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In looking back at the Creche we see figurines with varying expressions. In our Nativity scenes we see the Blessed Virgin Mary kneeling beside the Christ Child adoring the newly born Son of God. The Christ Child lays in a manger, His fingers outstretched in the form of the priestly blessing. An angel or two are perched about the scene who adore the Christ Child. Shepherds are arranged outside the stable their faces show awe and wonder. And there on the other side of the Christ Child, standing over the infant Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mary is St. Joseph. He is portrayed as being peaceful and attentive with his staff in his hand and sometimes holding a lantern, a symbol of the Light of Christ which has just dawned upon the world.

St. Joseph is given only a brief cameo in the Gospels. In this morning's Gospel we hear the last verses that make mention of him. Unlike the Blessed Virgin Mary there are no recorded words of St. Joseph in the Scriptures. We know very little about his life, and yet to whom so little is known is entrusted the greatest responsibility imaginable, to raise and protect the Son of God. We know from the Gospels that Mary was espoused to Joseph, and that they were engaged to be married. However, before they were married the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and announced that she would conceive a Son by the Holy Ghost, who would be the Savior of the world. The Scriptures record Joseph's response to Mary's news which was *not to make a public example out of her and to put her away secretly*, for Joseph was a righteous man. If Joseph revealed Mary's condition before the wedding it would have been an embarrassment to both of them and could have cost Mary her life. In those days an untimely pregnancy could carry offense that carried the death penalty. But Joseph was a gentle man and wanted to put her away secretly, until an angel visited him in a dream and confirmed all that the Blessed Virgin Mary had told him, and Joseph and Mary were married as the angel instructed.

Joseph would be visited by an angel in a dream a total of three times, and each time he was given instructions by God. The angel instructed him to flee Israel and Herod and go to Egypt, and this morning we hear that angel's announcement that they are to return to Israel, settling in Nazareth. Joseph in each situation is revealed to us as a character of incredible courage and faith. Three times he

abandons his own plans, and follows the advice of an angel, trusting that the message is from God. His courage is made evident to us by his willingness to leave his old life behind. What courage and virtue it took to take the already pregnant Blessed Virgin Mary to be his wife and agree to shelter and raise a son who was not his own, but the Son of God. And then at the message of an angel, they leave their life and work and flee to Egypt, all for the Christ-Child's sake. After settling down in Egypt an angel visits him again and they leave that new way of life behind in Egypt to return to Israel. From Israel to Egypt and back again was no easy distance, remember it had taken the Israelites forty years to wander from Egypt to Israel.

St. Joseph led Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mary through the dangerous early years of Jesus' life. And Joseph did his duty as a father even though Jesus was God in the flesh, the Son of God the Father, who had spun the worlds into existence. He taught Jesus the Scriptures, how to pray, and the skills of own trade, carpentry. St. Joseph spent his life serving the Christ Child. It is thought that St. Joseph died sometime after Jesus was twelve years old, as we do not hear of him again after the loss of the Child Jesus in the temple. St. Joseph did not live long enough to see the angel's prophecy of Jesus fulfilled, but most importantly he accepted his role as foster-father of Jesus Christ, and the husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary, two roles that teach us important lessons in faith and trust in God's will.

St. Joseph, by his life and example, teaches us that we are to let the Heavenly Father arrange our lives. The Church holds St. Joseph up to us as an example of courage and faith. The Epistle for this morning further stresses the importance of reliance upon God's will. The opening verses of this passage from the prophet Isaiah are a description of the Messiah and describe exactly what Jesus is to accomplish during His earthly life. When Jesus begins His earthly ministry He stands in the local synagogue and reads this passage from Isaiah, *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for a spirit of heaviness.* Jesus Christ, the Son of God, with such wonderful role models in His earthly parents, lets God the Father define His Life and Mission.

Let us not overlook St. Joseph who stands devotedly beside the Blessed Mother and the Christ Child. St. Joseph was a practical man, but he recognized that when we try to arrange our own lives, control events and our destinies we often fall short of God's plan. He stands for us as a model of fatherly stability, honest work, courage, faith, and trust in the Word of God. He is a sign that we must let God arrange our lives and assign our missions, for it is only in abandoning our lives to God's will that our lives become entwined with the Life and Light of Christ. And so this morning we pray, *Almighty God who has poured upon us the new light of thine incarnate Word; grant that the same light enkindled in our hearts may shine forth in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*