

The Characterisation of Joseph by Matthew (Matt 1–2; 13:55)

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ABSTRACT: The article presents the figure of Joseph and his place in the narrative by the first evangelist in Matt 1–2. Apart from the arguments for the unifying function of Mary’s spouse in the whole Infancy Narrative, the most important features of Joseph highlighted by Matthew are emphasised. Those include the attitude of the righteous man, the fact of belonging to the royal family of King David, the bond and similarity to the actions of the patriarchs, as well as the silent and ascetic nature of the spouse and parent. Despite many similarities to the Lukan narrative, the first evangelist stresses different aspects in his characterisation of Joseph. Using the tools proposed by Cornelis Bennema, the author of the paper also assesses the degree of characterisation of the person under study, his role in the narrative and his representative value for the modern reader.

KEYWORDS: Narrative by Matthew 1–2, Infancy Narrative, Joseph, characterisation, theology in Matthew

Every attentive reader of the Gospel is able to notice that the figure of Joseph is one of the important the secondary characters in at least two synoptic gospels (Matthew and Luke), and that individual traditions are also included in the text by the fourth evangelist (John 1:45; 6:42). However, the figure of Joseph¹ is most thoroughly presented in the so-called Infancy Narrative according to Matthew.² Compared to the version of the description of events by Luke, one can even say that Joseph is a leading character, at least considering the early life of Jesus.³ Matthew’s attention is focused on Joseph only in the first two chapters of his narrative, supplemented by a short commentary of the people from Nazareth who found it difficult to accept the message of the Messianic Messenger due to his supposedly ordinary origin (Matt 13:55–57).

- 1 The name Ιωσήφ is a transcription of the Hebrew form יהושי, which may be an abbreviation of the name יהושע, etymologically expressing the wish so that “the Lord (Jhwh) would add” (cf. Ezra 8:10). The explanation of that name can be found in Gen 30:23–24; cf. T. Ilan, *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity. III. The Western Diaspora, 330 BCE – 650 CE* (in collaboration with T. Ziem) (TSAJ 126; Tübingen: Mohr – Siebeck 2008) 150–152.
- 2 Some exegetes, while juxtaposing information from the Gospel of Matthew with the historical context of the young Judeo-Christian community after AD 70, established based on the Apocrypha and intertestamental and rabbinic literature, consider the figure of Joseph to be entirely fictional; see: A. van Arde, “The Carpenter’s Son (Mt 13:55). Joseph and Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew and Other Texts,” *Neot* 34/1 (2000) 173–190.
- 3 A. Wucherpfennig, *Josef der Gerechte. Eine exegetische Untersuchung zu Mt 1–2* (Herders biblische Studien 55; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder 2008) 3–5.

The announcement of the Year of St. Joseph by Pope Francis on 8 December 2020 and the promulgation of the apostolic letter *Patris Corde*⁴ have generated wider interest in the figure of the earthly parent of Jesus, which resulted in a number of publications about Joseph.⁵ Most of them are an attempt to get to the fullest possible picture of the historical figure of Joseph. The purpose of this article is rather to capture Matthew's specific characterisation of Joseph against the background of the narrative of the first gospel and to compare it with the description of Joseph proposed by Luke.

The research procedure of the article is based on the achievements of contemporary biblical scholars who work on the principles of characterisation of a literary figure, especially the proposal of the South African biblical scholar Cornelis Bennema, who systematised the tools for conducting that type of research. In his book *A Theory of Character in New Testament Narrative*,⁶ Bennema extensively discusses many of the key positions related to the characterisation of characters in a narrative, referring to both ancient and contemporary literary theorists.⁷ Then, he proposes a structured and detailed theory supported by a rich material of analysis of sample biblical texts.

The procedure developed by Bennema consists of three successive stages. First, the characters are analysed in their proper literary and historical context (the latter is supplemented by external sources). Then, they are classified according to a previously prepared template by placing them on the appropriate scale of characterisation (agent – type – personality – individuality). At the last stage, the examined characters are evaluated in relation to the narrative plan of the evangelist and the final assessment of their significance is performed.

As in the case of the Luke's Infancy Narrative, Matt 1–2 narrative is also primarily christologically oriented. In other words, Matthew consistently presents his material in such a way

4 See: Francis, Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2020). Here, it is also worth mentioning the earlier exhortation on St. Joseph announced by John Paul II (Apostolic Exhortations *Redemptoris Custos* [Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana 1989]); permanent access to the English text: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_15081989_redemptoris-custos.html.

5 The broader biblical bibliography on the figure of St. Joseph is too extensive to be quoted here. The Polish bibliography that reaches almost the end of the 20th century devoted to the figure of St. Joseph was prepared by Tadeusz Fitych (*Polskie publikacje o św. Józefie w okresie posoborowym [1966–1996]* [Lublin: Ośrodek ABMK KUL 1997]). An article by Adam Kubiś that covers the entire Synoptic Tradition on that figure was published this year: “Biblijny obraz św. Józefa,” *Sanktuarium świętego Józefa w Rzeszowie-Staromieście* (eds. M. Trawka – B. Walicki – S. Zych) (Rzeszów – Kolbuszowa: Parafia św. Józefa Oblubieńca NMP w Rzeszowie-Staromieście – Miejska i Powiatowa Biblioteka Publiczna w Kolbuszowej 2022) 11–38. In the spring of 2022, a Josephological symposium took place at the Catholic University of Lublin, which will soon result in another collective work on the carer of Jesus.

