

*The Year of St. Joseph 2021*  
*By: Fr. Valentine Joseph*

SEVEN JOYS  
OF  
ST. JOSEPH

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## Seven Joys of St Joseph

### Introduction

Christian life is determined by an eternal joy that starts in this life and reaches its climax in heaven. The Holy Spirit, working in the hearts of the faithful, directs a person from within to be more vibrant and joyful in life and enjoy the glimpses of heaven on earth itself. The Spirit of God makes a deliberate inward change in us from ordinary life to divine life. A devoted and active Christian grows everyday in Spirit. St. Joseph, the foster father of Jesus, is one among many who experienced this joy in life. Even though he may not fit into the category of the name 'Christian', which came later after his death, he was a Christian in spirit. He might have been a true disciple of Jesus like the Blessed Virgin Mary through his close association with Jesus from the time of his birth until his public life. To explain the joy of St. Joseph is not an imaginative endeavor. From the Bible, one could see the source of that joy. Here, I would like to point out seven examples from the Bible in which one could admire his character and responses to the situations that reveal his inner spirit. Discovering the joy of St. Joseph in the year named after him is a God given opportunity for all Christians. St Joseph was a joyful person who changed the moments of anxiety into great moments of grace. So, let us take these seven examples for our reflection today.

Before entering into the moments of joy, I would like to explain the meaning of the word 'joy' in comparison to its synonyms. It must be differentiated first from the words fun, pleasure and happiness. We always use the word 'fun' in the context of entertainment. People always wish others to 'have fun!' Fun is something that is caused by external factors like games, media or activities. But joy is an inner reality that emerges from within.

We may call it 'delight'. A mother, who comes home tired from a day at work, sees her child coming to her for love and an embrace. When she sees her child, all her tiredness goes away and a feeling comes from the bottom of her being and fills her whole body and soul. That is joy. It is an inexpressible feeling that is contagious and all consuming. Joy is also different from 'pleasure'. Pleasure is only sensual, but joy is both sensual and spiritual. Pleasure can be experienced by senses. But joy could be experienced as an inner value of life. Joy has a spiritual radiance. It goes beyond all material dimensions. Pleasure is like a commodity that loses its value in overconsumption. But joy is multiplied and it is always an increasing movement.

Joy is also different from happiness. Happiness means satisfaction, something that satisfies our inner urge for life, a self-oriented feeling. But, joy is both self and other oriented. It radiates compassion in the time of suffering. A compassionate concern for other's well being is the source of joy. Helping others is one of the ultimate ways of discovering one's own joy in life. Joy reframes the situation positively. It is an ability to experience gratitude. Joy is also spiritual. Faith in God is the highest form of joy in a believer. Those who believe in God always experience an added depth of life. They maintain a calm and joyous mind when they trust in God. They are able to focus in the present in times of calamities and disasters. There is a beautiful saying: 'pain is inevitable, but suffering is optional.' The believers accept pain as the will of God and reject suffering. If something could be done in a situation, why worry? If nothing could be done in a situation, why worry? – This is the attitude of a believer. Joy is contagious; it attracts others with immense force. It brings us the riches of heaven to earth and leads us to reach it fully.

# THE FIRST JOY OF SAINT JOSEPH



## THE MESSAGE OF THE ANGEL

*"... Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost." ...  
For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit."  
- Matthew 1:20*

## 1. THE MESSAGE OF THE ANGEL: CHANGE IN PERSPECTIVE

The message of the angel to Mary is spoken often in the mystery of incarnation. Annunciation is the first step God takes to enter directly into human life. The 'yes' of Mary is considered the first step of human response to God's initiative. Annunciation is the event that brought joy to the world. Matthew gives the appearance of the angel in the dream of Joseph as annunciation in 1: 20. For Matthew, the good news of the angel in the dream of Joseph was important. It brings joyful news to the world. It is joyful because it gives a new perspective of a meaningful life to Joseph and to the world. Perspective is the ability to reframe the situation more positively. That ability brings joy to those who accept it.

