

Ancient Words--Three Josephs for Jesus

There are three “Josephs” in the Bible who directly connect with the life of Jesus, the Christ, and each Joseph does his part to prepare the way for His coming. Joseph #1, the son of Jacob, is found in the book of Genesis and his life’s story covers the last 20 chapters, close to half of the book. Father Jacob blesses this son in Gen 49.24 with words that can only project out to the coming Savior—“Mighty One of Jacob”, “The Shepherd”, and “The Rock of Israel”. Joseph lives a profound example for the ages, one that typifies the life of Jesus, who will come in about 1,500 years. Joseph endures unjust suffering and anguish from belligerent brothers who are jealous of their Father’s love for this 11th son and his amazing response is unwavering, unconditional love. His brothers seek to kill young Joseph but settle for selling him to Egyptian slave traders. They concoct a story for their parents telling them Joseph was killed by wild animals and offer his blood-stained robe of many colors as proof. Over 15 years later, Joseph harbors no ill towards his brothers and names his two sons with meanings that define his uncompromising grace and forgiveness: Manasseh—“It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.” Ephraim---“It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.” Joseph #1 forgives and loves! After the death of their father, Joseph comforts his brothers, who once hated him, and says “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done the saving of many lives.” Gen 50.19 Jesus has come from the cradle to cross and Satan intended to do harm but God intended it for good for the saving of many lives. Perhaps the oracle of Balaam projects both ways; back to the life of Joseph #1 and forward to the birth of Jesus: “I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near. A Star will come out of Jacob; a Sceptor will rise out of Israel” (Numbers 24.17).

The story of Joseph #2 is found in the first 2 chapters of Matthew and Luke. This Joseph is the son of Jacob, just like Joseph #1, and in similar fashion, Joseph #2 is a “righteousness man”(Matt 1.19). He could have used a legal approach when he learned his espoused wife to be was with child but he did not. Instead, he chose not to disgrace Mary, showing a compassionate heart for what had to be an unexplainable event to his friends and family. The Angel, Gabriel, visits Joseph in his dream and twice communicates what he should do. It should be noted that Gabriel has spoken only to two men in the Ancient Words—Daniel and Joseph. Joseph is a favored man just like Daniel! Joseph takes Mary for his wife, yet abstains from any union with her until after the child is born, and then travels to Egypt and remains in a transient status with his young family of three until instructed again to leave for their home in Nazareth after the death of Herod. This Joseph makes choices which fulfill the Ancient Words: “Out of Egypt I have called my son” Matt 2.15 and Hosea 11.1. Joseph and Mary would also bear other sons and daughters once settled back in Nazareth. Two of these sons, James and Judas, would later give us the books of James and Jude in the New Testament. Joseph #2 was a believer, a man of faith, who trusted God and believed that which could not be proved, and because of his actions of faith, we have the beautiful Christmas story:

“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”) Matt 1.23 and Is 7.14.

The account of Joseph #3 is found in all four Gospels. From the account of the death of Jesus, we learn that Joseph #3 was from Arimathea. He was a good and upright man, a rich man, a prominent member of the Sanhedrin or Council, a secret disciple of Jesus, waiting for the Kingdom of God, who refused to give consent to the decision and action to crucify Jesus. He stood against the status quo and boldly went before Pilate and pleaded for the body of Jesus. Joseph (and Nicodemus) carefully take Jesus down from the cross, prepare his body, and lay Jesus in the tomb hewn by Joseph #3. In the face of known opposition, he acts with courage and bravery and tender compassion. The Apostles have fled, but two from the Council of evil, respond not again as secret disciples but bold disciples ready to risk their own lives as well, and now we have the powerful Resurrection story. Arimathea is a Greek word for Rama and specifically Rama-Benjamin. Joseph was from Rama and Rama is spoken of in Matthew in the fulfillment of prophecy concerning the killing of the innocent boys, two years old and under by Herod as he tried to kill the baby Jesus. Bethlehem is in Rama-Benjamin and so God completes Jesus' time on earth by calling Joseph #3, a possible surviving son of Herod's order, to physically lay our Lord to rest and tenderly administer the myrrh once brought to the manger on Christmas day by Kings from distant shores. All 3 Josephs prepare for Jesus in some way: Joseph #1 lives a life of forgiveness showing us the way we should live, Joseph #2 lives a life of trust and belief and truth so strongly that he defies the logic of man, and Joseph #3 secretly follows Christ but steps up bravely to offer his tomb for the crucified One so that three days later, death would be swallowed up in victory. All three Josephs defied rejection to prepare for Jesus. Eternal life is now secured for all who will come to Him. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through me.”

Sj/2014