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Chapter Three Glad Hearts

S OON after Christmas night, Joseph went up to the office of the censor to register. As he took up the quill, his hand trembled. Nervously, he smoothed out the parchment, dipped the quill, but he could not write his name. “What is the trouble?” asked a scribe who had been watching him.

“Oh, nothing at all,” said Joseph. Again he straightened the scroll, stared at it, hesitated, then wrote very hurriedly:

“Joseph, son of Jacob, carpenter”—and his age

“Mary, daughter of Joachim”—and her age

“Jesus, Son of Mary”—and His age.

“That does not seem just right to me,” he thought, “my name ahead of Jesus’ name. He should have first place.” In his humility he had hesitated to put himself first.

Joseph and Mary wanted to go back to Nazareth, but they could not go yet. There was a law among the Jews concerning new babies. Forty days after his birth, the father and mother were obliged to take the new baby up to the Temple, and make a gift offering of a lamb or doves. This was called the Presentation. It went back to the time when God freed the Jews from the yoke of Pharaoh. God told Moses to warn the Egyptians that if they did not free the Jews, whom they had taken into captivity, He would punish them by destroying the oldest son in each Egyptian family.

Devotion to St. Joseph

Pharaoh paid no attention to Moses. Moses then told the Jews to kill a lamb, and sprinkle some of its blood on the outside of their doors. That night the destroying angel entered every house not marked with the blood of the lamb and killed the eldest son in that family. So it was in thanksgiving for having spared the first-born of the Jewish families that Jesus was presented in the Temple. We see now why Jesus is called Mary's "first-born son." In Jewish families even an only son was called the "first-born" because of this law regarding his presentation in the Temple.

Again, Joseph and Mary are traveling. From Bethlehem to Jerusalem it is about five miles. They spent the night outside the city. The next morning Joseph took Jesus and Mary up to the gorgeous Temple with its massive gates, bridges, and stairways. Palestine had many synagogues, but only one Temple. It was a magnificent building, like an immense cathedral on the hill.

Here, again, Mary was depending on Joseph. It was he who brought the five shekels that were offered to the high priest. This sum is only about four dollars in our money, but, to a poor man like Joseph, it was a great deal. It was Joseph who bought the two doves which the mother offered. They could not afford a lamb.

Up the white stone steps of the Temple the holy pair went, up to where the great dome gleamed in the sunlight like snow above the brown walls of the city. Love and joy flooded Joseph's heart as he carried Jesus with him.

In the Temple at the same time was a holy old man called Simeon. He was praying when the Holy Family entered. The minute he looked at the Divine Child he knew Him, and shuffled after Joseph and Mary. Mary was surprised when he stood before them, clasped his hands and said, "Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace,

according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel.”³ Our Lady wondered who this man was, and how he knew who this Child was.

Tenderly, she let Simeon hold the Infant. While he pressed Jesus to his heart, he explained to Mary how God had promised him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord. Simeon also told Mary that many people would believe in this Divine Child, and many would not. He prophesied that a great sorrow would one day pierce her heart like a sword.

While they were speaking, Anna, a holy woman, came into the Temple. Mary knew Anna. This was the same Anna who had been in the Temple when Mary lived there. Anna knew who Mary’s Child was. From that day on she talked about Him to everyone she met.

All this happened on February second. It was the first Feast of the Purification. It is sometimes called Candlemas Day because, while Simeon held our Blessed Lord, he called Him “a light for revelation to the Gentiles.” On this day, the Church blesses the year’s supply of candles.

After bidding farewell to Simeon, Mary and Joseph began the journey home. On the way they discussed the prophecies of Simeon. “What will happen next, and when?” Mary anxiously asked Joseph.

“You and I must not worry about that now, dear. Let us leave each day to God. He has taken care of us so far; we must not doubt,” was Joseph’s kind, reassuring reply. Nevertheless, Joseph realized that Mary’s heart was anxious about Jesus. She had a mother’s heart.

They could see the magnificent court of Herod in the

³ Luke 2:29-32

distance. They had heard people in Jerusalem talk about how gorgeous his palace was. There were two immense halls in it where hundreds of guests could be served at one sitting, eating from gold and silver vessels.

The Jews did not like Herod. He was not their lawful ruler, but was merely appointed by the Romans. Moreover, he was wicked. He had killed members of his own family, lest they take his throne away from him. Mary and Joseph had heard these stories. They were glad to hurry past Herod's palace grounds.

Sometime after this, perhaps a year or two, a group of rich camel riders made a surprise visit to Palestine. "Noblemen from the East," said one.

"Look at their chests and saddlebags. They are from the Orient lands," said another.

"Either Persia or Arabia," said a third man. "They must have been a long time coming." A great crowd gathered around them asking where they were going, and why they had come.

To all questions the strangers replied, "We are looking for the King of kings, we are looking for the great Messiah, the new Infant King of Israel. We have seen His star in the East and are come to adore Him."

"A king? Ho! Ho! Wait until Herod hears that! There'll be trouble. He will not stand for that," the people told the Magi. These holy men were disappointed that no one seemed to know about the new King. They told the people how they had seen His star in the East and that they had recognized it as the sign that a great king was born in Israel. Day and night they had traveled for many, many months.

Everyone they passed was interested in them. "Let's follow them," one suggested. Imagine the surprise of the crowd when the caravan stopped at Joseph's humble home.