6 C. Bennema, *A Theory of Character in New Testament* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 2014).

7 Among the criteria particularly suitable for the analysis of biblical characters, Bennema (*A Theory of Character in New Testament*, 45–47) mentions, inter alia, the classic division by Edward M. Forster: flat and round character; the approach by William J. Harvey: protagonist, intermediate character, and background figures; the categories by Yosef Ewen: complexity, development and inner life; and the proposal by B. Hochman of eight characteristic continua that help to describe a character. Using biblical and extra-biblical data, he created the concept of a “reliable reader, aware of the historical reality,” thus opening the possibility of fruitful and up-to-date reading of biblical texts.

that it is clear to the reader that he is focused on the figure of Jesus. Nevertheless, there are other figures apart from the main character, and Joseph is among the most important ones. For the first time, the figure of Joseph appears in the carefully constructed genealogy (Matt 1:16). Joseph is the protagonist of the next scene, in which Matthew explains the circumstances of the birth of Jesus (Matt 1:18–25), and then, he “disappears” for a longer period of time and the attention is brought to the Wise Men and Herod (Matt 2:1–9a) and the Wise Men and the Mother with the Child (Matt 2:9b–12). The carer of Jesus is brought back to the foreground in two of the last three scenes of the narrative (Matt 2:13–15, 19–23) only to be mentioned by the residents of Nazareth at the end (Matt 13:55). Each of those texts reveals some important aspect/aspects of the figure of Joseph, starting with the guarantee of the origin of Jesus – the Messiah from the lineage of King David, through his participation in God’s plans that go beyond the Jewish understanding of justice and involve some form of spiritual struggle. Finally, through his readiness to submit to God’s will following the example of his forefather Abraham, conveyed in the dream (Matt 1:20; 2:13, 19), as well as the open question about the nature of Joseph’s relationship with Mary and their possible offspring later on (1:25).

1. Composition of Matt 1–2

The scattered material on the character of Joseph begs the question of his narrative function in the story as a whole. For this purpose, various scenes and their interdependence will be discussed. The Infancy Narrative of Matthew has been the subject of many literary studies that have resulted in various approaches to its structure.⁸ However, some observations are repeated in many scientific approaches. It is commonly noted that the genealogy at the very beginning (Matt 1:1–17) is clearly distinguished from the subsequent text, which has a narrative form. Its numerical regularity on closer examination reveals some inconsistencies, but the purpose of the first evangelist’s message seems clear: it is to present the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah, from Abraham to Joseph. At the same time, the evangelist directs the reader’s attention as early as the first verse to two figures on the list – David and Abraham (1:1).

⁸ See: W.D. Davies – D.C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (ICC; London – New York: Clark 2004) I. The authors divide the material into four parts, clearly separating the genealogy from the proper narrative: 1. From Abraham to Jesus (1:2–17); 2. Conceived of the Holy Spirit (1:18–25); 3. Magi from the East (2:1–12); The Messiah’s Flight and Return (2:13–23). A similar approach, though with a slightly different emphasis on the content of each section, is presented by Donald A. Hagner (*Matthew 1–13* [WBC 33A; Dallas, TX: Word Books 1993] 32–42), John Nolland (*The Gospel of Matthew. A Commentary on the Greek Text* [NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI – Carlisle: Eerdmans – Paternoster 2005] 65–131), Ulrich Luz (*Matthew 1–7* [Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 2007] 74–75). The text is divided into smaller parts in, e.g., D. Mangum (ed.), *Lexham Context Commentary. New Testament* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press 2020) Matt 1:1–2:23.

The sequence of characters linked by the verb γεννάω repeated like a refrain in the form of the aorist of the 3rd person singular leads the reader to Joseph, to whom Matthew did not assign any verb, linking him only passively to Mary, the mother of Jesus.⁹ Although several women are mentioned in the genealogy, the verb γεννάω in the passive voice (ἐγεννήθη) is only associated with her name, although in the strict sense it refers to Jesus himself. What is retained, however, is the preposition ἐκ that Matthew applies to all the mothers mentioned in the genealogy (Matt 1:5, 6; cf. 1:16).

Matt 1:18 opens the story in such a way that the reader does not lose sight of the most important character: Τοῦ δὲ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἡ γένεσις οὕτως ἦν (“Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about” – NAB). The Greek text links v. 18 very strongly to v. 1 and thus justifies the placement of the genealogy at the beginning of the book, which is unfortunately not evident in the Polish translations.¹⁰ The presented sequence reveals Jesus’ ancient ancestors, and the opening scene is intended to explain the circumstances of Jesus’ appearance on earth and his relationship with those closest to him. Verse 18 focuses the viewer’s attention on Mary and the Holy Spirit, but the next verses are already about Joseph, first confronted with the perplexing fact of his wife’s pregnancy, and then with the angelic revelation (vv. 19–24). The last verse seals Joseph’s non-participation in the birth of Jesus (οὐκ ἐγένωσκεν αὐτὴν ἕως οὗ ἔτεκεν υἱόν – Matt 1:25).¹¹

The next scene references the birth of Jesus again and continues the description of the events (Matt 2:1 – τοῦ δὲ Ἰησοῦ γεννηθέντος), but this time Joseph disappears from the scene entirely. Its protagonists are the Magi, who came¹² to Jerusalem from an unspecified land,¹³ led by the star (Matt 2:1). After consulting Herod and Israel’s elite, they set out for Bethlehem (vv. 4–9), where they pay their respects to the newborn King and his mother (2:11), and, having been warned in a dream, return to their homeland bypassing the kingdom’s capital (v. 12).