Joseph loved Mary immensely. He was dreaming of a new life with Mary. But the pregnancy of Mary brought trouble to his very life. He did not blame Mary. 'Why has this happened to me?' – That was his question. Joseph was worried and anxious whether to accept Mary or not, because he was a just man who was one with Jewish tradition. As a Jew, he was supposed to take her in front of Jewish authorities and do what the Jewish law wanted him to do. But his love for her did not allow him to do so. He had almost decided to divorce her silently and go in a different path. If he had taken an ordinary path like others, he would not have lived a happy life because his heart's desire was to be with Mary all through his life. The angel gives him a new wider perspective of the problem: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her." In these angelic words we see the good news of God to humanity in a nutshell. The perspective given by the Angel not only takes away the problem of Joseph, it gives new hope and enthusiasm to Joseph to reframe his life for God and for the world. It gave him not only relief, but also joy.

'Joseph, son of David' – In these words, the angel affirms the role of Joseph. He is a son of David. God has promised a Messiah to be the descendant of David. God has given him an opportunity to accept his role in the world to be a part of God's plan. The words 'Do not be afraid' are focusing on a remedy to his problem. Joseph was not angry or frustrated. He was afraid of his future life. His love for Mary is something that cannot be taken away from his heart. What would life be without Mary? – That was his fear. So the angel addresses properly the real problem. The angel guides him to take a particular action. 'Take Mary to your home'. The whole perspective of Joseph is now changed. There cannot be a valid reason other than this. It is the work of God, not a work of any human being. It allows him to keep alive his spiritual journey; the outcome of this perspective is joy. Joseph was given a God's eye perspective.

# THE SECOND JOY OF SAINT JOSEPH



## THE BIRTH OF THE SAVIOR

*"But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord."  
- Luke 2:10-11*

### 2. THE BIRTH OF THE SAVIOR: HUMILITY

A great mystery of God is taking place in the humble hands of Mary and Joseph. The God who made the whole universe becomes a child in the hands of ordinary parents. The true joy of Mary and Joseph is humility before Divine Majesty. Joseph was silent in these moments of great events. Mary put everything in her heart and meditated on them. They allowed their hearts to open and experience love and appreciation to God and others

St. Paul used to tell with great joy and gratitude: “We are earthly vessels. But the Divine Mysteries are revealed in our hands’. The same joy was with Joseph at the birth of Jesus in the manger. The good news is announced to Shepherds. They came with great joy to see the Divine Baby and to help the parents. Joseph was humble to accept their help and he was happy. Joseph might have been humbled before the songs of angels. The visit of the Magi might have humbled him more. What have I done to get such a divine revelation? Reflecting on every event that happened with humility and gratitude would have brought great joy to Joseph.

‘Blessed are those who are meek, they will inherit the land’ – These words are from the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus always required humility to inherit the Kingdom of God. He presented himself as the example of humility. Humility brings real joy. The birth of Jesus gave meaning and purpose to the life of Joseph. He accepted them with humility. He felt enormous joy and appreciation. “I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.” This news never made Joseph proud. It made him more humble.

The word humility comes from the Latin word ‘humus’ which means earth. The earth is humble. It accepts all who do harm to it and does well to all. Joseph was a humble man, but he was not timid. He was convinced and fulfilled boldly the role God had given to him in life. In his trouble, he was seeking God’s will. At the same time he was not afraid of others. With great joy, he did the will of God in his life by accepting Mary as his wife.

People used to speak about the donkey of St. Joseph. They associated his character with the character of the donkey. It is a humble animal. It goes wherever it is asked to go and it carries the burdens of others. Joseph played this role with great joy. His joy was his usefulness in the hand of God. God emptied himself and became man. He made humility the cause of joy for the world. The key for happiness is our humble attitude before God’s marvelous work of love. The silence of Joseph speaks volumes on humility.

