

Visio Divina: St Joseph



Visio Divina (Sacred Viewing)

In many paintings depicting St Joseph he is found in the background, standing in support, often in the shadows of the scene. Not so in this one. The French artist George de la Tour painted Joseph the Carpenter in 1642. This painting is on display in the Louvre in Paris.

The artist is renowned for his use of light and dark. Usually the light is from a single source like the candle in this work. His style draws from some of the great masters like Caravaggio.

Let your eyes drift across the artwork and note the points that are drawing your attention.

The painting depicts the young Jesus holding a candle, assisting Joseph work late into the night.

Notice the gaze of Jesus, looking lovingly and adoringly at this great role model in his life.

Look at Joseph.... listening to the chatter of the young Jesus, listen to Jesus tell the stories of the day spent in the village. Listen, you can hear the conversation.

Look at Joseph, he acknowledges the child with his eyes but does not open his mouth.

He must be pondering so much.

Now look at the candle. Notice it illuminates the face of Jesus making it the main focus of the painting. Is this a precursor to the Transfiguration where "Jesus' face shone like the sun"?

Look at the translucent hand of Jesus. This same hand would one day cure the sick, lift up the downtrodden, break the bread, raise the dead, comfort the troubled, open the eyes of the blind, bless the children, cure those who could not hear and be held against a wooden beam and nailed to it.

Allow your eyes to be drawn to the auger being used by Joseph. Notice it is in the shape of the cross, see it boring a hole in a wooden beam. The cross that Joseph will not stand under with Mary.

What is Joseph telling Jesus about? Is he preparing him for his life, is it about bravery, heartache, disappointment, dedication, love of the father?

Look back at the face of Jesus. He is to be the light of the world!

The lone candle casts light into the darkness. It reveals the warmth and love between father and son.

The candle reveals only that which is necessary for that scene.

Joseph, back bent in demanding work. Arms strong and muscular. Dirt under his nails and grime on his feet. He is a hard worker, providing for his family. Long days and into the night listening to the adventures and learnings of the young Jesus and his day in the village. And his dreams.

Joseph would recall the dreams when God revealed the answers to the most difficult times in his life

..... Don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife

..... Pick up and flee to Egypt for safety

..... Return to Israel

..... Go to Galilee

Decisions that had to be made for his family.... and God revealed the decision after he slept on it!

And so we move to another dream in the dark.... the dream of any mother or father for their child

“What will be the future for this special person?”

And all the while the child fills the night air with hope filled exciting stories of the day

And Joseph looks and ponders the future in total trust that the Father of us all knows our future and watches over us with a loving gaze pondering our future too!