**A Witness to Ordinary Time**

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

As the familiar strains of Christmas hymns fill the air these days, it occurs to me that, in the canon of our most popular Christmas songs, St. Joseph is inexplicably missing. As these songs describe the earliest witnesses to the Nativity, we sing of angels, wise men, little drummer boys, shepherds, sheep, and barnyard animals of all kinds.

Yet, missing from these songs is St. Joseph – the first one to behold Mother and Child with love on that night so long ago. He is the third person in our ubiquitous Nativity scenes – usually depicted holding a lamp or a staff as he protected his family, or kneeling by Christ’s cradle as he honored his newborn King. Nevertheless, so often he seems to be otherwise missing from our songs and our celebrations. But, to see Christmas – and the days before and after Christmas – with the love and awe that filled St Joseph’s eyes is a way to see, anew, how sacred this celebration is.

Nine months before Christmas, St Joseph received both the startling news from his beloved and the comforting news from an angel that Mary had conceived and was carrying within her the Son of God. Once he learned of this turn of events, did he speak of it to Saints Anne and Joachim as they contemplated what was happening in the lives of their daughter and son-in-law? How did he explain these circumstances to his own family and friends? Did he worry when Mary went to the hills of Judea to visit her cousin Elizabeth, fearing what could happen on her journey?

How did St Joseph react when he learned of Emperor Augustus’s decree that he must return to Bethlehem for a census? Did he rue the fact that, of all the inconvenient times the Emperor could have picked, he chose a time that would require rough long-distance travel with Mary so dangerously close to her delivery date?

How did St Joseph feel when, at the time he most wanted to protect his wife, he could not secure a place for her in an inn and had to do his best for her in far more humble accommodations?

When St. Joseph first laid eyes on the newborn Christ child, what awe must have filled his heart as he had his first glimpse of what this meant? When St. Joseph first saw his beloved hold her baby in her arms, did his heart swell with that fierce, protective love so familiar to new parents?

What thoughts went through St. Joseph’s mind when throngs of shepherds descended noisily on his exhausted little family, singing praises to God while the mother and child in his care surely must have needed their sleep?

How did St. Joseph the carpenter play host to the wise men who came from afar to pay homage to Christ? Did he worry about what he would do with such unlikely baby gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh in the rough quarters where these gifts were presented? Could St. Joseph have foreseen what the bitter scent of myrrh would mean thirty-three years later?

When it came time to present Christ in the temple, was St. Joseph overwhelmed with the privilege he had to present God Himself to God Himself?

When St. Joseph heard the prophecy of Simeon and learned that sorrows would piece the heart of his beloved Mary, did his own heart ache too?

How much fear crossed St. Joseph’s mind when he learned in a dream that he had to flee Bethlehem with his family to safety? In those days of flight, did he look forward to the days when his family could lead a simple, quiet, holy life once the immediate danger had passed? Did St. Joseph anticipate such mundane milestones as Christ’s first words, first steps and first smiles when he stayed awake at night pondering what was and what was to come?

I do not know the answers to any of these questions. Joseph speaks not a word in Scripture, so I never will know. Still, there is a peaceful joy that comes from reflecting on these days through the eyes of St. Joseph. In the rush of Christmas, it can be easy to overlook this silent, “just” and “righteous” man. Yet, as St. Joseph beheld Mother and Child that first Christmas night, he also witnessed the dawning of a new day of ordinary time.

*May the peace of the Holy Family be yours at Christmas and always!*

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