Humble people are always happy people. Humility always recognizes the need of others in our life journey. It helps us to see the goodness of others and thank them. Joseph preserved the virginity of the Blessed Mother out of reverence and respect to God who has done wonderful things through her. He might have called Mary blessed. Mary also respected his gentleness. When Jesus was found in the temple after three days, she mentioned Joseph with great respect in the conversation. The beauty of the holy family is their humility in appreciating each other. Jesus, even though he was a son of God, obeyed his parents and grew in wisdom and knowledge by mutual respect and humility.

# THE THIRD JOY OF SAINT JOSEPH



## THE HOLY NAME OF JESUS

*"But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus."  
- Matthew 1:25*

### 3. THE HOLY NAME OF JESUS – ACCEPTANCE

Joseph accepted Mary as his wife. He also accepted the realities of life as they were. He never questioned the angel who brought the good news of salvation. The way Mary questioned the angel was different. It was just to know the reality that is happening within her. After knowing the work of God, she accepted it. But, Zachariah questioned the angel with doubt. He was punished for that. Joseph never questioned the angel. He was such a holy man who respected God and accepted the ways of God unconditionally.

In any situation, one has to ask a particular question. Why be unhappy about something if it can be remedied? And what is the use of being unhappy if it cannot be remedied? Acceptance is opposite of resignation and defeat. It is the one place from which one can go forward. Acceptance allows us to move into the fullness of joy. Stress and anxiety come from our expectation of how life should be. Acceptance is the sword that cuts through all the resistance of judgment, criticism, anxiety and despair and allows us to be happy, relaxed and to see clearly and respond properly. Know the truth, it will liberate you – says the Lord. Knowing the truth involves accepting situations as they are and starting the journey from there.

St. Joseph accepted the realities that happened to him. He never murmured or demanded his own way. When the time came to name him, as the father who had the right to choose the name, Joseph accepted the voice of God and gave the name Jesus. Jesus means Emmanuel, God is with us. Joseph might have referred to his son as Jesus very often. He might have mentioned this name to so many people in his time. In every event, he kept the name holy by accepting God in his life. Joseph not only accepted the name, he accepted the reality of God is with us in all situations. That might have brought him immense joy.

We are always reminded of not using God's name in vain in the Ten Commandments. We are not supposed to manipulate God's name for our own purposes. We are supposed to give proper respect and reverence to God's name. It is an act of accepting of God's power and majesty. It is an accepting of God's will in our lives.

St. Julian of Norwich writes, *...deeds are done which appear so evil to us and people suffer such terrible evils that it does not seem as though any good will ever come of them; and we consider this, sorrowing and grieving over it so that we cannot find peace in the blessed contemplation of God as we should do; and this is why; our reasoning powers are so blind now, so humble and simple, that we cannot know the high, marvelous wisdom, the might and the goodness of the Holy Trinity. And that is what he means where he says, 'You shall see for yourself that all manner of things shall be well' as if he said, Pay attention to this now, faithfully and confidently, and at the end of time you will truly see it in the fullness of joy.*

St Joseph is a great example of accepting the real situations of life as they are and proceedings with calmness to do his best to change it. The serenity prayer we recite fits well in the life of St. Joseph: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference".

# THE FOURTH JOY OF SAINT JOSEPH



## THE EFFECTS OF THE REDEMPTION

*"Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem."  
- Luke 2:38*

### **4. THE EFFECTS OF THE REDEMPTION: GRATITUDE**

The gospel passage for this theme speaks about the prophecy of Anna in the temple at the time of the presentation of the Lord. She spoke about the Child Jesus. But it was addressed to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Israel. Joseph was one among many who were waiting for the redemption of Israel. One could ask, who are these people and what kind of redemption do they want? People were waiting for the Messiah who gives total liberation, personal, political and spiritual. Externally,

they were under the Roman Empire. Their religion did not give them true freedom. It brought another type of slavery by imposing its laws and rituals as absolute. Personally, they were emotionally oppressed by fear and confusion due to the hopeless situations that were increasing amidst different leaders who were proposing violence and hatred as solutions to these problems.

