



a Kendall Hunt Company

Joseph, Spouse of Mary, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session, read all the readings.

2 Samuel 7:4-5a, 12-14a, 16

Romans 4:13, 16-18

Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24a (1st Option)

The Word in Liturgy

As you read these scriptures, pay attention to the things that make you wonder. What questions arise for you? Do you hear something new today in these words?

Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections that follow. These sections will help you understand the readings and the Church's teaching about Joseph as Mary's husband. Become comfortable with the session outline and check to be sure you have all the necessary materials for teaching the lesson.

The Word In Liturgy

In 2 Samuel, God promises David (through the prophet Nathan) that from David's house will come the person who will establish God's kingdom. In the verses prior to God's announcement, God asks David to build a house for God. God points out that he has been with the Israelites throughout their travels and has defeated every one of David's enemies. Now it is time for David to build a house for God. God makes it clear in verse 16 that the house and kingdom that God will build through David's lineage will never be destroyed. The leadership necessary for God's kingdom will always exist.

In today's gospel, Matthew shows that Jesus, as stated in 2 Samuel, came from the lineage of David, just as God had told Nathan it would. In the days of Mary and Joseph, to be promised in marriage was as binding as the marriage itself. Couples were as faithful in their engagement as they would be in their marriage and so adamant was the law that an unfaithful person would be punished with death. Not only was Mary's pregnancy a surprise, but it looked like a serious offense against Jewish law. Joseph loved Mary and did not want to see her punished, so he decided to quietly break away from the promise of their marriage. His mind was changed, however, when an angel of God came to him in a dream and explained that the child was conceived through the Holy Spirit. By saying "yes" to the angel, Joseph accepted his role as Mary's husband and Jesus' earthly father.

Catholic Doctrine

Parentage of Jesus

Joseph was married to Jesus' mother, Mary. Mary is the Mother of God. In this way and by this vocation, Joseph is Jesus' father. With Mary Joseph shared in the parenting of Jesus. Joseph is

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“father” to Jesus because of his marriage to Mary. Mary was the espoused wife of Joseph and according to the law of the day, any children born of Mary’s during their marriage would also belong to Joseph. The gospels refer to Jesus as the carpenter’s son in Matthew 13:55 and Mary calls Joseph Jesus’ father in Luke 2:48. We do not argue, however, that it is a unique fatherhood. The early Church fathers wrestled with what to call Joseph. They didn’t have the vocabulary to name everyone’s role accurately. They tried “foster father.” Joseph does indeed foster love to Jesus, a child born into his marriage. He raises him in the carpentry trade as he would any son. God had already chosen Joseph to be Mary’s husband. We know God wanted this to work since he sent the angel to tell Joseph not to worry; and like Mary, Joseph says “yes” to the angel. In Matthew 1:20 we know that Joseph understood from the angel that Mary was to bear a baby “from the Holy Spirit.” The Church understands Joseph’s “yes” to the angel as his understanding that Mary would forever remain a virgin. Because Joseph loved God and Mary he gave himself to Mary in love and refrained from the sexual expression of marriage in order to preserve her virginity. This action does not denigrate marriage but rather is a way of preserving the specialness of Jesus’ birth. It is not surprising then that Joseph is the patron saint of all men and women who choose to live a celibate life for the sake of Jesus.

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