

As Pope Francis proclaims a Year of St Joseph....

A Portrait of St Joseph

by St John's parishioner, Mairi Clunas

At Christmas our gaze is naturally focused on the crib, the figures of Mary and the Christ Child. However, there are others too, gathered around Jesus, all of whom have made their own journey of faith – the shepherds, the Magi – but above all Saint Joseph. The following reflection attempts to explore some aspects of his life and experience.

The deepest mystery of Joseph's life and silence is his communion with Mary. Spousal love is founded on a union of hearts and reciprocal presence. Moreover, true love is not only a response to the beauty of another: it always discloses something of one's own uniqueness as well. In Mary, Joseph sees the perfect reflection of his own purity of heart - "I will betroth to myself forever" (Hos 2:19). In him, Mary glimpses the essence of her own poverty. Thus their communion of chaste love is rooted in the spirit of the beatitudes. The mission entrusted to Joseph is to undertake the role of 'father' with regards to the Child - "You must name him Jesus" (Mt 1:21). Joseph is to protect, nurture, support and guide him, so that Jesus can fulfil his true identity as Son of God - "When Israel was a child, I loved him .. I led him with reins of love" (Hos 11:1,4). Joseph teaches Jesus his craft, he shares his skill and knowledge with him - "The Father loves the Son and shows him everything he does himself" (Jn 5:20). As they work together and in harmony: there is an exchange of life between them so that it was said of Jesus, "This is the son of Joseph" (Lk 4:23)

Together with Mary, Joseph may be seen as a perfect and faithful disciple of Jesus: one who "hears the word of God and acts upon it" (Lk 11:28). We may learn of him as we do of Jesus – for Joseph, too, "is gentle and humble of heart" (Mt 11:29). Finally, Joseph may be described as a friend of God. This is seen above all, in his silence and obedience: he is a man of prayer and integrity: "a man of honour" (Mt 1:19) who "hears the word of God and acts upon it" (Lk 11:28). Joseph lives in God's presence and listens attentively which empowers him to do things he would never have dreamt of - "Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife" (Mt 1:20). Moreover, the ways of Gods often seem to confront him with difficult and puzzling circumstances: the mystery of Mary's pregnancy, and the events surrounding the hurried flight into Egypt which he does not fully comprehend. He is faithful steward who, by being attentive to the task of the present moment, perfectly accomplishes the will of God. Reflecting on St Joseph's journey of faith we too may be led to a deeper friendship with Jesus and Mary. Not only at Christmas but throughout the year.