A Life Surrendered

“Joseph did as the Angel of the Lord commanded and took his wife.”

This was not what Joseph had expected. He was engaged to Mary, the young maiden from Nazareth, the joy of his heart, yet how can this be that she is with child? We have not lived together yet. What has happened to our agreement? What shall I do? I cannot expose her to public disgrace. I cannot shame her - the only thing I can do is to send her away quietly. That’s what I will do... What torment in the heart of Joseph!

Then the Angel of the Lord visited Joseph in a dream, telling him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife. When he awoke from his dream, he took Mary into his home. The angel’s explanation was shrouded in mystery and uncertainty. From now on, Joseph would live with mystery. Just as Mary had already done, Joseph surrendered his life into God’s hands.

In taking pregnant Mary as his wife, Joseph would have been going against family customs and probably the disapproval of his kin and friends. In a society like Nazareth, it was difficult to keep secrets. Joseph’s reputation would have been at stake, yet he chose to surrender his own life-dream and trust in God’s providence to lead him. Joseph chose to follow God’s will.

His surrender was challenged when the Roman occupying power directed that all Jews needed to be counted in their ancestral home. Joseph was of the House of David so that meant going to Bethlehem with his very pregnant wife, Mary. Since Jesus was born before the census was completed, Joseph registered himself, Mary and “Jesus, son of Joseph of Nazareth”.

Joseph witnessed the birth of Jesus in conditions that were very humble. He witnessed the adoration of the shepherds who had heard the happy news of the angel. Later Joseph witnessed the homage of the Magi who came from the East. All of this in mystery.

As a father, Joseph fulfilled his obligation to have Jesus circumcised and named the child “Jesus”, proclaiming his mission as Savior”. Jesus was presented in the Temple and Mary and Joseph listened to the amazing prayer of Simeon...they marveled at his words. Still in mystery.
Joseph was a man of dreams – he listened inwardly and discerned God’s word to him. When he was directed by the angel in a dream to take his wife and Child and flee to Egypt by night, again Joseph responded in obedience. He was forced to be a pilgrim with all the uncertainty that entails. He and Mary surrendered as a migrant family with all the terror and danger as they stepped out into the darkness.

Joseph was the silent one in the Gospel. He served the Holy Family in anonymity, setting aside his own plans and dreams to follow God’s dream for humankind. His life was surrendered into God’s hands for the good of the mission of his Son. We celebrate his selfless gift on March 19.

We honor you today, St. Joseph,
Son of David,
spouse of Mary,
dreamer of the Spirit,
provider and guardian of the Holy Family,
father of the Holy Child.
You are a model for all of us today,
hope for the sick and weary,
presence to those in need,
companion to the refugee.
We lift up our hearts of gratitude for the many gifts you bestow on us, on the Church and on the world.

We pray all this in your Son Jesus’ name. Amen.

Sr. Jeanne Fallon, CSJ