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“It is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived” (Matt 1:20).

2 Sam 7:4-5a, 12-14a, 16; Rom 4:13, 16-18, 22; Matt 1:16-14, 18-21-, 23

Along with the four canonical Gospels, at least two other gospels, one by Peter and another by Thomas, were among the traditional sources. But there is no record of any gospel associated with Joseph the carpenter. He holds such a key role in the story of Jesus, yet the New Testament renders him mute. As we read about him, we can only imagine the story he might have told in his own words. His silence surrounds and protects one of the central mysteries of the Gospels, the Incarnation and identity of Jesus.

Joseph recedes even further from us when we realize that much of his character mirrors an earlier Joseph, the dreamer who was sold into slavery in Egypt only to emerge as provider for Israel in time of famine. The theme of dreams and going down into Egypt to provide for his family play a major role in the story of Joseph, husband of Mary and guardian of Jesus. He secures a place for Jesus in the genealogy all the way back to Abraham and to King David. He is depicted in the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke as a righteous man capable of making crucial decisions that balanced justice and wisdom, showing great faith and selfless love.

Today's readings for the Feast of St Joseph are about another central mystery, the virginal conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit. Joseph guards this mystery by his silence. Yet it fits a pattern of miraculous conceptions by Abraham and Sarah, repeated by Zechariah and Elizabeth, as prelude to Mary's motherhood of Jesus. These events signal a new genealogy, ascendant and spiritual that is the first

glimpse of the new Creation. God's promise to send a savior no longer depends on either the Law or human procreation but is the work of grace.

Abraham succeeds not by progeny but by faith, and the promise of salvation passes to anyone who has faith. The throne of David no longer depends on "an heir from his loins" but passes to anyone who has faith. Jesus comes in the flesh in order to bridge the promise of sonship to all humanity by birth in the Holy Spirit. By his Incarnation, Jesus is the first new human being, revealing that God's plan of redemption was already implicit at the Creation, divinity as human destiny because of Jesus.

Theology and even the Scriptures barely touch the surface of this mystery. Joseph was perhaps the first to know God's plan when the angel came to him in a dream to tell him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife. Perhaps this was why he was so silent, in awe at the glory he knew was passing through him into history.

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