

2026-01-11: 1st Sunday of Tobe - Joseph Discerns God's Will

Background

Good morning, dear beloved - Christ is Born! Glorify Him! - Wishing you all a blessed Feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ. We continue to celebrate the Nativity Feast for 8 days - until we reach the Feast of the Circumcision of our Lord on the 8th day. And during that time, we pray in the joyful tune, we wear our festive vestments, and we sing the hymns of the Nativity. On Wednesday, God willing, we will celebrate the Circumcision Feast.

So the Church arranges for the readings on the 1st Sunday of Tobe (today) to be related to the Nativity because it always falls during this period of the Nativity Feast celebration.

It is a coincidence that today we are also celebrating the martyrdom of the Children of Bethlehem, who are also mentioned in today's Gospel. May their prayers be with us all.

Shortly after that, we will start to prepare to celebrate for the Theophany! On Friday, Saturday and Sunday, we will fast the Paramon fast of the Theophany. And then on Sunday evening we will celebrate the feast of the Theophany going into Monday. Because of this, the Church arranges for all the readings of the rest of the Coptic month of Tobe to be related to baptism. So we'll see that in the next three Sundays, God willing.

Introduction

I want to focus today on the person of St Joseph the Carpenter. St Joseph is called in the Scripture a just man - that means a righteous man. A man that always does what is right. He is the one who took care of St Mary during her pregnancy, and then took care of her during their travel to Bethlehem, and then guided her to find a place to stay the night of the birth of Christ, and then protected her on the way to Egypt and for several years in Egypt and on the way back. He is a very important character in the early life of the Lord Jesus Christ - but he is often overlooked.

In our church, we have a meeting named after him every other Saturday, the St Joseph the Carpenter meeting for our older youth. And we have his icon in the Church in the back, which means every time that we raise incense in front of it, we ask for his prayers. So definitely he is praying for us, and doing work here in our church!

Who is this man? What makes him so just? How do we become like him? I want to focus today on St Joseph the Carpenter's guiding principles.

1 - Guided by an Angel

The first thing is that St Joseph is guided by an angel.

1. An angel appeared to him and told him that the baby your betrothed wife is having is from the Holy Spirit.
2. An angel appeared to him and told him "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him."
3. Then a few years later, an angel appeared to him and told him "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child's life are dead."

All three of those times, we read that when he arose from his sleep, he did what the angel said.

But who is the angel? The word angel is from the Greek ἄγγελος which means "messenger." Angel of the Lord means "messenger of the Lord." For most of us, an angel from heaven is not showing up to me in dreams - but the Lord is conveying his message to me through other messengers.

It could be the bishop or the priest, my parents - my father and mother, my spiritual father, it could be my servant in Sunday School, it could be my friend who is pious and who loves God. The question is not "Does God speak to me?" but "God is speaking to me... do I recognize His messengers? And do I obey them?"

Most of us (if not all of us) would say that if an angel appeared to me, I would do what he said. End of story. But what about when the message of the Lord comes from:

- Abouna in a sermon
- A servant that is correcting my child
- My father of confession advising me
- My godly friend giving me a warning
- My parent rebuking me

Obedience is easy if the messenger is glorious and the message is easy... but once the message is hard and the messenger is familiar... not so easy. Once there is a little discomfort, or a little attack on my ego, then it's hard.

- When the angel told St Joseph "take pregnant Mary as your wife" - this is at the risk of his reputation.
- When the angel told St Joseph "Flee to Egypt" - this means leave your home, your work, your stability.
- When the angel told St Joseph "Return to Israel" - this is after years of settling elsewhere

St Joseph did not obey because it was easy or comfortable, but because it was God speaking. And he obeyed every time right away. No argument. No delay. No negotiation.

Many times we argue. Or we delay. Or we try to negotiate. We say "well the Church is too strict" or "Abouna doesn't understand my times" or "That's just my parents' opinion."

But if I recognize the message is from God and the messenger is from God - then I will obey right away.

If I don't obey God when He speaks gently through His messengers, then I won't obey Him when He speaks loudly through difficult circumstances.

2 - Guided by Godly Principles

The second thing is that St Joseph is guided by Godly principles. A principle is a way of thinking. His thought was aligned with God. And we will give just two examples.

