

Minor Festivals: St. Joseph, March 19

Who Would Have Ever Guessed?

How different Joseph's life must have been compared to the life he had planned and dreamed of. No doubt he planned on having a carpenter's shop in Nazareth throughout his life. He planned on settling down and getting married to a nice Jewish girl named Mary. Together they would have children whom they would raise in the Jewish faith. They would live happily ever after.

Then one day his world was rocked, his mind was shocked, and his heart was filled with pain. His beloved fiancée came back from a three-month stay at her relative's house in the hill country of Judea. It was apparent that she was with child. Joseph knew that he didn't have anything to do with it. There was only one logical explanation—she had been unfaithful. What to do? He loved her. He didn't want to publicly humiliate her. So he decided to divorce her quietly. In this way, he was actually risking his own good name for the sake of hers. People could conclude that he wanted the “fun” of making babies without the responsibility—that he was a deadbeat dad.

He fell asleep with this on his mind. But an angel appeared to him in a dream and informed him that his betrothed had not been unfaithful. What was conceived in her was by the power of the Holy Spirit. He was to take his beloved home and watch over her, care for her, and provide for her. He was to name the baby Jesus, because he would save his people from their sins. Joseph was now the protector of Mary and the Baby Jesus.

The emperor's decree dictated that Joseph and his late-term virgin wife head down to Bethlehem for the census. The baby was born. Joseph and Mary decided to make Bethlehem their home—perhaps to avoid constantly answering questions about the conflicting dates of marriage and delivery. Magi came asking questions about the King of the Jews. Such talk agitated the paranoid and jealous King Herod. A plot was hatched to exterminate Jesus by exterminating all the baby boys of Bethlehem. An angel told Joseph to hustle the young family out of town under the cover of night. They went to Egypt until Herod died. An angel told Joseph to return to the Promised Land. He didn't want to go to Judea—too dangerous. He went north to Galilee and moved back to Nazareth. There he provided for his family, taking up his carpentry trade once again. He taught Jesus to be a carpenter. He and Mary evidently had four more sons and at least two daughters. They raised them in the Jewish faith. In the end, his planned and dreamed of life was fulfilled—but after a detour—an all-important detour. God used Joseph to protect and raise the Savior of the World. What an un-planned privilege!

You and I can make all of the plans in the world. We can lay out our future and know exactly what we're going to do next week, next year, and the year after that. But that doesn't make it so, as James reminds us: Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.” (James 4:13-15)

I leave all things to God's direction; He loves me both in wealth and woe.
His will is good, sure his affection; His tender love is true, I know.
My fortress and my rock is he: What pleases God, that pleases me.

God knows what must be done to save me; His love for me will never cease.
Upon his hands he did engrave me With purest gold of loving grace.
His will supreme must ever be: What pleases God, that pleases me.

My God desires the soul's salvation; My soul he, too, desires to save.
Therefore with Christian resignation All earthly troubles I will brave.
His will be done eternally: What pleases God, that pleases me.

My God has all things in his keeping; He is my ever-faithful friend.
He gives me laughter after weeping, And all his ways in blessings end.
His love endures eternally: What pleases God, that pleases me.

After sharing this devotion with your family, take the time to read Matthew 1:18-2:23.