

# 25 Days of Advent

## Seeing Jesus Through the Eyes of the Christmas Story Characters

### ADVENT DAY 7: Dec. 7 – Joseph, the Earthly Father of Jesus

#### Devotional

To understand Joseph's perspective of the Christmas narrative, we need to understand the customs surrounding betrothals/marriages of the time. In biblical times, people were married in their early youth, and marriages were usually contracted within the narrow circle of the clan and the family. Interpreting their "betrothal" as a modern-day "engagement" would be wrong. The Jewish custom in that time period involved a two-stage marriage: first, a legal contract of marriage, followed later by a party with the husband taking his wife into his home. This is shown in the Gospels: Joseph learned that Mary was expecting before she came to live with him so he planned to divorce her, but an angel instructed him not to; instead, he should take Mary into his home. Therefore, Joseph was already Mary's legal husband at the time Jesus was conceived.

We don't know how Joseph discovered that Mary was pregnant. Luke doesn't even reference that and Matthew simply says, "she was found to be pregnant." Stop and think for a moment, *she was found*. "Hey Joseph, have you seen Mary since she got back from visiting Elizabeth?" She was found...I'll bet she was. Kind of hard to hide that fact.

Joseph didn't yet have the advantage of hearing from an angel, he just had Mary telling him what she believed. He didn't know what to think. He probably didn't really know Mary very well either; the custom at that time was that in the year between the betrothal and marriage the couple rarely saw each other. He no doubt felt betrayed, alone, even stuck. The breaking of a betrothal like this was worse than breaking a business contract. Yet that's what Joseph considered doing. He trusted Mary to be faithful and devout; he had pledged his life to her. And yet, it seemed, she had betrayed him.

We don't know how long Joseph was tormented with these thoughts; Scripture doesn't tell us how long it was before the angel Gabriel appeared to Joseph to tell him the baby was God's son. But we do know that once he did, Joseph obeyed.

Like Mary, Joseph signed up for a lot of pain and heartache when he said Yes to God. This was no easy assignment. In marrying Mary, he would be subject to endless scrutiny. In listening to the voice of God, Joseph was giving up his reputation. In his book, *Hidden Christmas, the Surprising Truth Behind the Birth of Christ*, Tim Keller describes it this way:

*Everybody in that shame and honor society will know that this child was not born nine or ten months after they got married; they will know she was already pregnant. That would mean either Joseph and Mary had sex before marriage or she was unfaithful to him, and as a result, they are going to be shamed, socially excluded, and rejected. They are going to be second-class citizens.*

It's easy to glance over this and not give it another thought as you read this part of the Christmas story. But stop and consider how significant this decision was.

Mary and Joseph had to work together to move forward. They likely had several conversations about what had happened to them. They were no doubt anxious and uncertain about what the future would hold.

Joseph provided for his family as a carpenter and followed God's instructions to care for them. He named and circumcised his son, presented Him at the Temple in Jerusalem (Luke 2:22), and took Him to the Temple on holy days when possible, all in line with Jewish law. Joseph also protected Jesus from Herod (Matthew 2:13-15), the King of Judea who wanted to kill the child, by taking Mary and Jesus to safety in Egypt and then Nazareth. He was true to his calling and to his family.

Although he's not mentioned very often in Scripture, Joseph is an important role model of fatherhood and faith, truly an unsung hero of the Christmas story.

## Look Up – Connect with God

**Read:** Matthew 1:18-24

**Key Verse:** "When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus." (Matthew 1:24-25)

**Pray:** Lord, thank you for Joseph and his integrity. Thank you for working through ordinary people who don't look for fame or glory but look out for the best interests of those around them. Help me to be more like that, to be faithful to you and walk with integrity, always doing the right thing even when it means I'll personally suffer.

## Look In – Family Memories

**Discuss:** Mary and Joseph's life, particularly in the early years, was rough and full of challenges. Give your kids a Rocky Road candy bar and talk about the difficulties Mary and Joseph may have encountered on their way to Bethlehem, their first few years, their trek to Egypt and back to avoid persecution and death. Talk about sacrifices you've made that were for the benefit of the family and how you feel about those choices.

### **Activity:**

- Advent Tree: make or select an ornament of a walking stick and put it on the tree. [Download Ornaments](#) or [Ornament Ideas](#)
- Advent Garland: put the key verse on a paper/card, assign #7, and attach it to the garland twine. [Key Verses](#)
- Advent Cards: select a card and see what the activity might be (i.e., color a Christmas picture or decorate your room). [Family Activities](#)

## Look Out – Connect with Others

Look through old toys or books or clothes that you could part with and donate them to a worthy cause in your community. Help your family learn the benefit of sacrificing personal desires to help others.