

WONDER 3

YOUNG HUSBAND OF MARY

I see him [St. Joseph] as a strong, young man, perhaps a few years older than Our Lady, but in the prime of his life and work.

— St. Josemaría Escrivá

Old Men Don't Walk to Egypt

We wonder why the Gospel makes so little mention of St. Joseph. But did it not say everything when it taught us that he was the husband of Mary?¹

— Blessed William Joseph Chaminade

In 1981, Mother Angelica founded the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN). Her blessed network is an extremely successful and fruitful Catholic media apostolate. Mother Angelica's common sense, simple wisdom, and unwavering orthodoxy have catechized the hearts and minds of millions of people around the world. Mother Angelica died in 2016, but EWTN continues to lead many people to Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church.

Mother Angelica loved St. Joseph. On one occasion, during a live telecast, a caller asked her a question about St. Joseph. The question went something like this: "Mother Angelica, do you think St. Joseph was old or young?" Mother Angelica answered with her classic wit, responding: "Well, my dear, that's a good question. There is no official Church teaching on whether or not St. Joseph was old or young, but I prefer a young Joseph. All I know, sweetie, is old men don't walk to Egypt!"

Mother Angelica's straightforward answer makes a lot of sense. Not only would an elderly man not be capable of walking to Egypt, but an old man wouldn't be able to walk from Nazareth to Bethlehem, either; Bethlehem is 80 miles from Nazareth, and the journey would have been across rough desert terrain.

Saint Joseph was required to walk a lot to support the Holy Family. After walking 80 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem, St. Joseph was instructed by an angel to take the Child and his mother to Egypt. This required St. Joseph to take his family on another very

long journey. The distance from Bethlehem to the border of Egypt is 40 miles. No historian believes that the Holy Family lived on the border. Rather, they went much farther into Egypt where there was the possibility of work, food, and some semblance of civilization. We don't know exactly where Jesus, Mary, and Joseph settled down in Egypt, but it did require them to walk farther than the border.

Have you ever been to the Holy Land or North Africa? If you have, you know that the terrain is rough, the heat intense, and the dangers many. Walking to Egypt, being there for years without knowing anyone, and trying to make a living are not things associated with elderly men.

And then, after many years of living in Egypt, St. Joseph learned from the angel that Herod was dead. Saint Joseph was now required to pack up his family and walk from Egypt all the way back to Nazareth. That's more than 120 miles! The distance from New York City to Philadelphia is 92 miles. Add another 30 miles, and that's what St. Joseph had to do. There was no Jersey Turnpike, with smooth roads and cozy rest stops along the way. It was uphill, downhill, and around hills.

The endless walking didn't stop once the Holy Family reached Nazareth either. As faithful Jews, the men of the household were required to travel to Jerusalem three times a year to fulfill the Law of the Lord. "Three times a year all your men shall appear before the Lord, the God of Israel" (Ex 34:23). Remember: That's 80 miles one way. That is a lot of walking!

Saint Joseph could not have been an old man when he espoused Mary. Old men don't walk to Egypt. They don't walk three times a year from Nazareth to Jerusalem either.

Good Father [St. Joseph], I thank you for having watched over my Mother Mary while you were on earth.²

— Servant of God Sr. Mary Martha Chambon