

# Joseph, Carpenter Of Nazareth, Passes Tests And Takes Bride

and the old priest blessed the Lord God of Abraham, and this union of his children, Mary with Joachim and Joseph bar Jacob.

**Editor's Note:** The Gospels are wanting in their narrative of the love story of Mary and Joseph which reached its climax on that first Christmas nearly 2,000 years ago. Here, drawn from respected but non-canonical sources, is an account of their wedding.

It was late afternoon, about the tenth hour, and he knew full well he should be preparing for the betrothal rites at the rich house of Anna and Joachim, but he needed this final exertion to quiet his agitation.

He shook his head in chagrin. Yaal, foolishness! At his mature age, he should not have been so unsettled by the matter. Yet each time his thoughts turned to the maid, his strength fled from him.

Likewise, the inquiries had tried him sorely. He had submitted humbly to them. He was not a vain man. But their precautions left him worn and ill at ease. It was as if he were a stranger in their midst.

Had he not dwelt and toiled among them these many years? Had he not walked in integrity? He had brought forth young sons, and since he was widowed two years past, he had lived circumspectly and in accord with the law.

Yet it was meet that the girl's mother, Anna, and her kinsmen, having the high rank in the priesthood, should take great care in choosing a fit mate for an only daughter, a cherished yachid.

Joseph brushed the sawdust and strode into the house. The little ones were at the synagogue, being instructed by the chazzan, and thereafter would repair to the reception of espousal.

He poured water into a basin



"THOU ART GOODLY in all ways, Mary, as all know."

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By **GEORGE CORNELL**  
AP Religion Writer

He had borne enough. The rabbi had examined him. The elders had taken counsel. He had been interrogated by the whole congregation of Nazareth. Even priests of the Holy City had come to inquire into his reputation.

Joseph's patience waned. Verily, they had tested him without quarter. He took a last driving swing with his mallet, the chisel biting deep into the seasoned carob timber. The questioning near made him doubt himself.

Yet, manifestly, all of it had been necessary if he was to receive the most excellent and gentle maiden, Mary with Joachim.

With his foot, he shoved the chips and splinters into a heap in the corner, leaving the unfinished wagon axle on his workbench. Sweat drenched his beard. The biceps of his arms stood out in great knots as he hung his implements.

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on the clay floor, stripped off his loin cloth and bathed. Then, freshening the water, he dipped his head, scrubbing and spluttering. He towed himself briskly and rubbed fragrant oil into his hair and beard.

Digging into his garment box, he shook out his white linen mantle and wrapped it on, buckling a leather girdle at his waist. He put on his Sabbath sandals, then fetched the gifts for Mary and her family from the shelf.

He tucked them into a pouch at his waist and set out.

It would have been easier if this had been a simple match-making, negotiated by the shadchanin, who served regularly as go-between in arranging the terms between parents of young couples.

In Mary's case, however, great concern and attention had been lavished on finding her a rightful husband. Anna had called to her aid a learned and distinguished kinsman, the chief priest Zechariah, who also had been tutor to Mary.

A multitude of eager suitors had been considered, both widowers and young swains, wealthy and poor. Zechariah, after much prayer and consultation, had named Joseph, the plain, hard-working joiner of Nazareth.

It had amazed him, and Joseph's heart had leaped. But so prolonged and scrupulous had the testimonies and proving become that at one time he had declaimed his own fitness.

"I am an older man and have children," he had accused himself, "but she is young."

Zechariah had shrugged off the outburst, saying the determination was under divine guidance.

"Unto thee, Joseph, hath it fallen," he remonstrated.

Joseph's qualms arose not from any want of affection for Mary, but only from his own lowliness. He had scant possessions and only a meager abode compared to the stately house of Joachim. And the maid herself was the glory of the village.

He walked slowly up the hill, taking a path through the vineyard. She was, indeed, well-endowed, in body and comport, and his devotion burned in him. Of all her days here and in her training at the Temple, it was said:

"None ever saw her angry or heard her reviling. For her speech was full of grace... She was ever diligent in prayer and in searching the law, and was anxious not to sin by any word against her companions."

"Moreover, she feared to make any mistake in laughter or by the sound of her lovely voice, lest any insult or pride should show itself against her equals. She blessed the Lord without intermission."

Joseph approached the house. A new moon shone over the roof. The light of the moon, at mid-month, was the favored time for betrothals. From inside came merry sounds of voices.

His blood pounded as he touched the mezuzah at the doorpost, kissing his fingers, and knocked. A maid-servant brought a waterbasin for his hands and feet.

Leaving his sandals at the door, he walked barefoot across the room. It swarmed with neighbors and children, eating and conversing animatedly.

"Blessed by your coming, Joseph bar Jacob."

The salutations surged around him. "God cheer your heart, Joseph."

"May your tribe increase." "Does it go well with thee, Joseph bar Jacob?"

"It goes well." Anna kissed his cheek and hand, and led him toward his place. When he saw the bride, his knees turned to water, and the distance across the floor stretched out formidably.

He salaamed, spreading his arms, his cheeks red as fire, and mumbled his awkward praises.

"Thou art goodly in all ways, Mary, as all know."

His eyes downcast and fumbling with his purse-strings, he drew out his small gifts and presented them unceremoniously, a silken sash with the colors of her tribe

to Anna, a fringed prayer shawl to the old priest, Zechariah, a cruet of spices to his wife, Elizabeth, a bronze pendant to Mary.

Amid their utterances of gratitude and the murmuring of the throng, he took his seat beside the bride, with her family on either side. The servants passed more sweetmeats to the young, and the guests moved by to make flowery speeches of commendation.

At length came the time for all but the chosen witnesses and family to depart. Those remaining repaired to a low table in an adjoining chamber where the record chest, containing the ancestral register, sacred scrolls, histories and other family treasures, was opened.

Two suspended lamps glowed above the table. The old priest's beard, glistening with oil, bobbed as he read the lists of births, tracing the Davidic lineage of Mary, and also the ancestry of Joseph, son of Jacob, of the house of David, of Bethlehem.

While names were then inscribed together on the Galilean scroll. Terms of the mohar already had been agreed upon — it was to be the smallest dowry deemed honorable, 100 dinari to be paid to Mary's parents within a year to insure her future against divorce or abandonment.

The priest unrolled the parchment contract on the table, and turned to Mary.

"Wilt thou go with this man?" "I will go."

Joseph and the parents took the quill and put their names to the legal instrument of betrothal, the kethubah. Two witnesses stamped and sealed it. This was the binding covenant of marriage, with the ensuing wedding its public celebration.

Foreasmuch as she was virgin, and not a widow, it would be a full year before the marriage should be fulfilled, even though thenceforth it would not be unlawful for him to know her. She now was under his authority.

"Be thou the mother of thousands of millions," the old priest told Mary. "Let thy seed possess the gate."

The company prostrated themselves, facing toward the Temple.

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