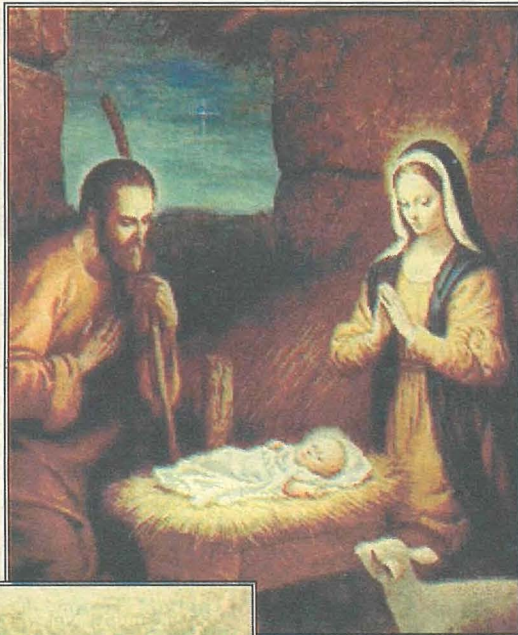


The Feast of Saint Joseph

Everything we know about the husband of Mary and the foster father of Jesus comes from Scripture and that has seemed too little for those who made up legends about him.

We know he was a carpenter, a working man, for the skeptical Nazarenes ask about Jesus, "Is this not the carpenter's son?" (Matthew 13:55). He wasn't rich for when he took Jesus to the Temple to be circumcised and Mary to be purified he offered the sacrifice of two turtledoves or a pair of pigeons, allowed only for those who could not afford a lamb (Luke 2:24).

Despite his humble work and means, Joseph came from a royal lineage. Luke and Matthew disagree some about the details of Joseph's genealogy but they both mark his descent from David, the greatest king of Israel (Matthew 1:1-16 and Luke 3:23-38). Indeed the angel who first tells Joseph about Jesus greets him as "son of David," a royal title used also for Jesus.



his family was in danger, he immediately left everything he owned, all his family and friends, and fled to a strange country with his young wife and the baby. He waited in Egypt without question until the angel told him it was safe to go back (Matthew 2:13-23).

We know Joseph loved Jesus. His one concern was for the safety of this child entrusted to him. Not only did he leave his home to protect Jesus, but upon his return settled in the obscure town of Nazareth out of fear for his life. When Jesus stayed in the Temple we are told Joseph (along with Mary) searched with great anxiety for three days for him (Luke 2:48). We also know that Joseph treated Jesus as his own son for ever and over the people of Nazareth say of Jesus, "Is this not the son of Joseph?" (Luke 4:22)

We know Joseph respected God. He followed God's commands in handling the situation with Mary and going to Jerusalem to have Jesus circumcised and Mary purified after Jesus' birth. We are told that he took his family to Jerusalem every year for Passover, something that could not have been easy for a working man.

Since Joseph does not appear in Jesus' public life, at his death, or resurrection, many historians believe Joseph probably had died before Jesus entered public ministry.

Joseph is the patron of the dying because, assuming he died before Jesus' public life, he died with Jesus and Mary close to him, the way we all would like to leave this earth.

Joseph is also patron of the universal Church, fathers, carpenters, and social justice.

We celebrate two feast days for Joseph: March 19 for Joseph the Husband of Mary and May 1 for Joseph the Worker.

