



## Joseph

**T**he Gospels tell us that Joseph was Mary's husband and Jesus' earthly father. He was a carpenter who lived in Nazareth. He took Mary to Bethlehem, where Jesus was born. Then, when the family was in danger, Joseph followed God's instructions and took them to live in Egypt for a few years. We think Joseph died before Jesus began traveling and teaching. In pictures of Joseph, he sometimes holds carpenter tools.

## A Closer Look . . .



**T**he Gospel of Matthew tells us that Joseph was already betrothed to Mary when he found out she was having a baby. After an angel came to him in a dream and told him that the child was conceived by the Holy Spirit, Joseph took Mary as his wife and cared for her and the child Jesus. We don't know much more about Joseph than that. Because he's not mentioned later, we think he died before Jesus began his public ministry.

We don't know how old Joseph was when Jesus was born. Different stories and traditions have influenced the way artists depict him. Some traditions say that Joseph was a widower, and so he is portrayed as old, even elderly. In other settings, Joseph is closer to Mary's age, but still a little older, an adult who is strong and capable of caring for his family.

The Gospels refer to Jesus as "the carpenter's son," so Joseph is portrayed holding the tools of the carpenter's trade, often the L-shaped measuring tool called a carpenter's square. In some pictures, Joseph holds a staff flowering with lilies, which is a sign that God has chosen him. In the Book of Numbers, God gave this same sign when he chose Aaron to help Moses: he made a staff sprout flower blossoms. The lilies from Joseph's staff also symbolize that Joseph and Mary were pure in their dedication to God's will.