



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for the Feast of St. Joseph
March 19, 2023

Christ Flees. Christ Frees. Christ Feeds.

Matthew 2:13–15, 19–23

¹³ Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” ¹⁴ And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt ¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

¹⁹ But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, ²⁰ saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.” ²¹ And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. ²³ And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

What do we really know about this man, Joseph, whose feast day we are celebrating? What can we say about Joseph of Nazareth? What can we possibly hope to gain by having our Lenten season interrupted by such a minor festival? Is this feast day some new invention?

More often than not, we erroneously think that honoring a saint is a practice belonging to Roman Catholics. But, the truth is that honoring the saints is a practice belonging to the whole Christian Church. So, on festivals such as these, we join Christians all around the world in giving thanks to God for the gift of St. Joseph, Guardian of Our Lord. This is truly good, right, and salutary in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church, as the Confessors themselves have stated:

Our Confession approves honoring the saints in three ways. The first is thanksgiving.

We should thank God because He has shown examples of mercy, because He wishes to save people, and because He has given teachers and other gifts to the Church. These gifts, since they are the greatest, should be amplified. The saints themselves, who have faithfully used these gifts, should be praised just as Christ praises faithful businessmen (Matthew 25:21, 23). The second service is the strengthening of our faith. When we see Peter’s denial forgiven, we also are encouraged to believe all the more that grace truly superabounds over sin (Romans 5:20). The third honor is the imitation, first of faith, then



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of the other virtues. Everyone should imitate the saints according to his calling. [Ap XXI 4-6]

So we're here today to celebrate the Feast of St. Joseph, giving thanks to God for working through Joseph for our good, to this very day.

What do we know about Joseph of Nazareth?

- We know that he was a carpenter by trade, that he was of the line and house of David, and, as such, he was required by the census of Caesar Augustus to register in his hometown of Bethlehem.
- We know that he was pledged to be married to a young virgin named Mary and that, upon learning that his betrothed was with child – a child that was not his! – he had in mind to put her away secretly, to seek to be released quietly from his pledge to become her husband.
- We know that the angel Gabriel came to him in a dream with the word of the Lord, instructing him to take Mary as his wife and not to fear, for the Child she was carrying was the Son of God.
- We know that “Joseph, being aroused from sleep did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And He called His Name JESUS” (1:24-25), a name meaning “the LORD saves.”
- We know that the Holy Family fled into Egypt upon word from the angel that Herod the Great sought to kill the infant Jesus out of jealousy and raging paranoia . . . and “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet [Hosea], saying, ‘Out of Egypt I called My Son’” (v. 15b).
Herod died, and his son Archelaus reigned over Judea. Our text tells us that Joseph was afraid of returning there, and that God instructed him to go to the region of Galilee, which he and his family did, settling in the town of Nazareth, “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, ‘He shall be called a Nazarene’” (v. 23).
- We also know that Joseph was still alive when the boy Jesus was twelve years of age, when the Holy Family went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover.

What we do not know is when or how Joseph died, for Scripture does not tell us even that he died. In fact, Scripture tells us precious little about Joseph of Nazareth, but what it does tell us is more than sufficient for our needs. For what God tells us about him in the Gospels, especially in our text, we give Him thanks and praise.

You see, what we learn through the little we're told is that this carpenter, this righteous man, this descendant of David, was a means through whom his foster Son, our



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Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, won our salvation. Joseph played an integral part in God's work of redemption. By taking his family to Egypt and then moving them from Egypt to Nazareth, thus fulfilling prophecy, the life of the Christ Child was spared until the proper time. Yes, the day would come for Him to lay down His life as a ransom for many, but Joseph's obedience to the word of God's holy messenger protected this Child in preparation for that time.

I cannot over-emphasize the importance of Joseph's obedience in taking the boy and His mother and fleeing to Egypt. The fulfillment of prophecy is one of the means God uses to validate His message. Joseph took his family to Egypt and then to Nazareth so that what was written in the law and the prophets might be fulfilled. As was foretold from ancient times, Christ fled to Egypt and then returned. This flight to and from Egypt is part of the prophetic backdrop to the history of our salvation, just as are the prophetic narratives concerning Christ's birth and crucifixion, all of which He undertook, not for Himself, but for us. Jesus fled so that at the right time He would become the sacrifice for all sin, gaining for all mankind the Holy Absolution that only comes through His suffering and death.

So, beloved, just as Jesus was born for you and died for, He fled for you. He fled for you. He bled for you. He died for you. Jesus gave His body and poured out His blood for you. Had Joseph not taken the infant Christ into Egypt, the devil might well have had his way through King Herod who sought to destroy the Child. Yet God was with Joseph both spiritually and physically, especially in the Person of this holy infant, whose true Father is God.

Because the Lord moved Joseph to act, the stable became the temple on that silent and holy night, and Egypt would become the Holy Land for a time, for there the Lord was present in His infant body, the body that would grow and be given into death for the forgiveness of your sins. Oh yes, beloved, it was for your sins and mine that the Lord moved Joseph to take his family and flee, so that this infant Priest, holy born, would return to sacrifice Himself as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.

And He has taken them away, for though He fled in infancy, the Lord did not flee from His cross. He did not flee death when the fullness of time had come. When it was His appointed hour, Christ died for us. He did not flee, but, rather, set us free, free from the curse of sin and the sting of eternal death. He bound Himself to the altar of the cross so that He may be found again today in His holy body and blood upon this altar, bestowing on you the forgiveness He won on that cross for all who believe in Him. Through this holy meal our Lord gives you the strength to flee – yes, flee – from the devil, the world, and your own sinful flesh, from the distractions of worldliness and churchliness, yes, even from your own good works which divert you from your desperate need of forgiveness by grace alone through faith in the works of your Savior on your behalf. Your works do not save you. Nothing you do contributes to your salvation. Our Lord gives you the strength, dear friends, to flee from yourself, to flee from your distractions, to flee to Him, for He alone has defeated sin, death, and hell for you by His death and resurrection.



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This death and resurrection Joseph very likely did not himself see but from which he, too, benefits. It's likely he didn't live to see His foster son's work of redemption take place. He likely didn't live to see the shame of the cross. Nor did he likely live to see the triumph of the empty tomb or witness the joy of death's defeat spreading into all the world. But that didn't matter.

Still he died full of faith and hope because he knew that God had come to be with us. He came to save us in that child, even as He learned to walk and talk under the guiding hand of Joseph, embracing him, eating at his table and sleeping under his roof, playing with abandon and praying with glee. And so Joseph closed his eyes in peace and opened them in heaven's light to be embraced once again by his child, his Jesus, his Savior.

And so we thank God for the gift of St. Joseph, Guardian of Our Lord, and join our voices to his and all the company of heaven, singing praises to our Lord and King. In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen