



FPC HOUSTON

Combined Christmas
SUNDAY SCHOOL

December 17, 2023



Presenters (in order)

Jeanmarie Tade, Pastoral Resident, Equipping & Sending

Emmanuel Paulpeter, Pastor of Outreach

Catie Smith, Director of Marriage & Parenting Ministries

Introduction

- Welcome - Make yourself comfortable!
- Emmanuel and Jeanmarie will tell you about two individuals whose impact is sometimes overlooked or minimized in Jesus' birth narrative
- Catie will help you soak in the Scripture passage for next Sunday through a prayer practice, Imaginative Prayer, that you can take “to-go”
- Opening Prayer

Opening Prayer

God of Imagination, who would have thought of something like the incarnation? God became man, “pitched His tent” among us, and lived with us so we could know what it means to be truly human. Holy Spirit, open our ears and minds today as we reflect on two people who played important parts in the Christmas story, but often are overshadowed by others in the story. Also, open our imaginations as we reflect together and creatively place ourselves at the birth of Jesus. In Him, Amen

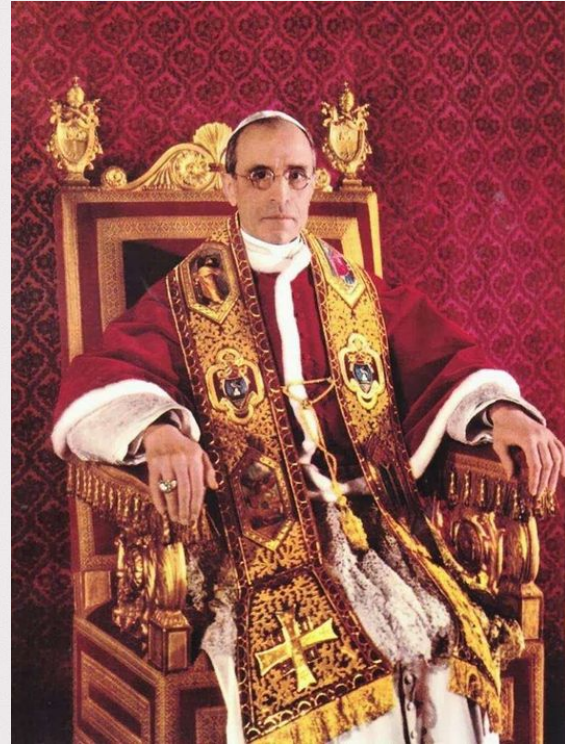
5 Virtues of Joseph



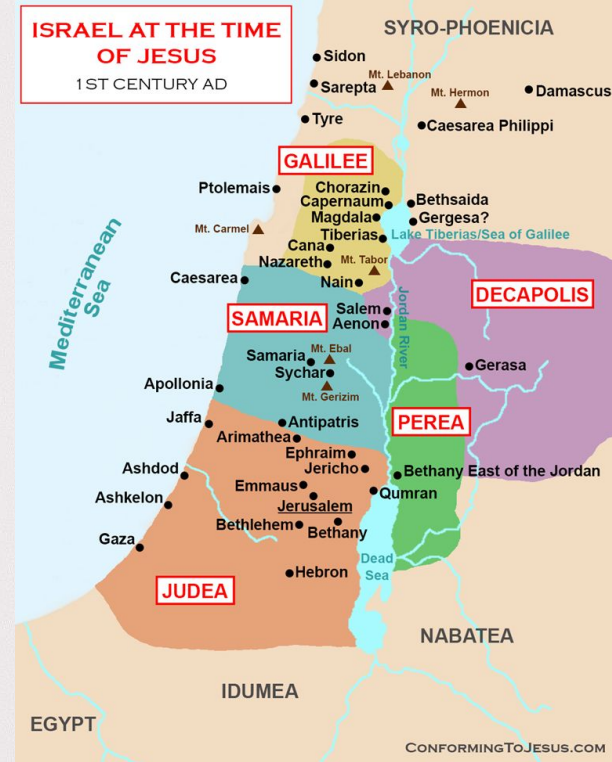
Joseph was Industrious



Pope Pius XII - St. Joseph's Feast as Worker's Day, 1955



Joseph the Faithful Descendent of David!





Joseph was Compassionate and Thoughtful

Matthew 1:19

Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.



Joseph was obedient, even when it was difficult

Matthew 1

²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, **do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.** ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).



“A man of creative courage” - Pope Francis



Virtues of Joseph

- Industrious
- Faith-filled
- Compassionate and thoughtful
- Obedient even when it was difficult
- Courageous

Another Often Overlooked Person in the Birth Narrative of Jesus

- 2 Timothy 3:16 “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness . . .”
- We need too pay attention to all of it
- Birth narrative extends to - Dedication (40 days after birth); Magi (possibly 2 years after)

Setting: Mary, Joseph, Baby Jesus at the Temple. *Why were they there?*

- They were observant Jews
- Leviticus 12:2-8 - Purification ritual required by the law 40 days after a son's birth
- Law required sacrifice of lamb or two pigeons or two doves
- The temple would have been a noisy, busy place

Anna the Prophet Luke 2:36-38 NIV

What can you learn about a Biblical character in three verses?