The scene of the flight into Egypt restores Joseph’s role as the main character (Matt 2:13–15). It is he who is warned by the angel, he who takes his family and flees to

9 The way in which fatherhood is highlighted on God’s side is much more subtle in the first gospel. Matthew does not contrast God’s fatherhood with Joseph’s presumed fatherhood as clearly as Luke (cf. Luke 2:49; 3:23).

10 Wanting to preserve the play on words present in the original of the first gospel, one would have to translate it as follows: “Roll of the genesis of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham: Abraham is behind the genesis of Isaac, [...] and Jacob is behind the genesis of Joseph the husband of Mary; of her was born Jesus who is called Christ. [...] This is how the genesis of Jesus Christ came about...”

11 Scholars agree that this is about preserving the concept of the virgin birth of Jesus; see A. Paciorek, *Ewangelia według świętego Mateusza. I. Rozdziały 1–13* (NKB.NT 1; Częstochowa: Edycja Świętego Pawła 2005) 96; Davies – Allison, *Matthew*, I, 219.

12 On the significance of the star in the first Gospel, see K. Mielcarek, “The Motif of the Star in the Gospel of Matthew (2:1–12),” *VV29* (2016) 175–197.

13 The origin of the Magi has long been a subject of debate. A range of suggestions on the subject has been put forward by Raymond E. Brown (*The Birth of the Messiah. A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, New Updated Edition [New York – London: Yale University Press 1993] 168–170) limiting the proposals to three: Parthia or Persia, Babylon, Arabia or the Syrian Desert.

Egypt, where he stays until the death of King Herod. Verses 16–18, on the other hand, shift the reader’s attention again to the area around Bethlehem, with Herod’s soldiers as the main actors murdering infants and young children at his behest. The final scene once again places Joseph at the centre of the narrative, as he receives news of the death of the king in Jerusalem, along with instructions to return to his homeland. The general term “the land of Israel” (ἡ γῆ Ἰσραὴλ – v. 21) appears to have been originally confined to Judea and most likely Bethlehem, but his fear of Archelaus and heavenly instruction led him to Nazareth.

The pattern of each pericope is similar and consists of three elements:

1. Information about the state of affairs, instruction and presentation of the reason for the action.
2. Fulfillment.
3. Introductory formula and citation about the fulfillment of a promise.¹⁴

The whole forms a specific narrative sequence through which the first evangelist takes the reader. The scenes he presents can be organised in different ways. However, it seems that one of the more sensible criteria is the changing space. The plot of each story unfolds from point A to point B, although the change is not always about space. In this case, the end point is obvious: it is Nazareth, where Joseph’s family finds refuge. Jesus will stay in Nazareth until he reaches maturity and he will be identified with this town.¹⁵ The starting point of the story’s plot is no longer so evident, as Matthew does not indicate where the events directly related to Jesus’ coming into the world took place. His silence on Joseph’s family’s change of surroundings, however, leads one to conclude that, according to the first evangelist, Joseph and Mary have been in Bethlehem from the beginning. Hence, the geographical outline of Matt 1–2 can be presented as follows:

	Protagonist(s)	Pericope		Location
Meta-protagonist – Jesus	Joseph	Matt 1:18–25		Bethlehem?
	The Magi, Herod		Matt 2:1–12	land of the Magi – Jerusalem – Bethlehem – land of the Magi
	Joseph	Matt 2:13–15		Bethlehem – Egypt
	Herod’s soldiers		Matt 2:16–18	Bethlehem area
	Joseph	Matt 2:19–23		Egypt – land of Israel – Galilee – Nazareth

Matthew’s narrative is structured around three major locations in the land of Israel: Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Nazareth. The homeland of the Magi and the destination of

¹⁴ As Wucherpfnig rightly points out (*Jesus der Gerechte*, 24), the quotation essentially does not refer to the narrative but is a theological supplement to it.
¹⁵ John Nolland (*The Gospel of Matthew*, 119) points out that in Matt 2:23 “the natural reading of the syntax would make ‘he’ Joseph.” Thus, according to him, the phrase: Ναζωραῖος κληθήσεται refers to Joseph.

the Holy Family's flight (Egypt) must be added to these. The various transformations take place within this space, in which the characters appear. The table presented clearly shows that of all the characters mentioned in the story, the character of Joseph is the unifying element of the entire plot at the level of the acting protagonists. He appears at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the story. However, one must not forget the numerous signs from Matthew the evangelist that Joseph himself, like all the other characters, is in turn subordinated to the main narrative of the gospel as a whole, which concerns Jesus Christ. In this sense, Jesus is a kind of meta-protagonist who is the basis of the entire narrative for the editor. This is so even if, in the scenes of the Infancy Narrative, He remains essentially in the background as the Child who is born, receives tribute from the Magi, and is then protected from Herod's murderous plans in Egypt, eventually finding refuge in Nazareth, unknown to anyone.

The foregrounding of the character of Joseph forces the reader of Matthew's narrative to analyse his characterisation by Matthew. The small length of Matt 1–2 does not allow for overly elaborate analysis, but it is certainly possible to distinguish a few key themes that the evangelist included in his description. These include Joseph's righteousness, his royal lineage, his bond with the patriarchs, and his specific way of existence, which was expressed in the silence and asceticism of married life.