Simeon and Anna were prophets. They predicted the future. They presented the child as the joy of those who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. More than hope, gratitude is lingering in the eyes of these two holy people. They are rejoicing in anticipation. It is natural for the parents to be grateful to God when they first bring the child to the temple. But, here, the gratitude is different. It is a gratitude to God for His marvelous deeds done in Jesus. More than anybody, Joseph and Mary would have understood these words. They saw the hand of God in the birth of Jesus. They have wondered at the future possibility in each event that happened at the time of the birth of Jesus.

Gratitude is the recognition of all that holds us in the web of life and all that has made it possible to have the circumstances we are experiencing. The Child Jesus is bringing redemption to the world. Joseph and Mary need not go further to see how his work would be in the future. They rejoice at the gift of the Divine Child himself. It is not happiness that leads us to gratitude. It is gratitude that leads us to happiness. 'Joy is the happiness that does not depend on what happens. It is a grateful response to the opportunity that life offers to us at this moment'

It is not only Anna who thanked God, but Mary and Joseph might also have thanked God. In Jewish Tradition, thanksgiving to God has a rich meaning. It is oriented towards future. It is a joy in seeing what great things would be done by God to redeem His people. Gratitude takes away all fear. People who have a strong disposition toward gratitude have the capacity to be empathetic and understand the perspective of others. That is what might have happened to Joseph at the time of presenting Jesus in the temple. He participates in the joy of Anna and takes her perspective as his own.

St. Joseph teaches us a great lesson. Life is short. All things are slipping away, and there is real danger of wasting our precious human life. Gratitude helps us catalog, celebrate and rejoice in each day and each moment before they slip through the vanishing hourglass of experience. Gratitude enables us to reframe the negative events into positive ones. Those who believe in the works of God will be rejoicing in gratitude always.

# THE FIFTH JOY OF SAINT JOSEPH



## THE OVERTHROW OF THE IDOLS OF EGYPT

*"A prophecy against Egypt: See, the Lord rides on a swift cloud and is coming to Egypt. The idols of Egypt tremble before him, and the hearts of the Egyptians melt with fear.  
- Isaiah 19:1*

### 5. THE OVERTHROW OF THE IDOLS OF EGYPT: FORGIVENESS

The journey of the holy family from Palestine to Egypt and return back to Nazareth seems to be a round trip from one country to another. In the Old Testament, there is a prophecy by Isaiah 19:1 "See the Lord rides on a swift cloud and is coming to Egypt. The idols of Egypt tremble before, and hearts of the Egyptians melt with fear". What is the meaning of this prophecy and how is it fulfilled in the journey of the holy family?

"The Lord rides on a swift cloud" means no one knows how the Lord will come to them. No one could determine His way or direction. Here in our context, the Lord rides as a baby on the donkey of Joseph. The idols

of Egypt tremble before him. Here, it does not speak about the people of Egypt in a general way. The idols of Egypt are arrogance, greed and false gods such as wealth, power and self glory. As a newborn baby, God is going to overcome them. The hearts of these powerful people are going to melt with fear. This happened to Herod. Even though he was a Jewish King, he had these idols of Egypt in his heart. After hearing of the birth of the Messiah, he was trembling and his heart was melting with fear. What is the joy we see in this event and how could Joseph experience this joy?

Herod was killing the innocent children out of fear and trembling. But God had a wonderful plan to make the holy family escape this danger. That plan was revealed to Joseph. Joseph might have experienced great joy in seeing the victory of God over evil. Even though it is a tough journey, he might have taken it in a lighthearted spirit. After hearing the destruction of Herod, he might have come back to Palestine to live a happy life with his family!

To be really happy, there probably was a sense of forgiveness going on in the heart of Joseph. He might have forgiven Herod. He might have forgiven all the idols of Egypt that were turned against God. Jesus never preached proud victory over enemies. He preached forgiveness in his lifetime. He has asked his disciples to forgive their enemies, seventy times seven. There was a civil war going on in many African countries. Recently there were efforts taken by some good souls like Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela to end the civil wars by reconciliation. The soldiers who killed young people were made to stand before the mothers who lost their children in violence. One of the mothers with tears of agony, told the soldier who dragged her son and killed him 'My child, I forgive you' After sometime, all mothers repeated the same with tears.