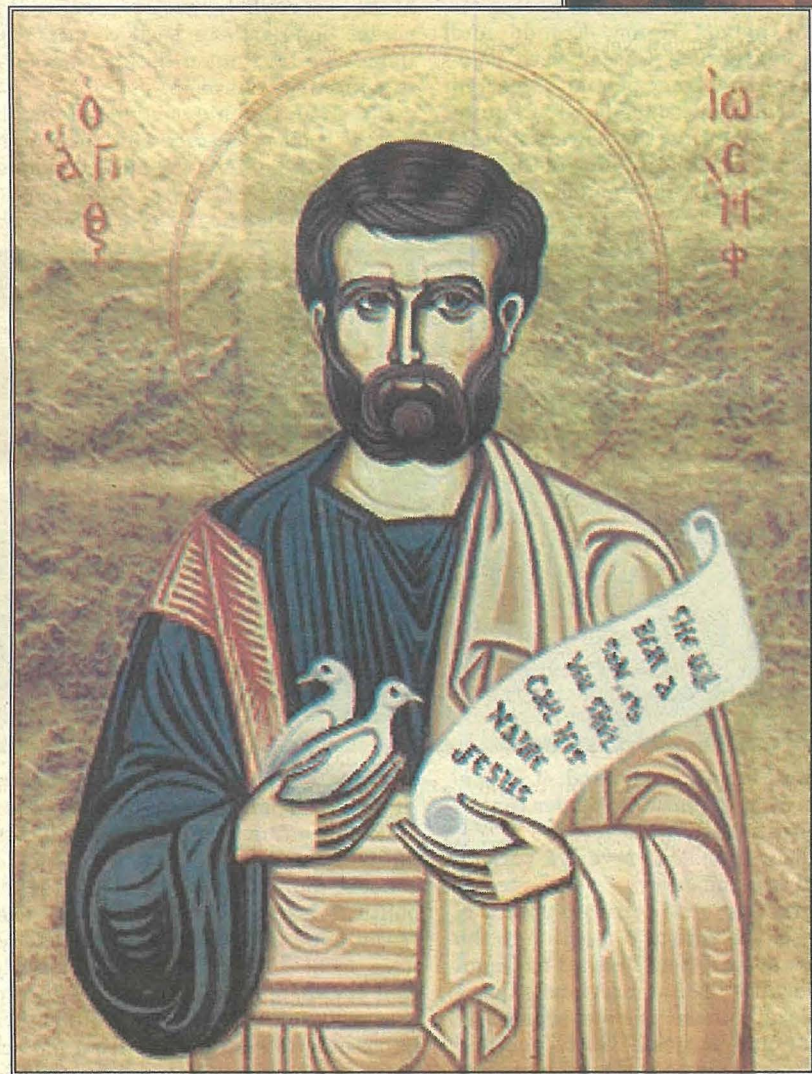
There is much we wish we could know about Joseph - where and when he was born, how he spent his days, when and how he died. But Scripture has left us with the most important knowledge: who he was - "a righteous man" (Matthew 1:18).

In His Footsteps:

Joseph was foster father to Jesus. There are many children separated from families and parents who need foster parents. Please consider becoming a foster parent if you are in a position to do so - there are many children out there who need you.

Prayer:

Saint Joseph, patron of the universal Church, watch over the Church as carefully as you watched over Jesus, help protect it and guide it as you did with your adopted son. Amen



We know Joseph was a compassionate, caring man. When he discovered Mary was pregnant after they had been betrothed, he knew the child was not his but was as yet unaware that she was carrying the Son of God. He planned to divorce Mary according to the law but he was concerned for her suffering and safety. He knew that women accused of adultery could be stoned to death, so he decided to divorce her quietly and not expose her to shame or cruelty (Matthew 1:19-25).

We know Joseph was a man of faith, obedient to whatever God asked of him without knowing the outcome. When the angel came to Joseph in a dream and told him the truth about the child Mary was carrying, Joseph immediately and without question or concern for gossip, took Mary as his wife. When the angel came again to tell him that



The Archconfraternity of St Joseph

GOING BACK hundreds of years, the fraternities always had an important part, not only in Malta's religious history, but also in the island's social and economic life.

The fraternities would do voluntary work for the poor and the families of workers who had no-one else to stand up for their rights.

The primary reason for the setting up of the Rabat Archconfraternity of St Joseph was to do the church's work amongst the poor, workers, the sick and convicts.

The Archconfraternity was erected in 1345, with Malta's first congregation coming into existence in Rabat, during the tenure of Franciscan Archbishop Nicola Bonet.

In the 1600s, the Archconfraternity already had an altar in the old church of the Franciscan Friars of Rabat. This altar later moved to the Oratory, which today remains a devoted sanctuary to St Joseph.

The first friars, the disciples of Saint Bernard of Siena, had greeted the setting up of the

Archconfraternity with great joy, so much so that they gave them the first chapel on the right of the main altar.

From an antique document from the archconfraternity's archives, we know that one of the leading reasons for the fraternity's existence was the cult of the most Holy Sacrament and the Archconfraternity would function as if it was the Confraternity of the Sacrament, accompany-



ing the Sacrament in solemn processions and taking part in viaticums when these took place in the homes of the sick.

In 1575, when



Monsignor Pietru Dusina made his apostolic visit to Malta, he had decreed that every parish in Malta should set up a Fraternity of the Most Holy Sacrament.

