

Readings: *2 Samuel 7:4,5,12 – 14,16; Ps. 88(89):1 – 4,27,29; Romans 4: 13,16 – 18, 22; Either Matthew 1: 16, 18 – 24; Or Luke 2: 41 – 51.*

In the New Testament Joseph figures by name only in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and John – and always as the father of Jesus, which is what people in general believed him to be. But Matthew and Luke make it clear that Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus, because Mary, his wife, *has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit* (Matthew 1:20). It would have been possible to tell the story of the birth of Jesus without mentioning Joseph, but there is an important reason for his inclusion in the infancy narratives of both Matthew and Luke.

Each of them provides a genealogy which traces the ancestry of Joseph back through King David to the patriarch Abraham (Luke takes it further – right back to *Adam, the son of God*). In Matthew's gospel the angel of God addresses Joseph as *son of David*. In Luke's gospel Joseph is described as *of the House of David*, and Gabriel tells Mary that her son will be given *the throne of his father David*. So Joseph's place in the story is to establish the legal descent of Jesus from David, thus making him *the Christ* – the anointed king or Messiah, *the one who is to save his people from their sins* (Matthew 1:21).

The importance of this descent from David also appears in a New Testament book written earlier than Matthew or Luke – Paul's letter to the Romans, which says that God's Son was *born of the seed of David according to the flesh* (1:3). This emphasis on descent from David is part of the New Testament writers' belief that the birth, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus were (as we say in the Creed) *in accordance with the Scriptures*.

Matthew has a particular way of emphasising this: in his narrative of the birth of Jesus he uses the Genesis story of Joseph, the Exodus account of the childhood of Moses, and passages from the book of Isaiah to show that this birth is part of a divine plan stretching back into Israel's history.

The readings for today's Solemnity all contribute to our understanding that the birth of Jesus into a particular family, in a particular place and at a particular point in history, is not a matter of chance but the deliberate choice of God. Among the things for which we give thanks on this festival of Saint Joseph this is one of the most important.