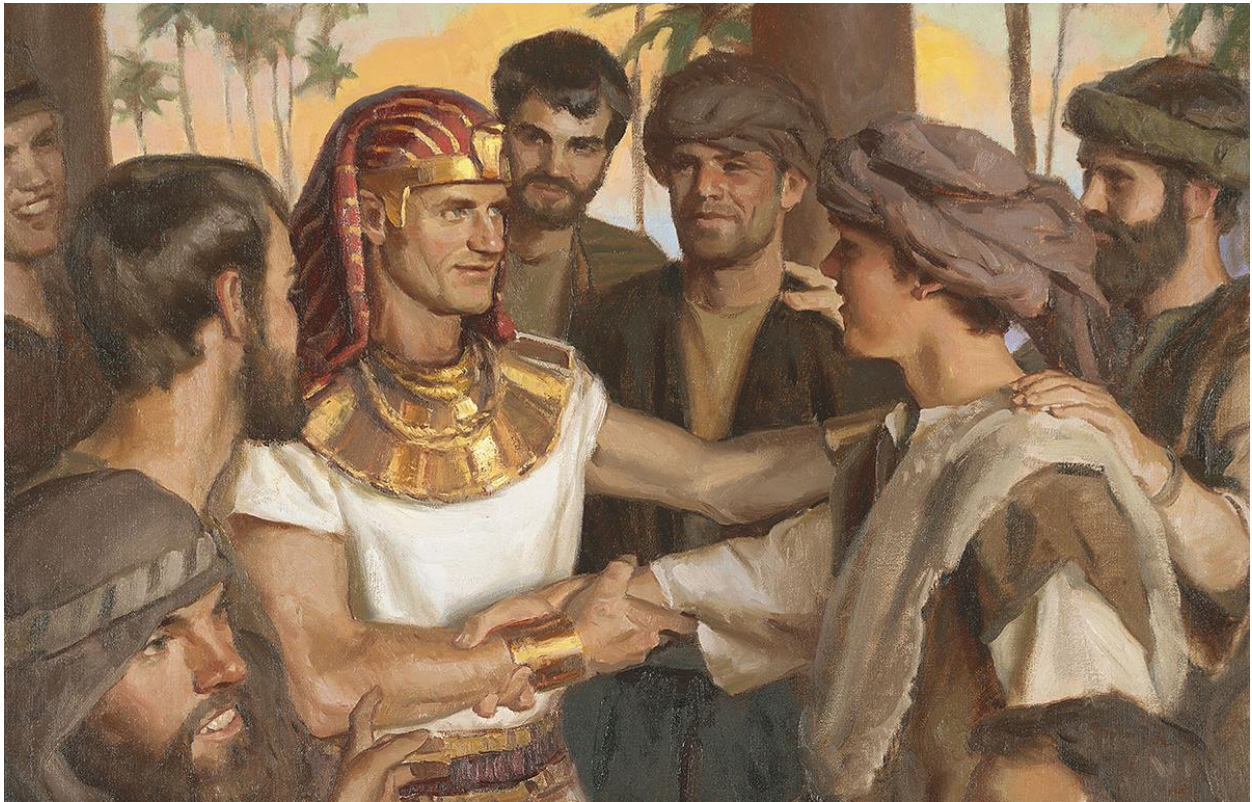


St Joseph Seminar 3. Joseph as Prophet



(Joseph meets Benjamin and his brothers in Egypt. Pics: Desmond Makubuna))

A. Joseph in the Old Testament and the New

- (i) Joseph, Son of Jacob in Egypt saved God's people by bringing them into Egypt to save them from a famine. St Joseph took the Holy Family to Egypt to save them and then brought them back to Nazareth fulfilling the Word of the Lord, "Out of Egypt I have brought my son (Amos 11:1). But Joseph of Egypt was a sage, a wise man and is not recognized by the Bible as a prophet.