Forgiveness is freeing oneself from the negative attitudes of hatred, anger and revenge which are imprisoning. It is the healing of oneself and to be free from the past. The slavery in Egypt experienced by the Israeli people was one of the major events in which they saw the liberating hand of God. In Jesus, God once again liberated people from the slavery of hatred, anger and revenge by means of the same forgiveness that brought immense joy to Joseph.

The forgiveness of the Holy Family is revealed in their shift of residence. They went from Judea to Galilee to have a peaceful residence. They wanted to free themselves from the past. Real happiness comes in forgiving and forgetting.

# THE SIXTH JOY OF SAINT JOSEPH



## LIFE WITH JESUS AND MARY AT NAZARETH

*"When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth."  
- Luke 2:39*

## 6. LIFE WITH JESUS AND MARY AT NAZARETH – COMPASSION

The life of any Jewish family is centered on the father of the house. He is the provider, protector and the priest of the family. He led the meal prayer and other family prayers. As a pious Jew, St Joseph very likely fulfilled his duties properly. As Luke points out in his gospel Chapter 2: 52, Jesus was growing in wisdom, knowledge and grace under the foster care of Joseph. Mother Mary also kept this beautiful life in her heart and pondered the works of God in human life. The holy family became a model for all families living a Christian life. I would like to describe the joy of Joseph and the little family in one word - compassion.

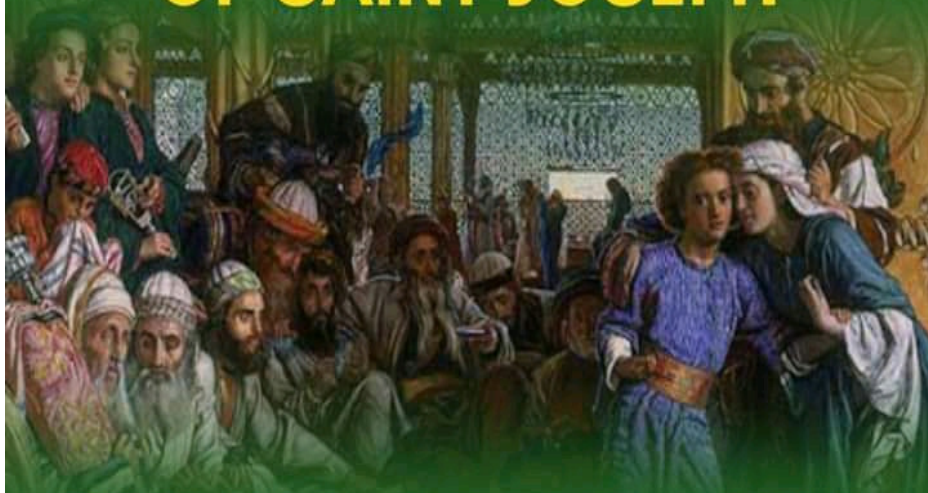
Compassion is a feeling for others. A compassionate care for others is the source of happiness. Compassion is the sense of concern that arises when we are confronted with sufferings and feel motivated to see that suffering is relieved. In Christian tradition, we have the word 'mercy' in the place of compassion. The Hebrew word for compassion and mercy is '*rachamim*' a feeling that comes from the womb of a mother.

The seed of compassion is from our own experience of being nurtured by our mothers and our family. This compassion is obvious in the holy family. Joseph expressed it beautifully when Mary was pregnant with child and in a more beautiful way in the birth of Jesus in the manger. There truly would have been mutual recognition and appreciation of compassion in the family. Joseph certainly appreciated Mary and Jesus and they would have admired Joseph. Compassion is contagious.

The family grew in grace because of this compassion. They must have shown compassion to others who were living nearby. We could see this character in Jesus during the time of his ministry. He identified the suffering people easily and showed them compassion and relieved their sufferings. The same compassion was shown by Mother Mary at the time of his passion on the cross.