2. Tzadik of the New Covenant (Matt 1:19)

In the very first scene (Matt 1:19), Joseph is referred to as δίκαιος ("righteous").¹⁶ The characterisation is extremely brief, which is typical of Matthew. The Jewish context of the Gospel's addressees prompts us to see this adjective primarily as a synonym for the phrase "law-abiding,"¹⁷ although it is difficult to limit it to only the legal dimension. Nevertheless, thought on justice in Judaism focused on the commandments in the Torah, and their observance was a prerequisite for achieving the status of a righteous man (cf. Dan 13:3 – LXX). In the Hebrew Bible, the ideal of the righteous man (Hebrew: צַדִּיק) is well known as it appears in more than 200 instances. It is not just about scrupulous observance of the commandments, but an authentic model of piety built on Torah regulations. For the righteous man, the Torah becomes the constant rule of life and wisdom in everyday existence.¹⁸ Similarly, rabbinic and Qumran literature considers those who follow the Law of God to be righteous.¹⁹ Paralleling Matthew, Luke's Infancy

16 Wucherpennig (*Josef der Gerechte*, 216) thinks that "Die drei indirekten Charakterisierungen Josefs, sein Schweigen und seine Träume, sein Leben als Flüchtling, entsprechen dem jüdischen Bild des Gerechten" but his argument is not convincing.

17 Davies – Allison, *Matthew*, I, 202.

18 See: Wucherpennig, *Josef der Gerechte*, 216.

19 See: G. Schrenk, "Δίκη, Δίκαιος, κτλ.," *TDNT* II, 212–214; cf. also 1QpHab 7:17–8:3; 4QFlor 1–3 ii 2; 1 Hen 38:2. E. Condra, *Salvation for the Righteous Revealed. Jesus Amid Covenantal and Messianic Expectations*

Narrative presents exactly the same understanding of righteousness when characterising Zechariah and Elizabeth, but the third evangelist further supplemented his statement with a brief explanation: “observing all the Lord’s commands and regulations blamelessly” (Luke 1:6; cf. 2:25).

Exegetes in the past have proposed a number of interpretations of the term δίκαιος in reference to Joseph, deriving it from the immediate context. His righteousness was the mercy shown to his fiancée, so that, despite the obvious disgrace, he would not publicly embarrass her.²⁰ As others rightly point out, there are alternative words expressing this kind of attitude in the Greek language (φιλόανθρωπος, ἐπιεικής; cf. Deuteronomy 6:25),²¹ and Joseph’s righteousness would then be limited to discretion only (λάθρα). There have also been explanations pointing to the pious attitude of Mary’s husband, who, completely unsuspecting of her infidelity, was helpless in the face of the situation and was afraid to oppose God’s plans.²² The latter interpretation does not take into account the dynamics of the scene, according to which Joseph only learns in Matt 1:20 that Mary’s pregnancy is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit. The alleged pious embarrassment of the young spouse also does not fit with the resolution he decided to make, that is, to send his wife away (ἀπολῶσαι αὐτήν – Matt 1:19). Rather, Matthew’s narrative fits into the typical dynamics of biblical stories, where understanding of a given situation comes “from heaven,” and the role of the character is to act in accordance with the revelation given. The Old Testament depicts the situation of Hagar (Gen 16:11–12), or Samson’s mother (Judg 13:3–7), in this way. The same pattern is also repeated in the following scenes with Joseph, who learns from the angel what awaits him and what he should do (Matt 2:13, 19–20). Thus, without passing judgment on Joseph’s motivation and understanding, since the evangelist does not share with the reader any clues on the subject, it is impossible to interpret the event other than as the intention of a pious Israelite to send his young wife away.²³

in Second Temple Judaism (AGJU 51; Leiden: Brill 2002) 101–110, 190; G.S. Oegema, “The ‘Coming of the Righteous One’ in Acts and in 1 Enoch,” *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man. Revisiting the Book of Parables* (ed. G. Boccaccini) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2007) 254–256.

20 C. Spicq, “Joseph, son Mari, étant juste...” (Mt 1:19), *RB* 71 (1964) 206–214; E. Klostermann, *Das Matthäusevangelium* (HNT 4; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1927) 8; F.V. Filson, *The Gospel according to St. Paul. Matthew* (London: Black 1960) 54; E. Schweizer, *The Good News according to Matthew* (Atlanta, GA: Westminster John Knox 1975) 30–31.

21 Davies – Allison, *Matthew*, I, 202.

22 In the patristic period, this understanding was presented primarily by Eusebius (PG 22, 884), as well as by Ephrem, Pseudo-Basil and Pseudo-Origenes. Contemporary references to them have been made by Xavier Léon-Dufour, Adolf Schlatter (*Der Evangelist Matthäus*, 3 ed. [Stuttgart: Calwer 1948] 13) and others. Heinz Giesen (*Christliches Handeln. Eine redaktionskritische Untersuchung zum δικαιοσύνη-Begriff im Matthäus-Evangelium* [Frankfurt am Main: Lang 1982] 183–187), among others, distanced himself from this opinion.

23 Davies – Allison, *Matthew*, I, 204–205. Paciorek (*Ewangelia według świętego Mateusza*, 92–93) presents both positions, but seems to lean toward the latter.

