historians that the Messiah was said to have been born in Bethlehem, he sent soldiers to massacre all male babies up to the age of two. God then sent **another** dream to Joseph commanding him to flee with the child and Mary. So Joseph rose up in the middle of the night, gathered Mary and Jesus and their few possessions, and immediately went to the land of Egypt.

The strength and patience of Joseph was tested again and again as Jesus grew up. After the small family fled to Egypt and had finally established themselves, Herod died. Once again, there was upheaval for Joseph as he prepared to move the family back to Nazareth.

The final recorded example of Joseph's love and acceptance as the human father of Jesus came when Jesus, still a boy, stayed behind at the temple in Jerusalem while his unsuspecting parents traveled over a day's journey back home. Frantic with worry, they retraced their steps and searched for their son. Finally they found him in the temple.

Perhaps this incident in the temple best demonstrates why Joseph throughout history has been considered the model husband, father, and protector.

Mystery

The mystery of Joseph is not something that can be immediately perceived. What prompted this common, practical, hardworking man to abandon the calm, predictable life he had created for himself to answer God's call?

Faith is the mystery of Joseph: extraordinary, unflagging faith eloquently expressed in his actions. Joseph possessed an unquestioning trust in God's revelation and love, one that defies human definition. This quiet, almost plodding, seemingly unexceptional man demonstrated an exuberant, swift and decidedly exceptional faith. That is the mystery of Joseph.

Customs and Traditions

There are many wonderful traditions associated with Joseph. Devotions to Joseph began to gain in intensity during the fourth century. Joseph was officially recognized as a saint in the late fifteenth century. Today, Joseph is the patron saint of fathers, workers, and real estate.

This last category has given rise to one of the strangest and most interesting devotions to Joseph. It is the custom among some Catholics who wish to sell their home to bury a statue of Saint Joseph on the property, often upside down and near the real estate sign.