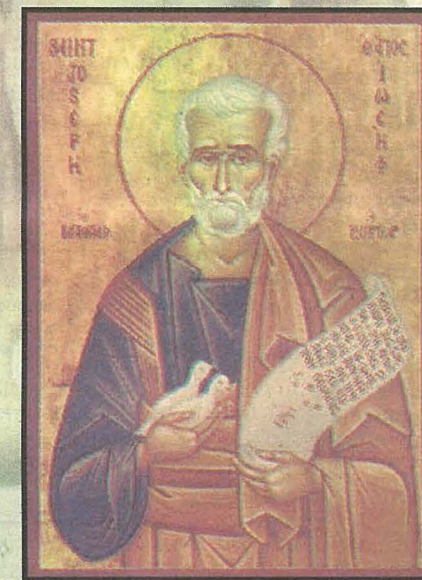
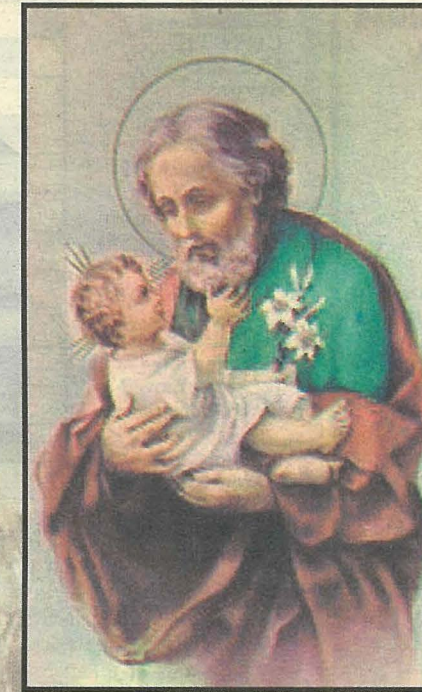
However, he found that in Rabat, his wish had already been fulfilled by the Archconfraternity of St Joseph.

Circumstances of historical importance which prove that the Archconfraternity of St Joseph was set up far before the Minor Franciscans' arrival in Malta are provided in 1576 when the question of the precedence in processions between the Fraternity of the Most Holy Rosary of the Dominican Convent of Rabat and the Fraternity of Santa Maria of Attard arose.

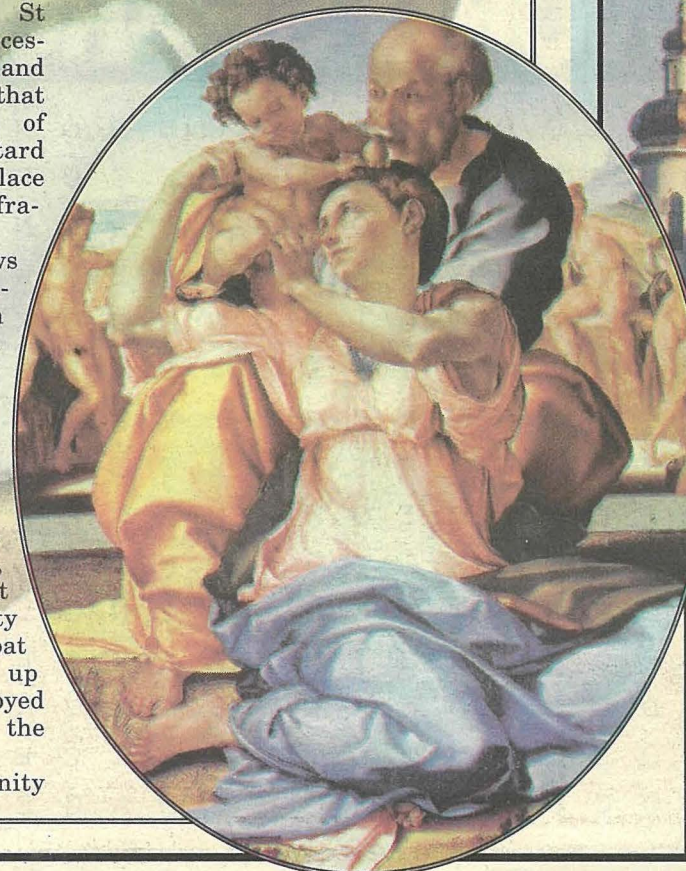
The Vicar General of the Diocese, who at the time was Reverend Dun Antonio Barbara, on June 8 1576 had decided that in the processions taking place in Rabat and Mdina, the Fraternity of the Most Holy Rosary should occupy a position immediately behind the Confraternity of St Joseph. For the processions outside Mdina and Rabat, it was ruled that the Confraternity of Santa Maria of Attard should take their place behind the Archconfraternity of St Joseph.

