

While March 17, Saint Patrick's Day, stood out as parades, green beer, and the celebration of all things Irish honoured the patron of Ireland, Catholics honour another major saint around this time. Saint Joseph's feast is March 19, but because that falls on a Sunday this year, we keep the celebration on Monday, March 20.

Saint Joseph is the patron of the Archdiocese of Ottawa, of Canada and of the Universal Church. The Jesuit missionaries dedicated their chapel to him at Sainte-Marie-among-the-Hurons, near Midland, Ontario. The largest church dedicated to him in the world, St. Joseph's Oratory in Montreal draws more than two million pilgrims every year.

Joseph is the silent man of the gospels, the foster-father of Jesus. Our first glimpse of Joseph appears in Matthew's gospel where he was perplexed to discover that Mary, his betrothed, was pregnant.

We learn that Joseph was a man of honour. Joseph wanted to please God by following the Law. His desire to observe the Torah put Joseph in a dilemma, for he knew the child Mary was carrying was not his own.

Enter the Lord's messenger in a dream. The angel informed Joseph that Mary conceived through the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. The angel told Joseph to accept this child as his own by naming him Jesus. In this way, Joseph conferred on Jesus his membership in the Davidic line, making Jesus a son of David and a son of Abraham.

Matthew wrote that Joseph had no marital relations with Mary "*until she had borne him a son*" (Matthew 1.25). As worded, this neither affirms nor denies her perpetual virginity. Church tradition clarifies this matter by testifying to Mary's perpetual virginity from ancient times.

Joseph's openness to divine guidance recurs on several occasions during the narrative accounts of Jesus' infancy. During the persecution by Herod, the angel warned Joseph to flee with the Child Jesus and his mother to Egypt, remaining there until Herod died.

That Joseph was the decisive, resourceful, and insightful person suggested by the first two chapters of Matthew's gospel may be confirmed by his trade. Matthew 13.55 refers to Jesus as "the carpenter's son". Some scholars feel that the Greek word underlying our word *carpenter* describes a general type of craftsman who works with pre-existing material—wood, stone, or metal. The term may refer to a.

We think that Joseph taught his trade to Jesus because Mark 6.3 refers to Jesus as a carpenter.

In Luke's gospel, Joseph is the hidden and silent one who cared for Mary as they journeyed to Bethlehem to register in a census commanded by civil authority. Later, Luke depicts the parents of Jesus as filled with joy, awe, and puzzlement at the events around Jesus' birth.

In the Passover of Jesus' twelfth year when his parents lost track of him during a pilgrimage, Luke quotes Mary's expression of the concern and sorrow she and Joseph felt. We would expect these feelings from good parents. Joseph was not an unfeeling and distant guardian of Jesus. He felt the joys and worries of a parent.

The New Testament depicts Joseph as a resourceful person who earned his living as a tradesman. He struggled as he sought God's will. Once he learned God's will, Joseph did it promptly, even when this disturbed his own plans.

The Bible depicts Joseph as a parent who cared deeply, both rejoicing in awe at the marvels around Jesus' birth and sorrowing when he was lost. In his life of faith and devotion to Jesus and Mary, Saint Joseph speaks to us today as a model father, husband, and prayer warrior.