Terminology related to the idea of righteousness has a unique meaning in the first Gospel.²⁴ The adjective δίκαιος appears seventeen times (as many as 3x in Matt 10:41!),²⁵ always with a positive connotation, with some of Matthew's uses being part of his own material (Matt 13:17; 23:29, 35) and usually referring to the pious ancestors, or a wider group of potential listeners of Jesus (5:45; 9:13; 10:41; 23:28; 27:19). The owner of the vineyard is characterised as righteous indirectly, because he gives the workers what they righteously deserve (20:4).²⁶ In several instances, the evangelist apparently has Jesus' disciples in mind, but these texts always refer to the future (Matt 13:43, 49; 25:37, 46). In one case, the evangelist uses this word in reference to Jesus himself, and the term was put in the mouth of Pilate's wife (Matt 27:19).²⁷ In addition to the adjectival form, the first gospel also contains others. These primarily include the noun δικαιοσύνη and the verbs δικαιώω, καταδικάζω. The latter two in the form of *passivum divinum* appear in Matt 11:19; 12:37 with the exception of Matt 12:7.²⁸

The concept of δικαιοσύνη is an important addition to the determination of the meaning of the adjective δίκαιος in Matt 1:19, as it complements Matthew's theological

24 A broad background to Matthew's terminology related to the idea of righteousness was presented at one point by Benno Przybylski (*Righteousness in Matthew and His World of Thought* [SNTSMS 41; New York – Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press 1980]). The then-assistant professor in the department of religious studies at McMaster University (Canada), after presenting the discussion to date on the issue of righteousness in the first gospel, analysed the Qumran literature, the rabbinic literature of the first two centuries and the Matthew tradition from this angle. His conclusions correct the radical proposals of earlier scholars to contrast the theology of the first evangelist with the content of the *Corpus Paulinum*. According to Przybylski, the category δίκαιος should be understood narrowly (only in relation to Judaism), while for those following Jesus on the new path of righteousness, in his opinion, the evangelist reserves the title μαθητής. Hence, "the concept of righteousness cannot be representative of Matthew's view of what it means to be a disciple" (*ibidem*, 111–112). It seems, however, that the author unnecessarily contrasts Matthew's understanding of righteousness and doing God's will (Matt 13:52) so strongly; see P. Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in the Matthew's Gospel* (WUNT 2/177; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2004) 201. The professor from Edinburgh finds it reasonable "to conclude that there is some overlap for Matthew between 'doing the will of the Father' and the practice of 'righteousness' by members of his community"; cf. C.N. Ridlehoover, *The Lord's Prayer and the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel* (LNTS 616; London – New York: Clark 2020). In the chapter on the question of God's will, the North Carolina (USA) lecturer agrees with Foster rather than Przybylski (*Righteousness*, 65–122, 203–208). At the other extreme are those who see in righteousness a gift from God rather than an obligation; see W. Schrage, *The Ethics of the New Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress 1988) 151. A list of authors advocating such an approach is provided in B.L. Martin, *Christ and the Law in Matthew* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock 2001) 70, n. 50.

25 The statistical predominance shows a clear predilection of Matthew (Mark 2x, Luke 11x, John 3x). The evangelist also uses its antonym, ἄδικος (Matt 5:45).

26 Wuherphennig (*Josef der Gerechte*, 217) understands the adjective in this case as "fair pay" (German: gerechten Lohn) and, in translation, proposes to use "proper/adequate/appropriate" ("angemessen") instead of righteous.

27 On this theme, see M. Klukowski, "The Function of Pilate's Wife in the Gospel According to Matthew (27:19)," „Niewiastę dzielną kto znajdzie?" (Prz 31,10). *Rola kobiet w biblijnej historii zbawienia* (eds. A. Kubiś – K. Naporá; ABLu 14; Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL 2016) 257–275. See also A. Hetzel, "La femme de Pilate, témoin et prophétesse," *Ponce Pilate* (ed. J.-M. Vercauysse) (Arras: Artois Presses Université 2013) 189–200; J.D.M. Derrett, "Have nothing to do with that just man!" (Matt. 27:19): Haggadah and the Account of the Passion," *Studies in the New Testament. III. Midrash, Haggadah, and the Character of the Community* (Leiden: Brill 1982) 184–192.

28 Davies – Allison, *Matthew*, II, 315.

understanding of it. The noun first appears in the scene of Jesus' baptism, as part of an argument to convince John to act: *πρέπον ἐστὶν ἡμῖν πληρῶσαι πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην* (Matt 3:15). The addition of "all righteousness" is appropriate. Most uses of this noun can be found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5–7). It is there that we can find the explanation of what the evangelist meant. *Δικαιοσύνη* proves to be a reality outside of man, one worth desiring (*πεινῶντες καὶ διψῶντες* – Matt 5:6).²⁹ Its value exceeds even possible persecution, since it guarantees the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven (*ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν* – Matt 5:10).³⁰ Also, once it is acquired, it must be cultivated to be greater than that represented by the pious Israelites (*ἐὰν μὴ περισσεύσῃ [...] πλεῖον τῶν γραμματέων καὶ Φαρισαίων* – Matt 5:20) and one should not boast about it to others (*μὴ ποιεῖν ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων πρὸς τὸ θαυμάζειν αὐτοῖς* – Matt 6:1).³¹

A better understanding of Matthew's righteousness reveals the meaning of the statement in Matt 6:33, where *δικαιοσύνη* is juxtaposed with *ἡ βασιλεία*.

