

**PASTORAL SERMON**  
**The Sunday after the Nativity**  
**By V. Rev. Timothy Baclig**  
**December 30, 2018**

Today is the “Sixth Day of Christmas.” It is also The Sunday after Christmas. The Gospel reading we hear today is the continuation of the events of the Holy Nativity according to the St. Matthew. It covers the period of time that begins with Mary & Joseph, who after facing the hardship of not having a place to lodge, were forced to become refugees in Egypt, in order to escape from the wrath of Herod, who forced the killing of the thousands of innocent children. Following the death of Herod, we are told Jesus journeyed with Mary and Joseph to their home in the city of Nazareth in Galilee.

The sequence of events of the birth of Christ can at times be somewhat confusing. That is because we are often presented with the nativity scene with everyone in place: Mary, Joseph, the Baby Jesus, the shepherds and the Wise Men – all there at once! Today, “Joseph,” who is called “the Betrothed,” is in the spotlight. He is described in the Gospel as a righteous man. His role is often overlooked.

We learn from the Apocryphal books such as *The Proto Evangelium of St. James* that Joseph was a master builder, a craftsman who was very gifted with his hands. He was married to Salome and together had four sons: James, Joseph, Jude, and Simeon; also three daughters: Esther, Martha, and Salome. Joseph and Simeon, the elder sons of Joseph were married and had families of their own. Their daughters were also married and lives in their own homes. So there remained in Joseph’s house Jude and James – who has the honorable title “James, the ‘brother’ of the Lord;” who was also the first bishop of Jerusalem – commemorated today with David the Prophet and King, and Joseph “the Betrothed.” Joseph’s wife, Salome died after a long and blessed marriage of about 40 years.

Joseph, therefore, was a widower and was chosen by the Temple priests to be betrothed to the Virgin Mary. Following the events of the Annunciation, when Mary was in her sixth month of pregnancy, Joseph was overwhelmingly troubled in learning that Mary was with child. This image is shown to us on the icon of the Holy Nativity. But as a man who was a “servant of the Lord,” he heeded the Angel of the Lord who spoke to him in a dream: “...do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in

her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” (Matt. 1:19-21). Joseph, who was a man knowledgeable of the Law and the prophets remembered the prophesy of Isaiah: “Behold a Virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and His name shall be called ‘Immanuel’” (Is. 7:14). Being a just man, he resolved to care for Mary by keeping her safely in his home; accepting her as his wife (Matt. 1:24) and in this way protected her from being stoned for adultery.

In obedience to the Law of Moses, Joseph took the Child and His mother and had him circumcised on the eighth day, and named Him “Jesus.” (Luke 2:22). This commemoration is on Tuesday, the eighth day of following the birth of Christ. It happens to also be our Civil New Year and the Feast of St. Basil the Great (when we will serve the Divine Liturgy).

It cannot be overstated that while Joseph was an accomplished builder and carpenter from a family well known in Galilee as well as Judea and to the Jewish leaders, his spirit was refined and elevated with the knowledge of the scriptures. Joseph was the head of his household, however, it was a home governed by love and devotion to the Law and the Prophets. Most importantly, Joseph was a man of God.

Very little is known of the life of Mary from the scriptures. Similarly, not much can be said of Joseph “the betrothed.” However a great deal can be understood about a man who not only faced great challenges, but made some very difficult choices.

Joseph was able to make wise decisions because he learned to respond to God’s call, readily and willingly over and over again. In a very few passages of the Gospel, Joseph appears as a strong, courageous man, a working man, yet in his heart we see a tenderness, which is not the trait of the weak, but rather a sign of strength of spirit and a capacity for concern, for love and compassion, and for genuine openness to others.

As a man of faith, who is described as a righteous and just man, He is a man of great kindness and compassion. This righteousness is not “self righteousness.” Nor is it based upon self-interests. It is grounded in compassion and mercy. It is a righteousness that is rooted in love and obedience. Most importantly, Joseph’s righteousness is based upon his relationship to God that defines who he was. His righteousness was not even

based upon what he was called to do or even the fact that he did it. Joseph, the son of David was simply a committed “servant of the Lord.”

He is a man who remains constantly attentive to God; open to the signs of His presence, receptive to God’s plans and not to his own. The man, Joseph is also a “protector” and guardian. Discretely, humbly, silently, but with patience, diligent attentiveness and fidelity, Joseph took care of Mary and gladly dedicated himself to Jesus Christ’s upbringing, even when it may have been hard to understand—from the time of his betrothal to the finding of the 12 year old Jesus in the Temple in Jerusalem. Joseph is present with loving care as the spouse of Mary. He is at her side in good times and bad, on the first journey to Bethlehem, and then to Egypt, and for the frantic search for the child in the Temple; later in northern Palestine, in a day to day life in their home at Nazareth; in the workshop, where (tradition tells us) he taught his trade to Jesus.

Joseph is able to hear God’s voice because He makes it his purpose to be guided by God’s will and for this reason is all the more attentive to Jesus and Mary who are entrusted to his care and safety.

God has given us hope in the Feast of His Birth in the revelation of Himself born as a little child, and in the Feast to come: The Feast of His Baptism (Holy Theophany) – hope of renewal and sanctification. For you and me, His life in us *is* our hope *for all that really matters*. May we have the courage of Joseph, the purity of Mary, the diligence of the shepherds and the wisdom of the Magi to be servants of God our King, for Christ is born! Let us glorify Him!