Compassion is the source of happiness in the life of St. Joseph. He provided the family with compassion. As a carpenter, he worked hard. As a protector of the family, he was alert and as the priest of the family he led the family in divine ways. He used to take the family for annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem. He used to take them on tours to different beautiful areas of Galilee. Household happiness always emerges from compassion.

# THE SEVENTH JOY OF SAINT JOSEPH



## FINDING OF THE CHILD JESUS IN THE TEMPLE

*"After three days they found him in the temple courts,  
sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking  
them questions."  
- Luke 2:46*

### 7. FINDING OF THE CHILD JESUS IN THE TEMPLE: GENEROSITY IN SPIRIT

Finding Jesus in the temple is an interesting event that brings great joy to the hearts of the people who read about it. Jesus was a young boy full of energy and spirit. He went to the temple to worship God with his parents. In one place in the temple area, teaching was taking place. Some teachers began to teach the Jewish laws to the ordinary innocent people. Jesus was listening to them. He might have seen the authoritarian teachings of some of the Pharisees and teachers of Law. A great spirit arose within

Since he came from Galilee, people might have thought that he did not have proper knowledge of the Torah. They might have degraded him. Since Jesus was accustomed to go to the synagogue for worship in Nazareth; he came out with great questions. Even the scribes who knew their religion could not answer his questions. They were astonished by the wisdom that came from his mouth. He expressed his great spirit of learning and teaching in that moment. Even his parents, Joseph and Mary were surprised by his wisdom.

The concept 'generosity in spirit' refers to the art of teaching to the unknowing. It is the magnanimity of a person to teach right things to uplift the ignorant. Instead of giving fish, it is an art of helping people to learn how to fish. Jesus once had great compassion on the crowd. After seeing them like 'sheep without shepherd' he started to preach them the gospel. Educating others is one of the sources of joy. It requires a generosity of spirit. There are three kinds of generosity; material giving, giving freedom from fear and spiritual giving to elevate and enlighten people. There are spiritual masters who feel immense joy in giving knowledge, wisdom and life to others.

Joseph might have trained Jesus in the art of teaching. In the family, they read scriptures and discussed the nuances. In synagogue, Jesus was learning and teaching people. When he went to the synagogue of his own town after becoming a great preacher, people were surprised at his wisdom and exclaimed how he got such wisdom! They referred to his father Joseph.

Teaching brings joy to the one who teaches and the one who receives the teaching. We do not know anything about Joseph teaching others. But the silence of Joseph speaks volumes. He might have been a great learner. He might have found great joy in learning. He might have found great joy in learning from his own son Jesus. Dad and son relationships are always based on teaching and learning.

So far, I have given seven sources of joy in the context of the life of St. Joseph. He is a patron saint for good education; hard working, faithful husbands; good death and so on. He is a dreamer of dreams. His dreams were just listening to God who spoke to him through angels.

## Conclusion

In this small booklet, I have tried to explore the hidden Joseph and his inner joy. I have a special love for Joseph. He is different among saints. He found joy in ordinary things. He found joy in humility, obedience, acceptance, compassion and generosity. Some years back, I went to a small island near the South Italy called Malta. Ninety percent of the people of that island are Catholics. They express their faith beautifully and they are generous in helping the people in need. While I was walking in the streets of Attard, a small town, many people were in queue to visit a patient in a hospital and get her blessings. I was surprised. I went to see that person. She was a religious nun. She had terminal cancer and was about to die in a few days. But she was full of joy. She was blessing people and revealing prophecies to many who were in trouble. After seeing me, she started to speak about the joy of St. Joseph. She did not know that my name is Joseph. She was joyfully speaking about the donkey of St. Joseph. She asked me to put all my troubles in the donkey and be happy like St. Joseph. In the year of St. Joseph, I remembered that event. Joseph was indeed a joyful person. He brings joy in the life of so many people. He gives God's perspective to people in their times of trouble. He protects the Church. He provides the material needs. He silently speaks volumes. Through the powerful intercession of St. Joseph, may God lead us in fatherly love to a greater life.