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.	ζητεῖτε δὲ πρῶτον τὴν βασιλείαν [τοῦ θεοῦ] καὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ, καὶ ταῦτα πάντα προστεθήσεται ὑμῖν.
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The syntax of Jesus' encouragement puts the kingdom and righteousness on the same level.³² It is clear from this that the two realities are close to each other. The first denotes the realm of God's dominion, that is, any place where His will is done. The other, on the other hand,

²⁹ This motif makes it possible to think of righteousness in terms of a gift; as, for example, in W. Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (THKNT 1; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt 1971) 126–127; J. Reumann, "Righteousness" in the New Testament. "Justification" in the United States Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue. With Responses by Joseph A. Fitzmeyer and Jerome D. Quinn (Philadelphia, PA – New York: Fortress – Paulist 1982) 125–135. The following scholars believe the opposite: Charles E. Carlston ("The Things that Defile (Mark VII. 15) and the Law in Matthew and Mark," *NTS* 15 [1969] 80), Georg Strecker ("The Law in the Sermon on the Mount, and the Sermon on the Mount as Law," *The Promise and Practice of Biblical Theology* [ed. J. Reumann] [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 1991] 36–38; *Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit: Untersuchung zur Theologie des Matthäus* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1962] 149–158), Benno Przybylski (*Righteousness*, 79–99, 148–155), William David Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr. (*Matthew*, I, 451–453), Luz (*Matthew 1–7*, 107), Jacques Dupont (*Les Béatitudes*. III. *Les Évangélistes* [Paris: Gabalda 1973] 211–384, esp. 383–384).

³⁰ This verse primarily emphasises the proper attitude of righteousness; see Davies Alison, *Matthew*, I, 452–453.

³¹ The last two instances involve a different perspective, as the noun *δικαιοσύνη* is further specified with the possessive pronoun *ὑμῶν*. It is therefore about the reality of the person concerned, whose degree can be evaluated. Moreover, the righteousness of the Pharisees and scribes, who were regarded as models of piety, proves insufficient. As scholars rightly point out, "The meaning of 'righteousness' in 5:20 is determined by the paragraphs that follow. 'Righteousness' is therefore Christian character and conduct in accordance with the demands of Jesus-right intention, right word, right deed." Davies – Alison, *Matthew*, I, 499–500. Matt 6:1 additionally introduces the aspect of inner intention, which cannot involve actions for show; *ibidem*, 575.

³² Whether one views the phrase as an editorial addition or the original text, the syntactic equivalence of the kingdom and righteousness is not debatable; see Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 314–315; Davies – Alison, *Matthew*, I, 661; Hagberg, *Matthew 1–13*, 165–166.

refers to what God wants, that is, to God's will.³³ This makes the two texts related to the mission of John the Baptist clear. For John came by the way of righteousness, that is, the fulfilment of God's will (ἐν ὁδῷ δικαιοσύνης – Matt 21:32) and therefore did not hesitate to fulfil it in its entirety (πάσαν δικαιοσύνην – Matt 3:15).

The presented instances of Matthew's use of terminology with the stem δικ- provide an important background for the search for the meaning of the phrase δίκαιος ὢν in 1:19. Its proper context, however, is primarily the situation of the wife's mysterious pregnancy and the evangelist's explanation: μὴ θέλων αὐτὴν δειγματίσαι, ἐβουλήθη λάθρα ἀπολύσαι αὐτήν. The two parallel participles (ὢν and θέλων) link his righteous condition in effect to his unwillingness to expose Mary to danger.³⁴ Because Joseph is righteous, he does not want to make his bride's pregnancy public. He foregoes legal action that would mean her public disgrace, limiting himself to the intention of restoring the order of the Law in his life.³⁵ After all, sending his wife away, whether done openly or discreetly, meant breaking off the engagement. His righteousness in accordance with the spirit of the Torah is therefore expressed in refraining from personal and public judgement. Such righteousness proves inadequate in his case, as the resolution of the narrative complication comes only after the intervention of an angel.

In the opening scene, Matthew thus outlines two types of justice that he will develop in the rest of the story. The one in the broader sense, which refers to Israelites faithful to God in the past and all who live in accordance with His commandments, and the one with a more special meaning, which refers to the disciples of Jesus and all those who are called to rise above the regulations of the Torah. Joseph seems to belong to both groups. First characterised as δίκαιος, he is first and foremost a pious Jew who shows obedience to the Torah.³⁶ In response to the content of the dream vision, however, he must transcend the meaning of the commandments written in the Law and submit to God's will revealed to him directly by the angel. In this way, he becomes a man of new and greater righteousness.

3. Joseph, son of David and father of Jesus under the Law (Matt 1:20)

The second element of Matthew's characterisation of Joseph is *de facto* put into the mouth of an angel, for God's messenger addresses him as the "son of David" (Matt 1:20). The term has a number of important connotations that the reader should process. The key significance

33 See: Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 165–166.

34 The second participle is preceded by the negative particle μὴ. Alternatively, the two parts of the sentence can be translated to show contrast: "Although he was a righteous man, he did not want..." The problem in understanding the phrase is discussed in great detail by Xavier Leon Dufour ("Le juste Joseph," *NRTb* 81 [1959] 225–227).

35 Hagner (*Matthew 1–13*, 18) views this act by Joseph as "simultaneously his righteousness and his charitable kindness."

36 See: Davies – Allison, *Matthew*, I, 202–203; Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 18; Paciorek, *Ewangelia według świętego Mateusza*, 92.

in this case is related to the evangelist's recorded genealogy of Jesus,³⁷ which in a biological sense unambiguously ends with Joseph (Matt 1:16). The ancestors presented in the genealogy comprise an unbroken sequence of characters, with the patriarch Abraham at the beginning (v. 1) and King David at its centre (v. 6).³⁸ The reader is warned at the beginning that these two figures are fundamental to Jesus' identity (v. 1). The former guarantees His participation in the Covenant, the latter fulfils Natan's prophecy by revealing His messianic and royal status (2 Sam 7:12–14). Joseph being the last link in this chain is responsible for ensuring both realities for Jesus. In other words, for Jesus to be recognised as the son of Abraham and David, Joseph had to be one first.