Principle 1: Obedience before Understanding

None of the commands of the angel were explained in detail... how long will we stay in Egypt? How will I provide for the family in Egypt? What is the road from Israel to Egypt like?

He was simply told "Arise" and so he arose.

Obedience does not require full clarity, but it requires trust.

When my parents say "no" to me - no you can't have such and such device, no you can't have such and such haircut, no you can't wear that dress or those pants - obedience. Even without understanding.

On the other hand, parents - sometimes God asks me to say "no" to my children even if they don't understand. Even if they get upset. Even if they will feel different from others.

Principle 2: Flee from Evil, don't negotiate with it.

We live in a world that tells us "just try it once" - "it's not that bad" - "everyone else is doing it"

"Blessed is the man who has not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, and has not stood in the way of sinners, and has not sat in the seat of the evil men. But his will is in the Law of the Lord." (Psalm 1)

St Joseph did not wait to see how dangerous Herod was; he didn't try it out. He acted BEFORE danger reached his door.

What kinds of places do I go to? What kind of media do I consume? What kind of friends do I have?

And if there is an evil, let me flee.

- If I am with a group of friends and one of them pulls out a vape. I stand up, and I leave. Why do I stay? Why do I put myself in temptation? Why do I say "I'll stay but I won't do it?"
- If I know that having my phone in my room at night is going to cause me to sin - leave my phone outside. Why put myself in temptation?

We always pray "Lead us not into temptation" and then we put ourselves in temptation. No, let us learn from St Joseph and from the Lord here and flee from evil.

3 - Guided by his Role and Responsibility

The third thing is that St Joseph is guided by his role and his responsibility. His role is the betrothed of St Mary and the supposed father of the baby Jesus.

What is the role of the father? Protection. Guidance. Wisdom. To take care of the needs of his family.

I need to understand my role and my responsibilities and how to fulfill them in a godly way.

- Many times a husband or father thinks that his role is just to put food on the table, and that's it. As long as my wife and kids have a roof above their head, food on their plate, and clothing on their back, I am doing my role. No! There is more to being a husband. There is more to being a father!
- Or a wife thinks that her role is just to cook and clean. As long as my husband comes home and the house is clean and the food is ready, I am doing my role. No! There is more!
- Or a son or daughter sometimes thinks that their role is just school - if I get good grades, and my parents are happy, that's it - nothing else matters. No! There is more!

We can see our responsibilities in the commandments that the Church gives me.

If I am a husband or a wife, there were commandments read to me on the day of my wedding:

- Husbands, "Excel in doing all that is good for her. Have compassion on her and hasten to do that which gladdens her heart."
 - Do all that is good for her - good financially, good emotionally, and good spiritually. You are clothed on your wedding day with the vestments of the priesthood - lead your family in their spiritual life.
 - Have compassion on her - even if she messes up. Even if she makes a mistake.
 - If I know what gladdens her heart, and I do it, then I am fulfilling God's will. What gladdens her heart is that I listen to her, I spend time with her, I prioritize her.
 - And this is the ancient wisdom of the Church - that when we do those things, we will see the good fruit of our relationship.
- Wives, "Honor and respect him, do not act against his opinion, but submit to him many times over what was commanded. Do not frown in his face, do not neglect any of his rights upon you, and fear God in all matters with him. Obey him as your parents."
 - Honor and respect him - when I argue with my husband and try to attack his ego or try to belittle him or try to emasculate him, I cannot expect good results. But when I submit to my husband, as to the Lord and fear God in all matters with him, I will see the good fruit of our relationship.
- When we see a husband and wife loving each other with these Christian principles, we see a healthy and fruitful relationship. But when one slacks, or one does not understand his/her role, it affects the other one. If I am a husband and I am not living up to my role, I cannot be upset if my wife is not living up to her role. If I am a wife and I am not living up

to my role, I cannot be upset if my husband is not living up to his role.

