

7 Sorrows and Joys of St. Joseph

First Sorrow and First Joy: The Doubt of St. Joseph — the Message of the Angel

In his book *Consecration to St. Joseph*, Fr. Donald Calloway, MIC, describes the three possible motives for Joseph's decision to send Mary away, which he calls the Doubt Theory, the Stupefaction Theory, and the Reverence Theory. Needless to say, he prefers the last theory, according to which St. Joseph decided to leave Mary out of reverence for her Spirit-bestowed pregnancy. Though "a just man," he felt unworthy to be close to this mystery any further. God approved this humility by sending His angel to command Joseph in a dream to "take Mary your wife into your home." Joyfully, Joseph obeyed.

1st Sorrow: Saint Joseph Resolves to leave Mary Quietly (Mt 1:19)

1st Joy: Saint Joseph's Annunciation (Mt 1:20)

Second Sorrow and Second Joy: The Poverty of Jesus' Birth — the Birth of the Savior

Saint Joseph cared for his wife, but, when they arrived in Bethlehem, he could not provide a home for her in which to give birth. This must have troubled him greatly. The census came suddenly, so he hadn't had much time to plan. Further, walking from Galilee with a pregnant wife would put him among the last travelers to Bethlehem. Finally, he didn't know how many descendants of David would descend on David's city. His fatherly role to protect and provide for his family was frustrated by these obstacles. Nevertheless, what joy must have flooded his face upon seeing the infant Savior asleep on the hay!

2nd Sorrow: The Poverty of Jesus' Birth (Lk 2:7)

2nd Joy: The Birth of the Savior (Lk 2:10-11)

Third Sorrow and Third Joy: The Circumcision — the Holy Name of Jesus

The Circumcision of Jesus is the first shedding of His Precious Blood. This painful moment foretells to Joseph and Mary their Son's future Passion and Death. But by His suffering He would redeem us. At His first bloodshed, He receives from Joseph the holy name of Jesus, which means "God saves." The angel requested this name for Him "because he will save his people from their sins" (Mt 1:21). Only to Joseph, the legal father of Jesus, was given the task of bestowing the Name that is above every name upon the Son of the Living God (see Phil 2:9, Mt 16:16).

3rd Sorrow: The Circumcision (Lk 2:21)

3rd Joy: The Holy Name of Jesus (Mt 1:25)

Fourth Sorrow and Fourth Joy: The Prophecy of Simeon — the Effects of the Redemption

Simeon's prophecy to Mary — that "a sword will pierce through [her] soul" (Lk 2:35a) — is first among the Seven Sorrows of Mary. However, Joseph too heard these words. Though speaking of Jesus' Passion, Simeon also implies Joseph's death, since he could not defend Mary from the sword. In his helplessness, Joseph must have been soothed by Simeon's later words: "so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Lk 2:35b). Indeed, Jesus' Passion and Mary's compassion have revealed the thoughts of many hearts, both for and against His Cross. Those who embrace Jesus' Cross in faith, however, experience His salvation.

4th Sorrow: The Prophecy of Simeon (Lk 2:34)

4th Joy: The Effects of the Redemption (Lk 2:38)

Fifth Sorrow and Fifth Joy: The Flight into Egypt — Overthrow of the Idols in Egypt

The journey to Bethlehem was taxing; the flight into Egypt was terrifying. The young Holy Family had to walk across miles of wilderness, braving weather and possibly bandits. When they reached Egypt, as mystics record, idols fell down before the newborn King. This can also be inferred from Isaiah 19:1: “the Lord ... comes to Egypt; and the idols of Egypt will tremble at his presence.” If Dagon fell before the Ark of the Covenant (see 1 Sam 5:3-4), how many more Egyptian idols must have fallen before Mary, the Ark of the New Covenant, carrying her infant Lord?

5th Sorrow: The Flight into Egypt (Mt 2:14)

5th Joy: The Overthrow of the Idols of Egypt (Is 19:1)

Sixth Sorrow and Sixth Joy: The Return from Egypt — Life with Jesus and Mary in Nazareth

Although life in Egypt could not have been easy for a family whose coming was associated with the fall of their idols, the return was also difficult. Again, the hardships of traveling through the wilderness on foot were far greater than most people in modern, developed countries can imagine. Furthermore, Joseph feared returning to Bethlehem, since Herod’s son Archelaus then ruled the territory. Joseph chose instead to go to the small town of Nazareth in Galilee. Life in Nazareth must have been deeply joyful, since he spent it with Mary, the Immaculate Conception, and Jesus, the King of Kings.

6th Sorrow: The Return from Egypt (Mt 2:22)

6th Joy: Life with Jesus and Mary at Nazareth (Lk 2:39)

Seventh Sorrow and Seventh Joy: Losing Jesus in Jerusalem — Finding Him in the Temple

This is the last mention of Joseph during his lifetime in the Bible. The Holy Family now traveled to Jerusalem in a caravan, and Jesus, at age 12, moved easily among relatives and friends. When they did not find Him on their return journey, how anxious His parents must have been! Every hour of that three-day search must have seemed an eternity. Upon finding Him in the Temple, their anxiety turned into joy. He was safe! They were perplexed at His teaching so young, but we can imagine that Joseph was proud of Him. Additionally, the elders likely honored Joseph as the Child’s father and teacher.

7th Sorrow: The Loss of the Child Jesus (Lk 2:45)

7th Joy: The Finding of the Child Jesus (Lk 2:46)

Reflection Questions for each Sorrow and Joy:

1. How is the sorrow in St. Joseph’s life resolved/fixed to bring about this experience of joy? What grace did God give to Joseph in this example?
2. What virtue(s) did Saint Joseph need in this sorrowful story? Joyful story? In what ways would you personally like to grow in these same virtues?
3. How can you relate to this example of sorrow/joy in your own life?

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