



March 19

Festival: Joseph, Guardian of Jesus

Saint Joseph is a figure in the Gospels, the husband of the Virgin Mary and the earthly father of Jesus Christ (in distinction to God the Father, his "heavenly father").

The earliest Christian records, the Pauline epistles make no reference to Jesus' father, and nor does the Gospel of Mark, the first of the Gospels. The first appearance of Joseph is therefore in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, one of which trace Joseph's lineage back to King David. The two lists give differing genealogies: Matthew says that Joseph's father was called Jacob. Some scholars reconcile the genealogies by viewing the lineage presented in Luke to be from Mary's side.

Matthew and Luke are also the only Gospels to include the infancy narratives, and again they differ. In Luke, Joseph lives in Nazareth and travels to Bethlehem in compliance with the requirements of a Roman census. Subsequently, Jesus was born there. In Matthew, Joseph was in Bethlehem, the city of David, where Jesus is born, and then moves to Nazareth with his family after the death of Herod. Matthew is the only Gospel to include the

narrative of the Massacre of the Innocents and the Flight into Egypt: following the nativity, Joseph stays in Bethlehem for an unspecified period (perhaps two years) until forced by Herod to take refuge in Egypt; on the death of Herod he brings his family back to Palestine, and settles in Nazareth. After this point there is no further mention of Joseph by name, although the story of Jesus in the Temple, in Jesus' 12th year, includes a reference to "both his parents". Christian tradition represents Mary as a widow during the adult ministry of her son. The gospels describe Joseph as a "tekton"; traditionally the word has been taken to mean "carpenter", though the Greek term evokes an artisan with wood in general, or an artisan in iron or stone. Very little other information on Joseph is given in the Gospels, in which he never speaks.

Joseph is venerated as a saint in the Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Anglican, and Lutheran faiths. In Catholic and other traditions, Joseph is the patron saint of workers and has several feast days. He was also declared to be the patron saint and protector of the Catholic Church by Pope Pius IX in 1870, and is the patron of several countries and regions. With the growth of Mariology, the theological field of *Josephology* has also grown and since the 1950s centres for studying it have been formed.

Painting: St Joseph with the Infant Jesus (c. 1635), at the Hermitage, in St. Petersburg. Oil on canvas, 126 x 101 cm.

Artist: Guido Reni