Joseph's Jewish background is not debatable. He is a member of the chosen people and lives according to the commandments of the Torah (δικαιοσύνη). Much more problematic is his royal status. He does belong to a royal family, descending from the stem of Jesse, but his status as a poor carpenter does not evoke monarchical associations. Nevertheless, the evangelist regards this circumstance as sufficient grounds for securing Jesus' royal prerogatives. The original addressee of Matthew's Gospel was aware that the Herodian dynasty represented by Herod the Great and two successive generations of his family (Archelaus, Agrippa I) did not meet the criterion of Davidic descent despite their rule over Israel. Herod's descendants in the strict sense were not even Jews. Hence the keen expectation of another Anointed One who will fulfil the Old Testament predictions.

The first evangelist emphasises that Joseph's assurance of Jesus' Abrahamic and Davidic descent is not biological but legal. Both the concluding formula in the genealogy (cf. ἐγέννησεν versus ἐγεννήθη – Matt 1:16) and the narrator's mention of the Holy Spirit in Matt 1:18 (ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου) unequivocally establish that Joseph had no biological involvement in Jesus' coming into the world.³⁹ As far as the Law is concerned, however, he is his legitimate father, and thus Jesus meets the messianic criteria of descent from Abraham and David. God recognises Joseph's paternal functions, which is expressed in the narrator's focus on his character and in the proclamation that he himself will name Jesus (1:25).⁴⁰

37 The question of genealogy in the Old Testament texts has been widely discussed. A division of the genealogies into linear and segmented genealogies has also been proposed, with the first Gospel not containing a purely linear genealogy despite the general linear pattern in which successive descendants in the male line are mentioned, as the male line is sometimes supplemented by female figures; T. Hieke, *Die Genealogien der Genesis* (Herders biblische Studien 39; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder 2003) 19–20.

38 Matthew's genealogy lists a total of forty-two men and five women. In the case of men, despite Matthew's assertions, the list can hardly be clearly divided into three identical sequences of 14 names each; see the discussion on this topic: Brown (*The Birth of Messiah*, 64–84), Wucherpfennig (*Jesus der Gerechte*, 59–78).

39 This motif was used by Jewish authors to create anti-Christian pasquils like *Toledot Jesuh*. The Jewish Talmud and Tosefta consider a man named Panthera to be the father of Jesus; see Tosefta *Hullin* 2.24. The terms ben Stada (or Stara) are also known; see M. Wróbel, "Textual and Historical Criticism of Talmudic Passages about Jesus and Christianity," *Estetyka i Krytyka* 27 (2012) 26–32.

40 The naming rite associated with circumcision was part of a widely recognised tradition among ancient peoples in the Middle East according to which a name reveals the essence of a thing or person, and also determines his or her future mission or purpose in life; see R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel. Its Life and Instructions* (Livonia, MI: Erdmans 1997) 43–46. Unlike Luke, Matthew does not mention the moment of naming Jesus. Instead, he

4. An Exile Obedient to God, a Follower of the Patriarchs (Matt 1–2)

The genealogy of Jesus informs the reader that Joseph is a descendant of the patriarchs. Three generations of them were forced by life circumstances to leave their land and stay abroad for an extended period of time.⁴¹ The life of Joseph, Mary's husband, shows many similarities to the lives of his ancestors. Joseph, like Jacob, must leave home in the face of danger to his life and, like Abraham, stays in Egypt. Assuming that his homelands are Judea and Bethlehem, also upon his return from Egypt, Joseph is an exile, or at least a displaced person,⁴² as out of fear of the bloody rule of Archelaus, and guided by God's command, he eventually heads to Galilee and Nazareth.

Matthew, as is typical of him, leaves out the details of leaving Bethlehem and arriving in Egypt. The narrative bears the characteristics of Semitic schematism and a certain automatism. First, the angel communicates the will of the Most High to Joseph in a succinct formula, supplementing it with an explanation of the reasons for leaving the family nest (v. 13). Then, Joseph strictly follows his instructions. The only motif that allows for a more detailed characterisation of Joseph at this point concerns time. In Matt 2:13, the evangelist explains that the vision took place in a dream, which obviously implies nighttime. A verse later, the reader learns that the actions communicated by the angel were carried out later

gives a clear indication that it is Joseph who will perform this act. The third evangelist uses the passive form of the verb καλέω (ἐκλήθη), which does not make it clear who ultimately performed the rite. For Luke, it was more important to emphasise that the name was chosen by God long before the birth of Jesus, and that in the perspective of God's plan of salvation it took place outside of time (cf. Luke 1:31).

Jewish circles in Jesus' time commonly followed the custom of patronymy, i.e. naming sons after their father; see P. Hanks – H. Parkin, "Personal Naming Systems of the World," *The Oxford Handbook of Names and Naming* (ed. C. Hough) (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2016) 169–190. Hence, in the gospels we encounter such names as Bar-Timaeus (Mark 10:46), or Simon Bar-Jonah (Matt 16:17). The custom emphasised the deep relationship between father and son and taught the son that his worth is built on his father's identity. Neither Matthew nor any other gospel, however, contains a direct example of Jesus being called by the name *bar/ben-Josef*, although historically such a practice cannot be ruled out. A text that may support this Middle Eastern custom may be the rhetorical question of those gathered in the Nazareth synagogue, which in the first gospel, however, was seriously weakened by the removal of Joseph's name: Is he not the carpenter's son? (Matt 13:55); cf. Luke and John: "Isn't this the son of Joseph?" (Luke 4:22; John 6:42).

