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“Joseph accepts God’s dream for his life”

In his 29 January general audience, Pope Francis continued the catechetical cycle on Jesus Christ, our hope, for the Jubilee of 2025, speaking about the annunciation to St. Joseph.

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today we will continue to contemplate Jesus our hope in the mystery of His origins, as narrated by the infancy Gospels.

Whereas Luke lets us do so from the perspective of the mother, the Virgin Mary, instead Matthew takes the perspective of Joseph, the man who assumes the legal paternity of Jesus, grafting him onto the trunk of Jesse and linking him to the promise made to David.

Indeed, Jesus is *the hope of Israel which is fulfilled*: He is the descendent promised to David (cf. 2 *Sam* 7:12; 1*Cr* 17:11), who makes his home “blessed for ever” (2 *Sam* 7:29); He is the shoot that buds from the trunk of Jesse (cf. *Is* 11:1), the “righteous Branch, [who] shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land” (cf. *Jer* 23:5; 33:15).

Joseph enters the scene in the Gospel of Matthew as Mary's betrothed. For the Hebrews, betrothal was a full legal bond, which prepared for what would happen around a year later, the celebration of marriage. It was then that the woman passed from the father's custody to that of her husband, moving into his home and making herself willing to the gift of motherhood.

It is precisely during this time that Joseph discovers Mary's pregnancy, and his love is harshly put to the test. Faced with a similar situation, which would have led to the termination of the betrothal, the Law suggested two possible solutions: either a legal act of a public nature, such as the convocation of the woman in court, or a private action such as giving the woman a letter of repudiation.

Matthew defines Joseph as a "righteous" man (*zaddiq*), a man who

lives according to the Law of the Lord, and who draws inspiration from this in every occasion of his life. Thus, following the Word of God, Joseph acts thoughtfully: he does not let himself be overcome by instinctive feelings and fear of accepting Mary with him, but prefers to be guided by divine wisdom. He chooses to part with Mary quietly, privately (cf. *Mt* 1:19). And this is Joseph's wisdom, which enables him not to make mistakes and to make himself open and docile to the voice of the Lord.

In this way, Joseph of Nazareth brings to mind another Joseph, son of Jacob, dubbed the "lord of dreams" (cf *Gen* 37:19), greatly beloved by his father and much loathed by his brothers, whom the Lord raised up by having him sit in the Pharaoh's court.

Now, what does Joseph of Nazareth dream of? He dreams of the miracle that God fulfils in Mary's life, and also the miracle that he works in his own life: to take on a fatherhood capable of guarding, protecting and passing on a material and spiritual inheritance. The womb of his bride is pregnant with God's promise, a promise that bears a name in which the certainty of salvation is given to all (cf. *Acts* 4:12).

As he sleeps, Joseph hears these words: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus because he will save his people from their sins" (*Mt* 1:20-21). Faced with this revelation, Joseph does not ask for further proof; he trusts. Joseph trusts in God, he accepts God's dream for his life and that of his betrothed.

He thus enters into the grace of one who knows how to live the divine promise with faith, hope and love.

Joseph, in all of this, does not utter a word, but he believes, hopes and loves. He does not express himself with “idle words,” but with concrete deeds. He belongs to the lineage of those who, according to the apostle James, “put the Word into practice” (cf. *James* 1:22), translating it into deeds, flesh, life. Joseph trusts in God and obeys: “His inner watchfulness for God ... leads quite spontaneously to obedience” (Benedict XVI, *The Infancy Narratives*, Milan-Vatican City 2012, 57).

Sisters, brothers, let us, too, ask the Lord for the grace to listen more than we speak, the grace to dream God’s dreams and to welcome responsibly the Christ who, from the moment of our baptism, lives and grows in our life. Thank you!

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