



The Parish Churches of S Philip and S Augustine and S Matthew with S Mary the Virgin Newcastle

Homily for the Feast of Saint Joseph (19th March) 2026

In the unregenerate days of yore, it was not uncommon to hear someone observe that behind every successful man there was a good woman. It was not always the case, but probably sufficiently so to merit the generalisation.

Today, we reflect on something of an antithesis to that proposition: Saint Joseph - the man behind a woman of unique significance and importance - Mary his wife. We might wonder what life would have been like for her and little Jesus had Joseph not stepped up at his *Fiat mihi* moment when he abandoned his plans to divorce Mary and, instead, stand by her.

It is possible that Anne and Joachim would have taken care of their daughter; but we only have to think of the fate of unmarried mothers in former generations to realise that Mary and Jesus would have found themselves in an highly precarious situation without Joseph by their side.

Of course, the divine Purpose could have driven its way through any level of human adversity to deliver Jesus to His adult life and the incarnate work of His Son. However, the greater the divine intervention, the lesser the humanity, which from the Letter to the Hebrews to Saint Anselm and beyond, we have been taught is an essential element to the character and redeeming work of Christ.

Yet, in fact, over the centuries, Mariological reflexion has seen her achieve something almost of an apotheosis, which leaves little room for Saint Joseph as minds are concentrated on the divine nature of his stepson. Indeed, his presence in the narrative causes inconveniences for the notion of Mary *semper virgo*.

Never-the-less, whatever the tricks our corporate ecclesiastical memory may play, he was there; and he will have been a significant influence on Jesus as He grew up. We can only speculate as to what that influence might have been. We do not know at all the extent to which he took Jesus to himself as his own; nor do we know whether or not he was a strict father. It is generally assumed that Jesus joined his carpentry business prior to his Baptism at the hands of Saint John.

Indeed, Joseph's work will have created a significant aspect of the context of young Jesus' life in terms of the level of comfort and prosperity He experienced. Some commentators are sceptical of the traditional assumption that Joseph's family life was one of subsistence, suggesting, instead, that he might have been one of the more affluent members of an albeit basic community.

It is unlikely that we shall ever know much of Saint Joseph for sure. There is a paucity of material about him in the New Testament: even at that early stage, the Church was beginning to write him out of the story. Perhaps he was absent from the events of Jesus' public incarnate Ministry: maybe he had died or perhaps he distanced himself from his Stepson's activities.

All the same, as I say, he was there - and he was there for Mary and Jesus when they needed him most; and for that reason, if for no other, we gather to honour the memory of this enigmatic figure in our history.