Keeper of the Gate

The astonishment of Mary and Joseph was even greater when they saw all this excitement around their home.

The unusual visitors introduced themselves to Joseph. They were three. One was old; he was Caspar; Melchior was middle-aged, and Balthasar was young. Joseph introduced them to Mary. She picked up her sleeping Infant and showed Him to the Magi. Instantly they dropped to their knees, adored Him and kissed His feet. He woke up, stretched His little arms, and smiled at them.

Then the royal visitors sat down and talked to Joseph and Mary. They were honest men and had great love. Joseph was thrilled at their great reverence and devotion. They told Joseph how they were watchers of the skies, and were called wise men because they knew all the science then known about the skies. They practically lived out-of-doors. They knew every star by name. Every night they went up on the housetops and high places around to see the constellations rise and set.

“We have brought gifts,” said Caspar, who did most of the talking. “No one goes before a king without royal gifts. I brought the gold, in honor of His kingship. Balthasar has frankincense. It is a particularly rich and fragrant resinous gum used in religious ceremonies. This we offer to honor Him as God.”

“I have myrrh for the Infant King,” said Melchior, “and because of its bitter taste we offer it to honor Him as man.” Joseph took these gifts and set them down on the floor. He could not help admiring their great faith. It pleased him. He told the Magi the details of the miraculous birth on Christmas Eve. It was Joseph who first taught the Magi the mystery of the Incarnation. We celebrate the visit of the Wise Men on January sixth. It is called the Feast of the Epiphany.

Devotion to St. Joseph

Was it not strange that so many unexpected things happened at Christmas? There was no room for Him who made all the world. The donkey was nearest the crib, the shepherds got to Bethlehem before the Wise Men, who themselves asked the way to Bethlehem from those who never found it. Scripture calls them Wise Men; Herod called them fools; and Christ, who made the world and everything in it, chose to become a little Child and to be poor because He loves the poor.



Discussion Questions

1. To St. Joseph it did not seem right to put his name before the name of Jesus. What do you hold to be more important than Jesus? What do you put ahead of him?
2. On page 21, we see how Joseph registered for the census: He lists his name and his father's, Mary's name and her father's, Jesus' name and His mother's. Why did he not list himself as Jesus' father in the traditional manner?
3. What might the "great sorrow" that "would one day pierce [Mary's] heart like a sword" be? (page 23)



Virtues of St. Joseph

At the Temple, Mary again "was depending on Joseph" (page 22). Like Mary, we too must rely on St. Joseph. Memorize the following prayer to him and recite it daily: "St. Joseph, take care of me just as you took care of Jesus and Mary. Watch over me, protect me, guide me to your Son. Help me to pray to you when I need help. Amen."

Prayers to St. Joseph

I Visit Saint Joseph

Dear St. Joseph, when you lived on earth, people did not know who you were. People thought you were just a carpenter. They did not know that you were the head of the Holy Family. They did not know that you were working for Jesus, the Son of God, and God's Holy Mother. Help me, St. Joseph, to work as you did. Help me to work for Jesus, to work for Mary, to love them both. Amen.

Prayer for My Family

Good St. Joseph, you are the foster-father of Jesus. You worked for Him and took care of Him. Jesus is God, but He was obedient to you. Mary is the dear Mother of Jesus. How you and Jesus love her! You were all very kind to one another in your little house in Nazareth. We call your family the Holy Family, because you were all so good. Your home was a very happy home. Please, dear St. Joseph, help me to be obedient and kind. Help my mother and father too, so that my home will be happy; and my family, a holy family, like yours. Amen.

Prayer for a Happy Death

Dear and holy St. Joseph! You loved Jesus and Mary very much. But you could not stay with them always. One day you had to die. You were not afraid, because Jesus was there and Mary was with you too. You had a very happy death. Someday I must die too. I will not be afraid, if Jesus is with me in Holy Communion; and if Mother Mary prays for my soul. Holy St. Joseph, when you see that I am going to die, will you please ask Jesus and Mary to be with me, and will you come too? Amen.

Devotion to St. Joseph

Act of Consecration to St. Joseph

O dearest St. Joseph, I consecrate myself to your honor and give myself to you that you may always be my father, my protector, and my guide in the way of salvation. Obtain for me a great purity of heart, and a fervent love of the interior life. After your example, may I do all my actions for the greater glory of God, in union with the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. And you, O blessed St. Joseph, pray for me that I may share in the peace and joy of your holy death. Amen.

Prayer for Wednesday

(Wednesdays are dedicated to St. Joseph.)

St. Joseph, most pure spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, pray for us daily to the Son of God that, armed with the weapons of His grace we may fight as we ought in this life and be crowned by Him in death. Amen.

To St. Joseph, Patron of Silence

Well may we, St. Joseph, look on you as Patron of Silence, and as teacher of the value of actions, not words. Although your good and virtuous *actions* as guardian of the Holy Child are recorded in the pages of Scripture, no *word* of yours finds place there. Were you in the mind of St. John, the beloved disciple, when he wrote, “Little children, let us not love in word, but in deed and in truth”? It is possible that you were. Your service of the Holy Child was certainly at least the type of that of which the apostle wrote.

Obtain for me, dear St. Joseph, the grace to show my love for Jesus as you showed yours—not by what I say, but by what I do.