

Images from Our Views of Joseph

There is much made of St. Joseph in the church and in Christian history, but there really is very little in the Bible about him. Still, as Sisters of Saint Joseph, we rejoice during the entire month of March, delighting especially on March 19, the Feast of St. Joseph, as we celebrate the legacy and heritage left to us by this great saint of the church.

So why is this and what are the actual images that we have of St. Joseph?

There are only two books of the New Testament that even mention him! In the Gospel of Luke, we read in Chapter 2 that Joseph and Mary traveled from the town of Nazareth to Bethlehem because they were ordered to register in their hometown of Bethlehem. Mary was pregnant and gave birth in a crude shelter there. The image of Joseph in this story is that he already knew that this pregnancy had not been entirely “smooth sailing” and that the days ahead would be anything but sheer bliss.

The image we might take from this story is that through Joseph we recognize what we already know: there are few relationships and few scenarios of birth and new life that *are* simply glorious manifestations of unmitigated joy. Perhaps that is some of the reason for Joseph being such an example to us: he faced rough patches in his struggle to be faithful to the ones he loved and felt called to help bring to life.

Later in Luke’s Gospel, Mary and Joseph accompany Jesus to a religious festival and guess what? They *lose* him! In verse 2:42 his frantic parents question Jesus about where he had been why he caused them so much stress. In this image, Joseph appeals to so many episodes of parenthood: we worry so and struggle to protect and provide safety for our children. Again, Joseph comforts and encourages us in real life struggles we face.

And in Matthew’s Gospel, Chapter 2, Joseph learns through a dream that the political tyrant of his day, King Herod, has plotted deadly ruin for his little son Jesus. In the middle of the night, Joseph realizes that he has to escape with his wife and son to pursue safety in the land of Egypt. What about this as an image of a parent willing to do any and everything to protect his family from danger?

Sometimes I marvel at the thought that Joseph is so prominent in the church when so little is written about him. When I think of just these few images that we have, I think the core of who he is for us is the very core of what we truly and really care about: our children, our families, safety and well-being, generous love in spite of the messiness and confusion of life.

~Sister Patricia Schoelles