

## The Faces of Advent

### Obedience in Uncertainty – St. Joseph

When we think of examples of obedience in Scripture, our minds often turn to Abraham or St. Mary the *Theotokos*, who each submitted entirely to the will of the Lord. Yet, St. Joseph is frequently an overlooked and profound example of obedience. Through St. Joseph, we encounter a quieter, but no less profound, example of obedience—one that is immediate, rooted in humility, and unwavering.

When the angel of the Lord appeared to St. Joseph in a dream and instructed him to take St. Mary and the Child and flee to Egypt ([Matthew 2:13](#)), St. Joseph took action without any hesitation or questioning: “he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt” ([Matthew 2:14](#)). St. John Chrysostom marvels at the swiftness of St. Joseph’s response, “See from this also their faith, how they were not offended, but are docile, and considerate; neither are they troubled, nor reason with themselves...” In St. Joseph’s immediate action, we find the essence of obedience—not a passive acceptance, but an intentional, active trust. But how was St. Joseph so obedient in the face of tribulation? We must acknowledge that St. Joseph’s obedience was immediate because his heart was already inclined to God’s voice. As with Abraham, who “went out, not knowing where he was going” ([Hebrews 11:8](#)), Joseph trusted fully that God’s command was enough, even when the road ahead was uncertain or dangerous.

Each time the Lord spoke to St. Joseph—whether to take Mary as his wife ([Matthew 1:20](#)), to flee to Egypt ([Matthew 2:13](#)), or to return to Israel after Herod’s death ([Matthew 2:19-20](#))—he did so with precision. He did not try to improvise or modify God’s command. Instead, his actions were exact and intentional, as we read, “he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him” ([Matthew 1:24](#)). Unlike many in both the Old and New Testaments, St. Joseph did not demand signs or proofs to obey, but his strength lay in his resolve to act upon God’s word. He followed the Lord’s instruction promptly and without question.

St. Joseph’s humility is perhaps the most remarkable aspect of his obedience. Upon learning of St. Mary’s pregnancy, Joseph’s righteousness placed him before a difficult decision—one that could have preserved his reputation while endangering hers. If he had not married her, St. Mary would have been regarded as a promiscuous woman who became pregnant out of wedlock. Yet he “was unwilling to put her to shame” ([Matthew 1:19](#)). When the angel revealed that the Holy Spirit conceived the Child, Joseph did not protest or cling to pride. He submitted to a divine plan that placed him in a position of potential ridicule and misunderstanding. In Homily 20, St. Basil explains how the foundation of all virtue is humility. Those who are humble will easily become obedient, gentle, and peaceful. It is through St. Joseph’s humility that his virtue of obedience was perfected.

St. Joseph’s story reflects the pattern of obedience seen through many servants of the Lord:

- Noah built an ark before seeing the flood ([Genesis 6:14](#)).
- Abraham left his homeland without knowing the destination ([Genesis 12:1-4](#))

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- St. Mary proclaimed, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” ([Luke 1:38](#)).

Like them, St. Joseph teaches us that obedience is not merely blind submission; it is a confident surrender of will rooted in trust in the Lord. As Father Tadros Malaty beautifully writes, “with hardships, we are perfected before God, and with joy, we are filled with hope in God’s protection and constant care.” When we surrender our will to the Lord, we will be protected by Him and filled with peace, knowing that the Lord’s plan for our lives is coming to fruition.

St. Joseph’s obedience teaches us that faith is not just a matter of belief, but also a response to God. It is taking immediate action when we hear God’s voice, even when the road ahead is uncertain or difficult. May we strive to imitate St. Joseph’s obedience, trusting that our silent submission to God’s will is the surest path to salvation.

Lord, grant me the obedience of Joseph, to hear Your voice without hesitation, to act without delay, and to trust without fear. Amen.

#### **Sources:**

- Bible, ESV
- Catena Bible
- Commentaries on The Gospel According to St. Matthew, Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty
- Homily 20, St. Basil the Great