If I am a parent, I had more commandments read to me when my child was baptized:

- "Be diligent in teaching them reciting the holy Scriptures, and attending church services in the mornings and evenings, and fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays, the Holy Great Fast, and all the fasts, in keeping the Church laws and apostolic commands. Guard your children, and keep them from going to unsuitable places, sow in them beautiful qualities, sow in them righteousness and praise, sow in them purity, sow in them obedience, love and holiness; sow in them compassion, charity and justice; sow in them godliness, patience and goodness; sow in them honesty and every good work that pleases God. Nurture them with spiritual teachings; teach them the fear of God and His revered commands; raise them according to a plan and sound order; do not neglect their catechism (Sunday School), but be diligent."
- Sometimes we ask a child if he's fasting and he says "I didn't know" or he knows but he says "my parents don't make me fasting food." So that means I don't understand my role!
- Sometimes we ask a youth - who took you to that evil party? That unsuitable place? And he says "my parents dropped me off." Or if I don't drop him off directly, I buy him a car and give him freedom to go wherever he wants - so that means I don't understand my role!
- My role is to sow good virtues and beautiful qualities and righteousness - God forbid that my child learns from me bad habits - or bad language - or going to bad places - or listening to unsuitable music.
- The commandment specifically talks about "sow in them" - this is an ACTIVE thing. No one Sows passively or on accident. Sowing is INTENTIONAL. Parenting is INTENTIONAL.
 - One example of the parenting struggle: my son and daughter's appearance.
 - My daughter wants to wear jeans with holes in them or to have piercings.
 - My son wants to have that hairstyle that every high schooler in the country has right now.
 - These are not uncommon struggles.
 - The question is not about "is it a sin to have long hair" or "how many inches long becomes a sin" or "what if the ripped jeans are not revealing" - the question is, are we being INTENTIONAL in forming our children? Or am I letting the world form them? Definitely they did not get the broccoli haircut and ripped jeans and piercings from their parents. Definitely not from the Church teaching or from Abouna... So from where? From the world!
 - Am I helping them to form their identity? Or is their identity whatever the other kids at school are doing? Whatever the celebrities and youtubers are doing? Whatever seems "cool?" Whatever "looks cool"?
 - Am I raising them according to a plan and sound order? Or letting them go wherever the wind blows? And if I didn't teach him order in the small things, then how do I expect him to learn order in the big things?
 - And if I allow them to be disobedient in this small thing - how will I expect them to be obedient in the big things?
 - And the saddest part is that when the servant or Abouna speaks up, we are met with disagreement and "well Abouna is strict" - "well the servant is picking on him."

- I need to understand my role.
- What about my role in the spiritual upbringing?
 - Maybe as a parent, I think it is enough to drop my kids off at Sunday School on Friday and come back and pick them up, and now I did my duty in their spiritual life... No! The time at home is much more important!
 - Thank God, our church gives many resources.
 - Every month, the liturgical book is sent home to our elementary school children. Let me make time for them to do it. Let me help them with it.
 - Every week, the parents receive a summary of the lesson. Let me ask my child what they learned. Let me review the lesson with them.
 - Every day, the middle and High schoolers have a Bible reading to fulfill, let me sit with my child and read the Scripture. Let me at least ask them about it. Let me remind them. Let me pray with them.
- What is my role as a parent? My role is to provide for my children what they need to grow (physically, intellectually, emotionally, spiritually). My role is to model good behavior. My role is to teach spiritual teaching, My role is to discipline with love.
- It doesn't mean I will be perfect - no one is perfect. But at least I will have direction in my life and in my parenting.

If I am the child, suffice it to say that my role is to obey my parents in the Lord, for this is right.

- Even if I don't like what they're saying, even if they're old fashioned, even if they "don't understand me" or "don't understand my generation" - what is my role? "Obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Ephesians 6:1)

Without expanding on them, I'll add - what is my role as a grandparent? What is my role as a deacon? What is my role as a servant?

If I don't know my role, let me ask - let me seek guidance. Let me return to my father of confession. And he can help you to realize and fulfill your role in the Lord.

St Joseph understood his role in the Holy Family. And he fulfilled it 100%

Conclusion

St Joseph did not speak a single word in the Scripture. Not one word from his mouth is recorded... but his life speaks very clearly.

Let us ask ourselves if we are living like St Joseph

1. Am I listening to God's messengers in my life?
2. Am I living by Godly principles?
3. Do I understand my role and responsibilities? And fulfill them?

May the Lord grant to us the wisdom of St Joseph, to live according to His will, and may His prayers be with all of us. Amen.

Glory be to our God. Amen.

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