

Who was Joseph, the father of Jesus?

Joseph was the earthly father of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Joseph was a descendant of King David, he lived in Nazareth in Galilee, and he was pledged to be married to Mary (Luke 1:27), the virgin who gave birth to Jesus. The Bible tells us that Mary became pregnant through the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18) and not through Joseph. Therefore, Joseph can be understood as Jesus' earthly, adoptive father but not as His biological father.

The Bible doesn't tell us much about Joseph. But, given the glimpses into his character we do have, we conclude that he was a humble man who cared deeply about obeying God. For example, the book of Matthew tells us that Joseph was "faithful to the law" (Matthew 1:19). After an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph and encouraged him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife, Joseph immediately obeyed (Matthew 1:24-25). Later in the book of Matthew, an angel again appears to Joseph and commands him to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt because King Herod wanted to kill Jesus. Again, Joseph immediately obeys the angel's command and takes his family to Egypt, saving Jesus' life (Matthew 2:14-15). After Herod died, an angel once again appears to Joseph and commands him to return to Israel, which he does (Matthew 2:19). Joseph presents a pattern of obedience.

The Bible also indicates that Joseph was a kind, self-sacrificing man. Though he had a legal right to divorce Mary when he found out she was pregnant, he intended to do so quietly (Matthew 1:19) because he did not want to bring any public shame or disgrace on Mary or her family. Also, after their marriage, Joseph did not have sex with Mary until after Jesus was born (Matthew 1:25); in this way, Joseph safeguarded the validity of the virgin birth. Following Caesar's edict, Joseph took Mary to be counted in the census in Bethlehem where his ancestors were from (Luke 2:4-5). Forty days after Jesus was born,

Joseph (along with Mary) took Jesus to Jerusalem to have Him dedicated at the temple, as required by the Law of Moses (Luke 2:22-24).

Another incident further shows Joseph's commitment to keeping the law: "Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover" (Luke 2:41). On one such trip, when Jesus was a young boy, Jesus stayed behind at the temple in Jerusalem while His parents began making their way home. When Mary and Joseph realized Jesus wasn't with their caravan to Galilee, they searched "anxiously" for three days before finding Him sitting among some teachers of the law (Luke 2:48).

When Jesus was an adult, people often referred to Him as the "son of Joseph" (Luke 4:22; John 1:45; 6:42), although the gospel writers were careful to maintain that Jesus' true Father was God, with Joseph being more of a foster father or stepfather (see Luke 3:23). People also referred to Jesus as "the carpenter's son" (Matthew 13:55), suggesting that Joseph worked as a carpenter or some other type of handyman (the Greek word for "carpenter" could also be translated as "stonemason" or "metallurgist"). Whatever Joseph's particular vocation was, it is evident that he worked hard to provide for his family, doing what he could to help Jesus grow in "wisdom and stature" (Luke 2:52).

Joseph isn't mentioned in any of the stories of Jesus' adult ministry, while Mary His mother occasionally is (Mark 3:31; John 2:1; 19:25). The absence of Joseph in the stories of Jesus' ministry has led many to believe that Joseph died sometime between when Jesus was a young boy (Luke 2:42) and when He launched His public ministry as an adult (Luke 3:23). The fact that Jesus, as He was dying, committed the care of His mother to John gives strong indication that Joseph had indeed passed away by that time (John 19:26-27).

Although the Bible does not give many specifics about who Joseph was as a person—and the Bible records no actual words that Joseph spoke—we know enough to see that he was a humble man who faithfully obeyed God, honored others, took responsibility, and worked hard to provide for his family. These are all godly characteristics that we should seek to replicate.