

Homily for the Sunday After Nativity

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Today, on this 4th Day After the Nativity of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ, we commemorate the Holy Righteous Ones: the Prophet David, James the Brother of the Lord and Joseph the Betrothed. This is the only commemoration of St. Joseph the betrothed in the Orthodox Church. Much of his life in the Gospel account is shrouded in silence. However, there are many things that the Church's tradition can tell us about the one who protected and nurtured not only our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ but also the our Most Pure and Blessed Lady, Theotokos and ever Virgin Mary.

The Hymnography for this feast exclaims: “O Joseph, tell thou the glad tidings to David, the ancestor of God, for thou hast seen a Virgin give birth; with the shepherds didst thou give glory; with the Magi didst thou worship; by an angel wast thou instructed. Entreat Christ God, that He save our souls!”

Joseph, at the time of his betrothal to the Most Pure Virgin Mary, was about eighty years old. It was said by St. Epiphanius that out of all the men in Israel there was none to be found more fitting and righteous than Joseph. He was of the same tribe as Mary (the House of David, the Tribe of Judah), elderly, and had led an irreproachable, trustworthy, and honorable life. The betrothal was a protection and deception to the devil who knew the prophecies about a Virgin who was to give birth to the Savior and was keeping a watchful eye for the One that was to be born.

In the time of Christ, the people of Israel had a very father-centered, paternal form

of family life. The fatherless and the widows were often denied justice in the time of Christ, having no man to defend their rights. The blessed Jerome tells us that there was a threefold purpose accomplished by Joseph's betrothal to the Virgin: a quiet obscurity was assured for Christ until the appointed moment, second, there was an impenetrable defense against slander for the all-Holy Virgin, and third, a masculine defense was provided for both her and the divine infant.

Joseph was a widower and had many children from his previous marriage, among whom was the youngest one, James the (half) brother of the Lord whom we also commemorate today. From the book, *The Life of the Virgin Mary*, we are told that “God ordained the family unit as a vital part of human society. And what a great reward and honor awaited Joseph and all his house! One of his sons would be of the inner twelve Apostles (Jude); one would become the first Bishop of Jerusalem (James); and his daughter Salome, the Myrrh-bearer would give birth to the two Apostles and 'sons of thunder,' James and John. And let us also not forget that Joseph's brother, Cleopas, was one of the Seventy Apostles.”

In all things, Joseph provides us with an image of humility, of righteousness, and of goodness of the highest degree. He nurtured, protected, guided and helped the Lord and the Ever-Virgin Mary in a way that was so special and unique that it behooves us to honor him with never silent hymns and to call upon his intercessions with fervent hearts. How could the Lord fail to honor the one who cared and loved Him so much! The just Joseph, though his hands were covered with the calluses of the carpenter, yet his spirit

was refined and elevated with the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. Though he took no part in the conception and incarnation of Christ, he was to be called the father of the Lord. He fulfilled all the duties of a father towards a son: He called His Name Jesus [Matthew 1:25,] he had Him circumcised, he fled with the divine infant and His Mother into Egypt, and then chose their place of residence to be Nazareth, working as a carpenter, teaching and working with his Son, our Savior and Redeemer Jesus Christ. It is said by many sources that he reposed at the age of 110, right before the Lord Jesus began His public ministry.

As he lay dying, one apocryphal source tells us that Joseph cried out to the Lord, “Hail, my well-beloved Son. Indeed the agony and fear of death has encompassed me. But as soon as I heard thy voice, my soul is at rest. O Jesus of Nazareth! Jesus my Savior! Jesus, the deliverer of my soul! Jesus, my protector! Jesus, O sweetest name in my mouth, and in the mouth of all that love it!”

As we celebrate the Nativity in the Flesh of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, let us reflect: Out of love, the Lord descend from on high, becoming poor that we might be rich, out of love, He emptied Himself, and took the form of a servant. Out of love, He reconciled and healed the nature of man so that we might partake of those things which eye has never seen or hath ever entered into the heart of man. This is a feast of the love of God: God so loved the world, that He gave (as the greatest gift to all) His Only Begotten Son.... Christ is the answer to all our needs. Christ is the answer to all of our problems. Christ is the Life in our death, Christ is the joy in our sorrows, Christ is the

strength in our weakness. Out of His great love, He clothed Himself in flesh to seek that which was lost. Without Him, we are lost, our life is death and our love remains enclosed within our own small world. What is it that we are doing or can do repay debt of love? Love is only repaid by love. Let us love not in word but in deed by placing the Lord on the Throne of our heart. Let us love one another not in word but in deed through a spirit of kindness and gentleness, setting aside the darkness of hate and bitterness and choosing to follow the way of Christ. Let us love one another and show mercy and compassion to each other so that God may find us worthy of His love. Let us love one another, so that with one heart and one mouth we may confess the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.