B. What is a Prophet

- (i) A prophet is someone in the OT who **knows the mind and will of God**. A good example is prophet Micaiah Ben Imlah of 1 Kings 22. He could see and hear what was going on in the council of God (where God discussed matters with the Angels) and reported this back on earth. Mostly prophets do not have visions like this but receive “the word of the Lord,” a living and powerful word from God that God wants passed on. The Call of Jeremiah explains this well
- (ii) The Call of **Jeremiah** and the Word of the Lord
- (iii) Herein this text we see Jeremiah’s **encounter** with God, his **objection** (I am only a youth), God’s **reassurance** (Do not be afraid, I am with you...) and then his **mission** – to set you over nations etc.

Jer.1

[1] The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilki'ah, of the priests who were in An'athoth in the land of Benjamin,
[2] to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josi'ah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign.

[3] It came also in the days of Jehoi'akim the son of Josi'ah, king of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of Zedeki'ah, the son of Josi'ah, king of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month.

[4] Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,

[5] "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations."
[6] Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how
to speak, for I am only a youth."
[7] But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a
youth';
for to all to whom I send you, you shall go,
and whatever I command you, you shall speak.
[8] Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver
you, says the LORD."
[9] Then the LORD put forth his hand and touched my
mouth; and the LORD said to me, "Behold, I have put my
words in your mouth.
[10] See, I have set you this day over nations and over
kingdoms,
to pluck up and to break down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant."

- (iv) St Joseph also received words from the Lord which is why we can consider him as a prophet. In his initial encounter with God, he is also reassured (Do not be afraid) and he also received his mission: Mary and Jesus – "The beginnings of the mysteries of human salvation". The opening prayer of the Mass for the Solemnity of St Joseph says that the beginnings of the mysteries of human salvation were entrusted to Joseph i.e., Mary and Jesus were entrusted to him.

C. St Joseph as prophet



(The espousals of Mary and Joseph)

The Context. Mary and Joseph were engaged. For the Jews at that time Marriage took place in two stages separated by about a year: a. The first stage, after the initial discussions and decisions, of course, was the engagement or espousals. This was actually a legal marriage, after this the only way out of the relationship was divorce – or death. But the young couple did not begin living together for about a year - until after the second

stage. b. The Second Stage. The Marriage Banquet. Both dressed up as bride and groom for this and during this meal (usually it went on for 7 days) they started their life together. The first divine word Joseph received was when he was legally married i.e., espoused/engaged to Mary and she was found to be pregnant. This was during the period of preparation after the espousals.

1. Word One. Mt 1: 20-24. The Annunciation to Joseph: Take Mary your wife

This scene takes place after the espousals of Mary and Joseph during the period when they are still living apart. When Mary's pregnancy becomes clear to Joseph, he does not understand it and thinks the best thing is to divorce quietly. This is when the angel brings him the Divine Word. Mary's child is "of the Holy Spirit" and he should go ahead with the banquet and take Mary into his house. Here we find his call and mission. Mary was named "full of grace, Joseph is named "Son of David." He is of the Davidic line and so Jesus will be legally considered a Son of David also. His mission now also becomes clear: he is to accept both Mary and Jesus and must name the child Jesus, Savior. This means he must educate Jesus and prepare him to be the Messiah, the Savior of the world, an amazing mission. It also becomes clear that Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. Joseph, unlike Jonah, is an obedient prophet and accepts the angel's word and does what he is told to do

by the divine word. He takes Mary into his home and – when the time came – called him Jesus and took care of his education.

Text: Mt 1

[18] Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit;

[19] and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

[20] But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying,

"Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit;

