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by Pat Marrin

[View Author Profile](#)
patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

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“This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about” (Matt 1:18).

Jer 23:5-8; Matt 1:18-25

Poor Joseph. His assigned role in the Christmas story is to marry a woman he cannot have and raise a child not his own. What he thought and felt about this we do not know, because he does not say a word. The narrative only tells us that he was caught in a dilemma so exhausting that all he could do was sleep on it. Matthew, keen to show prophetic fulfillment, reduces him to a biblical type of the more famous Joseph of Egypt, who solves his problems in dreams. He obediently takes Mary into his home.

Thus, in a few lines of scripture, Matthew explains how the conception and birth of Jesus came about. Joseph is made guardian of an even deeper mystery that Luke elaborates in the other infancy story in the New Testament -- that Jesus is the Son of God. Matthew picks up the story again, describing how Joseph protects Mary and the child from Herod's shock troops, sent to kill all potential rivals in Bethlehem, the city of David.

This is a jarring start to the most beloved and certainly the most important story in the Gospels. This birth, like all births, will be a human miracle, but also the transforming event that makes possible a divine destiny for all of us. Jesus enters the world true to his name, *Yeshua*, "God is savior." He is the Incarnate Word, the proclamation of the new Creation.

Joseph fulfills another scripture, Psalm 85:10: "Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss." During his nightmare struggle to resolve the demands of justice and love, an angel comes to show him the way forward. "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary into your home." The truth is buried in his heart in a silence he will carry for the rest of his life. Jesus, Son of God, is also known as the carpenter's son.

We honor Joseph, exemplar of all husbands and fathers, guardians and protectors, keepers of the deep narratives that explain God's ways, stories with words and those that no words can tell. Joseph is essential to the story of God coming to earth as one of us, and so must we. The Incarnation begins with a helpless child born into an inhospitable and dangerous world. Joseph protected and nurtured the mystery with justice and love. We are called to do the same.

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