36 There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, **37** and then was a widow until she was eighty-four.^[a] She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. **38** Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

- a. Luke 2:37 *Or then had been a widow for eighty-four years.*

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a. Luke 2:37 *Or then had been a widow for eighty-four years.*

**Context of these 3 verses: What comes
before them? Luke 2:25-35**

Notice:

- Role of the parents
- Influence of the Holy Spirit
- Simeon's role
- Anna's role

What is the Context of these 3 verse? What comes before them? Simeon v. 25-35

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the **Holy Spirit** was on him. **26** It had been revealed to him by the **Holy Spirit** that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. **27** Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the **parents** brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, **28** Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

Simeon's Song Luke 2:29-32 The Good News

29 "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

30 For my eyes have seen your salvation,

31 which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel."

Simeon's Song Luke 2:29-31 The "Bad" News

33 The child's **father and mother** marveled at what was said about him. **34** Then Simeon blessed them and said to **Mary, his mother**: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, **35** so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

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Luke 2:37 *Or then had been a widow for eighty-four years.*

Artistic Depictions: Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, Fra Angelico (1440)



Simeon & Anna; Rembrandt (1627)
Anna “at that very moment” v. 38



**The Prophetess Anna /Rembrandt's Mother/Old
Woman Reading (1631) -a woman who knew
scripture**



Anna's Resume - Luke 2:36-37

- **Prophet** - Only named woman in NT; several in OT; Truth-teller; sometimes about future, ex.-Jesus
- Anna recognized Jesus would redeem & told people
- **Daughter of Penuel** -Father mentioned, not husband
- **Tribe of Asher** -(8th son of Jacob's 12) -One of 4 NT characters with tribal listing: Jesus; Saul/Paul of Benjamin; Barnabas, a Levite; Anna of Asher
- **Very Old** - *See* next slide re: her age
- **Had been Married** - Probably in her early teens
- **Was a Widow** - But not remarried; most would have

Calculating Anna's Age: Between 84 and 105+

V. 36-37

She was **very old**; she had lived with her husband **seven years** after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was **eighty four**.

V. 37 can be **translated** legitimately as “**then had been a widow for eighty-four years.**”

The average age to get married for a woman then was **12 - 15** years old

14 (age at marriage) + **7** (number of years married) + **84** (number of years as a widow) = **105 years old** (possibly older if she had married later than age 14)

Notice: the Christmas story includes people of all ages and stages! Baby Jesus to Anna, the prophet. All are included.

Anna's "Eccentric" Lifestyle of Devotion

- **Never left the Temple** - Rooms there for the devoted
- **Worshipped Night and Day** - "Worship workaholic;" special calling, but in our own way we should
- **Fasted and Prayed** - Her spiritual habits; fasting then meant no food (today - social media, mirror)
- ***What we don't know*** (Luke's textual silence): her family, her finances; her appearance (clues: fit -walking, good eyesight & hearing; slender -fasting)
- **Was she any more eccentric than John the Baptist?**

Use of Our Imagination

- *Mary, Simeon, or Anna: Who First Recognized Jesus as Messiah?* B Witherington; Second Witness Dt 19:15
- There are many things we know about Anna; all narrative, but she spoke to others about Jesus
- Many things we don't know about her
- We can *imagine* some things - customs, history
- We rely primarily on Scripture to guide us
- Imagination is helpful putting us into scenes and making them come alive
- This can become a useful prayer practice to enliven our reading of Scripture

Two Goals for the Remainder of our Time

- Allow space for you to meet with Jesus
- Provide a tangible prayer practice that can be duplicated

Meeting God through Imagination



Disenchantment to Reenchantment

“Christianity is not an intellectual system, a collection of dogmas, or a moralism. Christianity is instead an encounter, a love story; it is an event.”

- Pope Benedict XVI



Reenchantment through Imagination

- “What if education...is not primarily about ideas and information, but about the formation of hearts and desires? The education of desire...requires the pedagogical formation of our imagination.”
-James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*
- “When our imaginations provide us with images ***that correspond to God’s truth***, they have the potential to transform us.” - Josh Porter, Bridgetown church

Reenchantment through Imagination

- Romans 12:2:

Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is— his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Imaginative Prayer

We think by imaginatively recreating reality in our mind. The imagination is the mind's ability to evoke images of things that aren't physically present.

How can we access powerful, formative representations of a relationship for which there are no physical images? How can we be formed in a relationship that strictly does not feature physical touch or physical voice?



We use our imagination more than we realize



Imaginative Prayer

- A method of prayer in which you imagine yourself present in a Gospel scene, stepping into the story and encountering Jesus there.
- St. Ignatius believed that God can speak to us just as clearly in our imaginations as in our thoughts.

Imaginative Prayer Practice

Group Discussion

- Share about your experience “living” in the story.
- What did you see, smell, hear, taste, feel?
- Were you surprised by what you witnessed?
- Who did you become in the story?

- If comfortable, share your experience seeing Jesus.
- Did you sense the Lord speaking to you- did He give you a word or phrase or picture that spoke to something going on in your life?

- Have you ever engaged with this practice of Imaginative prayer before, or was this your first time?
- Was it easier or more difficult than you expected?
- Can you see yourself incorporating Imaginative Prayer into your life going forward? Why or why not?

Conclusion

- Thank you for coming today from Emmanuel, Jeanmarie, & Catie!
- Joseph
- Anna
- Imaginative Prayer
- Closing Prayer



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HAVE A
Merry Christmas!