[21] she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

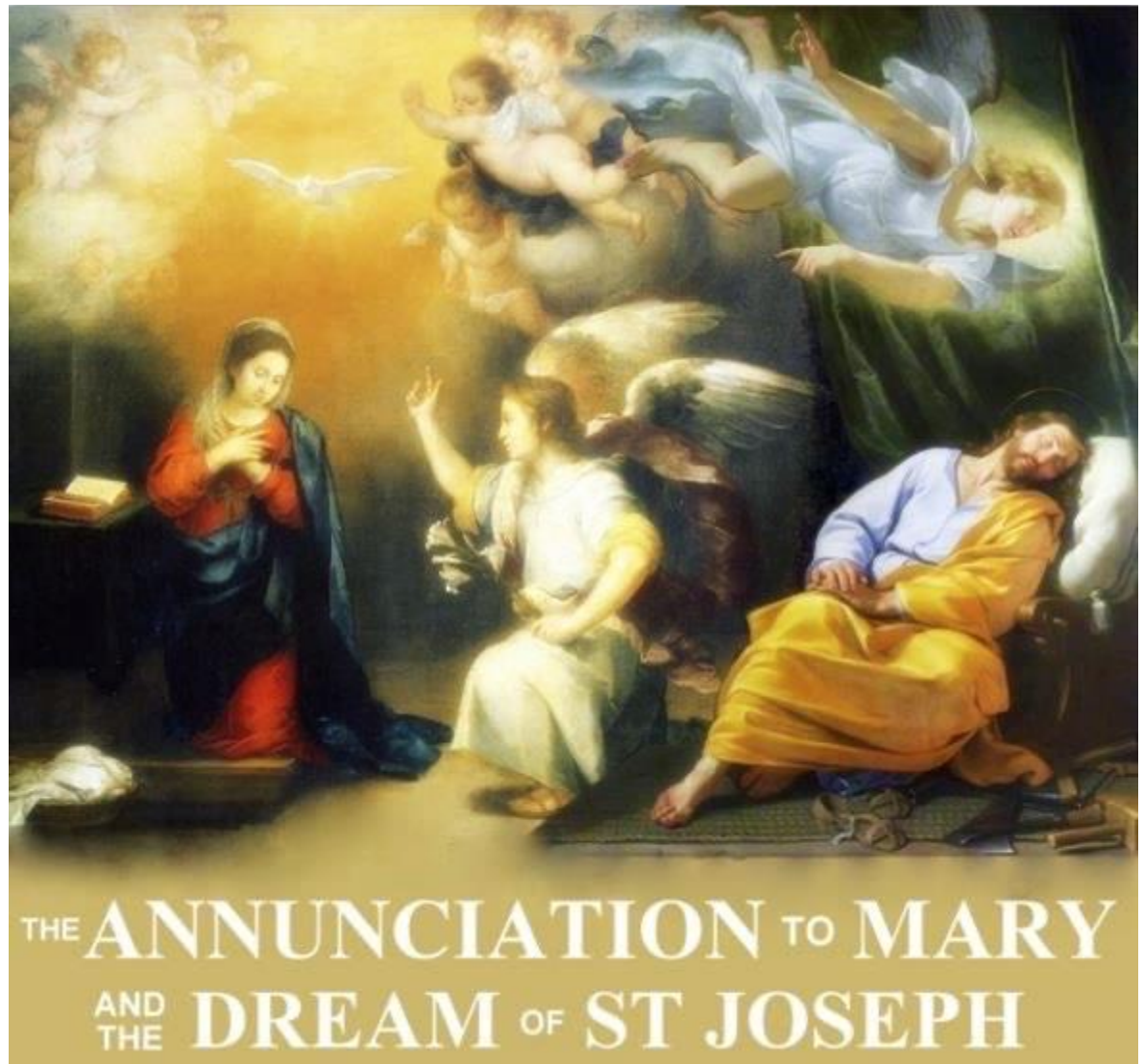
[22] All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

[23] "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel"

(which means, God with us).

[24] When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife,

[25] but knew her not until she had borne a son; and he called his name Jesus.



2. Word Two. Mt 2:13-25. Rise... Flee to Egypt

CONTEXT: The scriptures demanded that the Messiah be born in Bethlehem, but Mary and Joseph were in Nazareth. God sorted that one by inspiring none less than the emperor himself to demand a census. Everyone had to be counted in their own village or city. Joseph had to go to Bethlehem with his wife Mary who was close to her time and so Jesus was born in Bethlehem, fulfilling the

scriptures. Luke tells us all about the shepherds, but it is Matthew again who sets the scene for the second divine word to Joseph.



