My Beloved Ones,

As we continue to enjoy this bright and joyous Nativity season, this Sunday, the Church honors several important individuals in the life of Christ, among who are King David (also celebrated on December 17th) and James the Just, the Brother of the Lord (also celebrated on October 23rd). However, today I wish to pay special attention to another individual celebrated on this, the Eighth of the Twelve Days, and that is St. Joseph, the Betrothed of the Virgin Mary.

Unlike St. James, we do not know much about the life of Joseph. We know that he was from Bethlehem (of the house of David), that he was betrothed to protect the much younger Mary, and that his profession was as a carpenter. Though he was still living when Jesus was found teaching in the Temple at age 12, we do not know when he fell asleep in the Lord, only that it was some time before Christ began His earthly ministry.

In many Western Christian traditions, it has become popular to hear of Joseph, Mary and the Christ Child referred to as, the “Holy Family”. However, according to the Orthodox Church, this perspective is not Traditional. We do not regard Joseph as the Father of the Lord—in either a biological sense, or as a “stepfather”. However, this is not in any way meant to lower Joseph. In some way, the little we learn about Joseph perhaps betters helps us as Christians imagine ourselves in his place.

Though we will never actually be involved in a story like that of the Incarnation, Joseph’s emotions are familiar to all people. In icons of the Nativity, Joseph is not shown in the cave with Mary and her Child, but by himself, always deep in thought—sometimes tempted by the Devil (shown as an elderly shepherd) to doubt the miracle which has taken place. Though Mosaic Law allowed for grave punishments for a child born out of wedlock, we know from the Gospels that Joseph was “…a just man…” (*Matthew 1:19*). When the angel informs him of Mary’s role in God’s plan, he does his best, and protects her on the journey to Bethlehem, until that holy night when Christ was born in a cave. Even under the threat of King Herod, Joseph rises to the angel’s call and takes Mary and Christ into Egypt.

In each of the few references to Joseph in the Nativity story, we have a model for how a human being can overcome doubt and confusion, by placing all their trust and faith in the Lord. Though Joseph is not Christ’s father, we have in him, our own great example for how a human being can overcome his or her weaknesses, and accomplish great things, through following God’s will.

Therefore, as we look forward to the remainder of this festive time, and to the feast of Theophany, may we ask that St. Joseph intercede for us, to help us receive the same kind of belief, courage, and strength.

+ALEXIOS
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