



December 20

Hail Joseph!

(Another who obeyed)

Reading: Matthew 1:18-25; 2:13-25

***"You shall call His name Jesus:
for He shall save His people from their sins" (Mt 1:21)***

Engagement in Palestine was a legally binding contract, usually arranged by parents. Sexual relations were forbidden until after marriage. Joseph's character is shown by his decision to take private legal action to break the engagement instead of publicly humiliating Mary. His obedience to the Lord in taking Mary as his wife is the crown of his character. Matthew records, "Joseph did **as** the angel of the Lord **commanded** him and took to him his wife" (Mt 1:24). For a sexually immoral man it may not be shocking though surprising to find his fiancée already pregnant. But being "a just man" as Joseph was, with obviously a respectable standing in the society, it would have been a great embarrassment whatever be the explanation. But he didn't speak a word when the angel defended Mary's pregnancy and attributed it to the work of the Holy Spirit. He just obeyed the Lord though "the communication came only in a dream, least dramatically. Whatever be the mode of communication, once we have the inner conviction that God has spoken to us, we must not delay obedience in the guise of seeking further confirmation.

Joseph also teaches us that civil laws must be obeyed not as a matter of convenience but for the sake of conscience. Bethlehem was about 150 km from Nazareth. It was at least a three day trip. In obedience to the decree of Augustus Caesar, to get their names registered, Joseph undertook this strenuous journey with Mary who was in her late pregnancy. Joseph had known that obeying the government meant obeying God (Lk 2:1-6; Rom 13:1-5).

God spoke to Joseph thrice in dreams after the birth of Jesus for the protection of the Baby from the hand of the enemies who sought to kill Him (Mt 2:13,20,22). From Bethlehem he fled to Egypt. Then when he came into the land of Israel, he had to turn aside into the region of Galilee. Such frequent shifts with a little child and the nursing mother would not have been pleasant. "Cannot God who so miraculously brought forth His Son into the world protect Him also miraculously in the world? Why should the angels be simply appearing to me to urge me flee from the enemies instead of encamping

round about me and my family to deliver us from Herods? Is the Baby really the Son of God and the Saviour?" Such questions would have definitely haunted Joseph's mind. But being a habitually obedient man to God, he did not succumb to natural reasoning but walked by faith. Hail Joseph!