(El Greco's Nativity)

The Magi arrived in Bethlehem to pay tribute to the newborn King of the Jews. They had unwittingly put the child's life in danger by consulting with Herod. A dream alerted them not to return to Herod so they took a different route home. These stories are often compared to the birth of Moses whom the Pharaoh tried to kill but who

escaped. When the Magi did not turn up in Jerusalem, it was only a matter of time before Herod would send to kill the child. This is the setting for Joseph's second prophetic word. This time the angel says: **"Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him."** Joseph immediately obeys. This is a difficult word. It means that the Holy family now become migrants due to violence. They must flee. They set off at once for Egypt. The sense is that they leave for Egypt the very night that Joseph received his dream. Hopefully he piled the donkey with the gold, frankincense and myrrh they had revived to help them in Egypt. The Coptic (Egyptian) Church has many legends about the journey and their stay in Egypt. One story, taken up by medieval artists is the following. The holy family arrive at a farm where the farmer is sowing the wheat. They ask for water and help and he kindly gives it. When they are leaving Mary speaks to him. "If soldiers come looking for us, please just tell them we were here when you sowed the wheat." The very next day, Herod's soldiers arrived at the farm hot on their heels. When they asked the farmer if a family had passed that way, the farmer, remembered Mary's words and told them, Yes they were here when I sowed the wheat. They looked out at the wheat and it was fully grown. They said to themselves "They are well gone by now" and returned to Herod.

The scriptures give us no information of their life in Egypt but we can be sure their fellow Jews helped them and

helped Joseph to set up as a carpenter. Perhaps, with the Magi's gold, he was able to buy a small house and carpenter's shop for them. God is a provident God.

Text: Mt 2: 13

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said,

"Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him."

[14] And he rose and took the child and his mother by night, and departed to Egypt,

[15] and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt have I called my son."

[16] Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, was in a furious rage, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the wise men.



(The Flight into Egypt)

3. Word Three. Mt 2:19-21. Rise... Go to the Land of Israel

Context: The Holy family is now settled in Egypt. Herod the Great died in 4 BC, some two years after the birth of Jesus. This may mean that they just spent two years in Egypt but we cannot be sure just when the angel returned to Joseph. The message begins in the same way. He is told to “rise.” He is also told to “take the child and his mother”. Jesus and Mary cannot be separated, they are “the beginnings of the mysteries of human salvation”. Joseph has been tasked with protecting the beginnings of our salvation, the lives of Jesus and Mary and he does this well.

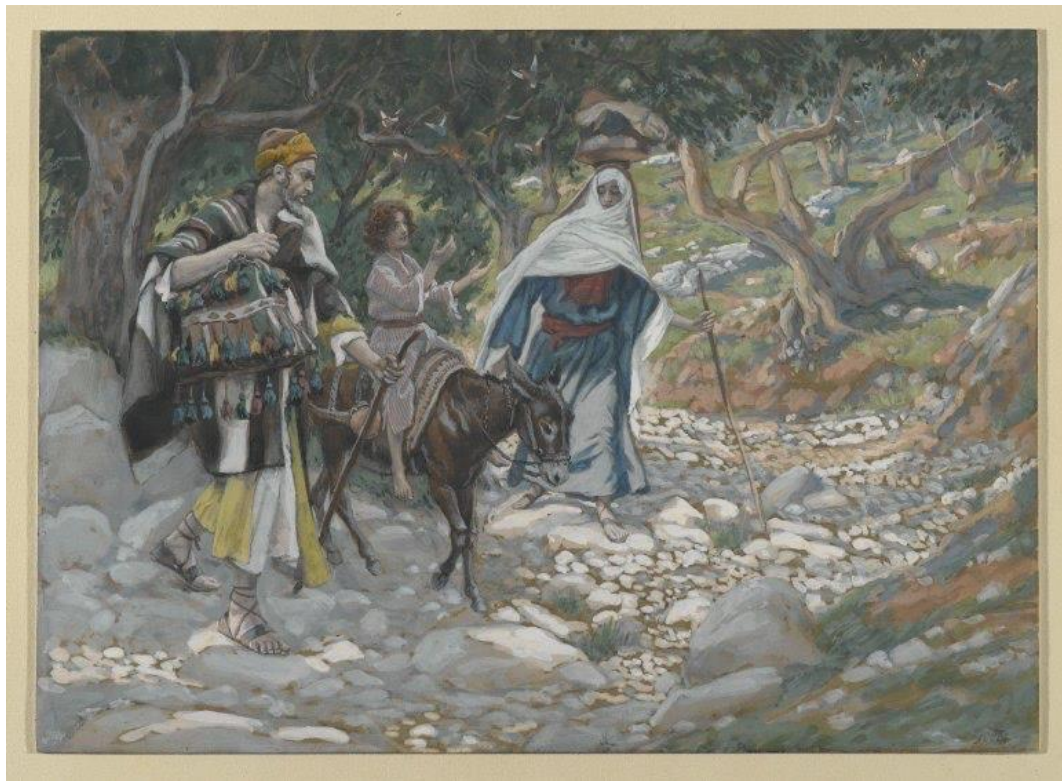
Once more, Joseph, the prophet obedient to the word of God, obeys and returns to the land of Israel. Here he is fulfilling the prophecy of Amos 11:1, "Out of Egypt I have called my son."