This all clearly shows that the Archconfraternity of St Joseph enjoyed the absolute precedence in all processions. Besides this, as the Confraternity of Santa Maria of Attard was founded by Monsignor de Valguarnera in 1498, one can conclude that the Archconfraternity of St Joseph of Rabat was definitely set up before then, as it enjoyed precedence over all the others.

The Archconfraternity



of St Joseph has always been very active and has worked towards increasing and spreading the devotion St Joseph, not only in Rabat but also throughout the rest of the Maltese Islands.



Catholics Don't Have A Monopoly On Saints

CATHOLICS AREN'T the only ones with saints; Eastern Orthodox churches post an informal route to sainthood, leaving the decision to national synods.

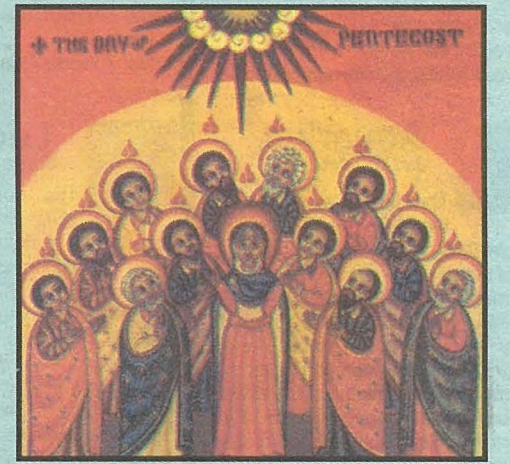
Since splitting with Rome in the year 1054, the Orthodox churches have developed a separate group of saints.

In the 20th century, perhaps the best known was Nektarios of Aegina, a priest who was hounded from Cairo on slanderous charges of immorality. Despite the harassment, Nektarios founded a school and convent on Aegina, then died there in 1920. He was finally proclaimed a saint in 1961.

Also widely revered is Seraphim of Sarov, a 19th century Russian mystic said to have healed through prayer and communed in visions with Sts. Peter, John and Mary. So powerful was Seraphim's appeal that the communists hid his remains in Leningrad for seven decades. In 1991, after the demise of Soviet communism, the Russian Orthodox Church retrieved the body in a brass reliquary, then displayed it in a grand procession of thousands of believers.

"For the Roman Catholic Church, the pope is the focus of unity," says the Rev. Mark Arey, endowment director for the 1.5 million-member Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. "But for us, unity is based on the faith itself. And the saints represent the witnesses."

Conservative Protestants often consider sainthood as flirting with idolatry, though Catholics insist they are praying "with" or "through" saints rather than to them. Seventeenth century Puritans even invaded St. Paul's Cathedral in London to tear out the



statues there.

"We honour great people in history, but we wouldn't pray to them," says Michael A. Milton, administrator of John Knox Theological Seminary, an evangelical school in Fort Lauderdale. "The Bible says there is only one mediator between God and men, Jesus Christ."

Churches in the Anglican Communion, including the Episcopal Church in the United States, are more pluralistic. Some Episcopalians pray directly to Christ, not through saints. Others keep the full Roman pantheon.

They accept the saints canonized before the split with the Roman Church in the late 1500s, although they favor those from the British Isles, such as Anselm and Columba. But various national synods add people from time to time, such as Bishop Samuel Isaac Joseph Schereschewsky of Shanghai, who died in 1906. His day is Oct. 15.

The U.S. Episcopal Church reserves days for American civil rights martyrs such as Martin Luther King. Furthermore, the two dozen national conventions in the worldwide Anglican Communion have the same rights to decide whom to honor.

"We don't put sainthood on a pedestal, so high you can't reach it," says Canon Frederick Masterman, education director for the Episcopal Diocese of Southeast Florida. "It's not necessarily a special contact or channel of grace. It's an example of a holy life that we can follow."

Then again, even strongly biblicist Protestants have done some rethinking about sainthood. The 11th chapter in the New Testament book of Hebrews scans the lives of heroes such as Abraham, Moses and David - "a veritable hall of statues," Milton says.

"Many evangelicals are thinking it's a good idea to investigate lives of those who have gone before and imitate them," he adds. "After all, they were fallen people like us, who needed a Saviour."

