

Interview with Joseph – by Justin

An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt. (Mat. 2:13-14)

A couple of years ago a brilliant scientist built a machine that opened up a portal in time just long enough for a handful of ancient people to come live in the United States. Some important figures came through the portal: Roman kings, Greek poets, and Viking explorers to name a few. Joseph, the stepfather of Jesus, stumbled his way through the portal right before it closed up for good. In December of 2019, a journalist caught up with Joseph and asked him his feelings about Christmas in America. The following interview first appeared in the New York Times and has been re-printed for your reading pleasure.

Interviewer: "Joseph, thank you so much for allowing me to interview you! I know it's the Christmas season – the busiest time of the year - even for an ancient carpenter like yourself! Since you were there for that first Christmas I hope you don't mind me asking you how you feel about Christmas in America? Aren't you proud of how far Christmas celebrations have come in the last two-thousand years?"

Joseph paused and averted his eyes off into the distance as though to plunge himself into deep thought. He was carefully measuring his words, thinking of the right way to respond. "Honestly, I don't recognize this thing that you Americans call Christmas." The interviewer was puzzled, slightly dropping his jaw. "What do you mean!? I thought you would love Christmas in America?" "Well," Joseph began to elaborate, "It looks like you Americans have the wrong expectations, as though you don't really understand what the first Christmas was like. You seem to think everything is supposed to be perfect, and that everyone is required to be happy. Between your gift-giving, your Christmas trees, and your really big meals, Christmas for you has no struggles and no pain. But I was there at the first one. I know it wasn't really like this." The interviewer's facial expression turned from outrage to interest. "Joseph, do you mind telling us what the first Christmas was like for you?"

"Christmas was hard on me because I couldn't go home. An angel appeared and told me to take the baby Jesus and his mother and flee to Egypt. King Herod was coming to kill the baby and we had to get out of there. We left at night, which was much more dangerous back then than it is now. Dark roads were rallying points for robbers and thieves. The road to Egypt was hard and winding. The nights were cold and the days were long. I was going somewhere I didn't want to be – not just for that Christmas – but for several after it. I had to take a woman and her child with me into a country I didn't know, to live with strangers who spoke a language I didn't know. As a carpenter I was no rich man, but that Christmas I truly learned what it meant to have nothing. The child cried the whole way there because the journey was hard. But that was nothing compared to what happened to the children back in Bethlehem. Herod, you see, came and killed all the babies without mercy. I wasn't even allowed to go home for their funerals. Do you have any idea what it's like to not be able to go to your loved ones' funerals?"

Joseph paused just long enough to begin stroking his beard nervously, reliving it all in his mind. "And then there was that episode with my wife. Early in our relationship she suddenly came up pregnant. I was going to kick her out, the same as anyone would. Of course I kept her once the angel told me she was innocent, but people didn't believe us. They were sure Mary committed adultery and they judged our marriage. Society rejected us. So you want to know what Christmas was really like? I wasn't allowed to go home. I wasn't allowed to go to funerals. I was stuck somewhere I didn't want to be with people I didn't want to be around. I was responsible for a child that was not mine, and I wasn't even in a situation where I could take good care of him. And for a while I even wondered if my wife had cheated on me. To top it all off we were rejected by our community. For me, the first Christmas was like being locked in a jail cell with no way out."

The interviewer paused long enough for Joseph to recover. Finally, he mustered the courage to ask his last question, "Is there anything you would like to share with those who might be experiencing a dark and lonely Christmas this year?" For the first time in the interview Joseph's face lit up. He smiled and his eyes crinkled. Those old and experienced eyes seemed to flicker with all the warmth of the holiday season. "Yes... there was this one thing. Just before leaving for Egypt, a star appeared and guided a group of wise men right to us. Later when I was on the road, scared and running for my life, this star taught me to keep looking up. When I was stuck in Egypt with strangers and no way out - I would look up. When I felt forgotten and thought I was at the end - I would look up. I didn't know it then, but my lonely Christmas was only the beginning of what God was doing in my life. You see, I might have led Jesus into Egypt, but he led me into a life of hope, redemption, and abundant joy. Jesus changed the world and the pain of the first Christmas began to fade. So, what advice can I offer? This Christmas when you feel alone, and when you think you have been completely forgotten, *you just keep looking up and Jesus won't let you down.*" --- Merry Christmas from Mike, Justin, and all the rest!