Text:

[19] But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt.

[20] *"Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead."*

[21] And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.



(The return to Nazareth)

4. Word Four. Mt 2:22-23. To Nazareth

Context: the fourth and final word of the Lord comes to Joseph as they journey back home. This time the actual words Joseph received are not reported but we are told he received them, as usual and like his OT namesake, in a dream. They had come to Egypt from Bethlehem in Judah and so it seems they were returning there.

However, Joseph heard that the cruel Archelaus, Son of Herod was ruling there. Archelaus was so cruel that in 6 AD the Jews themselves went to Rome and asked the emperor to replace him with a Roman Procurator and this was granted to them. So, this places the journey before 6 AD and before Jesus was 12 years old.

We see Joseph's prudence at work here. He heard about Archelaus and was afraid to return to Bethlehem. This was when he received this final word. Acting on this he went to Nazareth, a Jewish town in Galilee of the Gentiles, this also fulfilled the scriptures, "He shall be called a Nazarene" (Jud 13:5.7 and Isa11:1- there is not direct OT quotation.)

[22] But when he heard that Archelaus reigned over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee.

[23] And he went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

5.The Silence of Joseph. Why this Prophet never Spoke

- (i) All the Prophets spoke “the word of the Lord.” They received the living word of God and passed it on to others. Why did Joseph never speak any words in the Bible?
- (ii) The answer is easy to find. The prophets received a word and had to speak it. Joseph received the VERY WORD OF GOD (Jn 1:1). Jesus, God’s own Son. His task was not to speak about Jesus but to give Jesus to the world. That was the mission he received- to accept, protect and prepare the very Son of God for his mission. And this task he carried out faithfully according to God’s own plan which he followed. With Jesus he received Mary. Jesus and Mary. Here we have Jesus the Savior and Mary the perfect response to the Savior. Joseph’s task involved both of them. As the liturgy tells us God entrusted the beginnings of human salvation - the Savior himself and how to respond to him – to Joseph who protected this. Josephs’ great word to the world was JESUS. His task was to educate and protect Jesus, to prepare him for his mission, to make sure that he survived to carry out his mission. He gave us THE WORD not words.

6. CONCLUSION: Our Debt of Gratitude to Joseph. His Help.

The Church, all of us, owe a huge debt of gratitude to St Joseph. This year of St Joseph is a tiny token of this gratitude we owe him. We must constantly thank him for what he did for our Savior. He put his own needs aside and showed us a wonderful example of the gift of self, dedicating his whole life to serving Mary, his beloved spouse and Jesus. Yes, he knew Jesus was Savior, Immanuel and from Mary he knew he was Son of God and Messiah. The shepherds would have told him Jesus was a savior, who is Christ the Lord. Simeon told them Jesus was the very light of the world. There were many things Joseph could have told us about Jesus but that was not his mission. His mission – with Mary – was to give us the very WORD OF GOD himself. This is why his throne in heaven is so high.

Joseph lived a life of great intimacy with Jesus. I heard this question recently “Are you a Deist or a Christian?” A Deist believes in God. A Christian, hopefully, has a close personal relationship with Jesus. Let’s ask Joseph to bring us closer to Jesus in our everyday lives. As close as he was? and also closer to Jesus in the tabernacle where he is very neglected especially since this Covid hit us.