41 The motif of the patriarchs as exiles has already been addressed by world exegesis. The migration of Abraham and his descendants is part of a broader historical process. Recent publications on the topic include: M. Safwat, "Forced Migration and Reconciliation in the Joseph Narrative," *The Joseph Story between Egypt and Israel* (eds. T. Römer – K. Schmid – A. Bühler) (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2021) 85–101; W. Vogels, "Natives and Immigrants in Biblical Israel: Their Rights and Obligations," *ScEs* 71/1–3 (2019) 303–319; H. Tremblay, "Pourquoi Israël s'est-il fait un peuple de migrants?," *ScEs* 71/3 (2019) 321–333; C.A. Strine, "The Study of Involuntary Migration as a Hermeneutical Guide for Reading the Jacob Narrative," *Bib-Int* 26/4–5 (2018) 485–498; F. Wilk, "De migratione Abrahami als Kontext des Neuen Testaments," *Abrahams Aufbruch. Philon von Alexandria, De migratione Abrahami* (eds. H. Detering et al.) (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2017) 219–244.

42 An interpretation of the Holy Family's sojourn in Egypt as fitting into the migration motif was recently proposed by Konrad Schaefer ("La familia emigra a Egipto [Mt 2,13–23]: hacia la teología de la migración," *QOL. Revista bíblica Mexicana* 82 [2020] 189–210).

that same night (νυκτός). Thus, the text suggests not only Joseph's strict obedience⁴³ as the recipient of the revelation, but also his efficiency in carrying out the instructions. With just one word, Matthew dynamises the scene to make it clear to the reader that the command was carried out immediately once received.⁴⁴

The journey to Egypt is referred to using the verb ἀναχωρέω (to withdraw/move away/leave the place), which may indirectly indicate leaving home (cf. Matt 2:11 – εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν). Ansgar Wucherpfennig⁴⁵ sees Matthew's use of the verb ἀναχωρέω as a typical way for the Septuagint to indicate a refugee situation. In this way, the LXX describes Moses' flight from Egypt after the murder of an Egyptian had been uncovered (Exod 2:15),⁴⁶ David's escape from Saul's grasp after his fury-filled assassination attempt (1 Sam 19:10), or Tobit leaving Nineveh for fear of the king's wrath (Tob 1:19). However, it can hardly be considered "einen typischen Ausdruck der Septuaginta für das Schicksal einer Flucht," since the use of this verb in the Greek Bible has a much broader meaning.⁴⁷ Moreover, also in the First Gospel itself, one can find many uses that do not imply flight or refugee status (cf. Matt 2:12, 13; 4:12; 9:24; 12:15; 14:13; 15:21; 27:5). In Matt 2:14, Joseph actually escapes from Herod to Egypt. This meaning is further reinforced by the angelic injunction: φεῦγε εἰς Αἴγυπτον (Matt 2:13), where the evangelist uses the verb "flee" explicitly. However, in Matt 2:22, although Joseph changes his intention to settle in Judea because of Archelaus, it is difficult to equate this action unequivocally with a flight to Egypt. It is better to think of it as moving away from the influence of the tetrarch. Joseph is simply carrying out God's plan of taking care of the Lord's Anointed and, encountering danger, moves to another location. Jesus adopts a similar strategy during his mission.⁴⁸

Joseph sets out immediately and leaves behind everything he had in Bethlehem. Matthew leaves the reader without any information as to what the house the protagonist and his family left looked like. However, one can guess that the nonaffluent carpenter did not own much. In any case, he could afford to travel to Egypt, in which the gifts of the wise men could have significantly helped.⁴⁹ He must also have been earning well enough in

43 It is precisely the obedience based on faith, following the example of Abraham, that is often emphasised as a motif of Joseph's characterisation; see Kubiś, "Biblijny obraz św. Józefa," 15–17.

44 Other reasons for the mention of nighttime have also been discussed; see Davies – Allison, *Matthew*, I, 261: (1) Reference to the night of the Exodus (Exod 12); (2) Jesus captured at night (Matt 26); (3) Joseph must flee in the night to avoid being seen; (4) Joseph gets up in the middle of bedtime to immediately take Mary and Jesus.

45 See: Wucherpfennig, *Josef der Gerechte*, 214.

46 On the parallels between the childhood of Moses and Jesus as persecuted messengers of God, see E. Nellessen, *Das Kind und seine Mutter. Struktur und Verkündigung des 2. Kapitels im Matthäusevangelium* (SBS 39; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk 1969) 89–91.

47 Cf. especially Num 16:24; 1 Sam 25:10; 2 Macc 5:27; 10:13; Ps 113:5 (LXX); Prov 25:9.

48 See: texts in Matthew using ἀναχωρέω cited above.

49 This was the opinion of Theodor Zahn (*Das Evangelium des Matthäus* [Leipzig: Deichert 1903] 103, n. 2). Wucherpfennig (*Josef der Gerechte*, 213) cites also a number examples from apocryphal literature, but these "idyllischen Darstellungen von der Flucht nach Ägypten" contribute nothing to the study of Matthew's narrative. For example, according to the apocryphal Gospel of Matthew (Ps-Matt 24), Joseph is accompanied on the journey by three boys, and Mary – by a girl. Meanwhile, after the Holy Family arrives in Egypt, the prince of Hermopolis and his army hold a solemn welcoming ceremony.

Egypt, since he had enough means not only to return to the land of Israel, but also to travel to Nazareth.⁵⁰

Matthew's theological commentary on the whole incident is a quote from the prophet Hosea (11:1). The original meaning of the prophetic oracle undoubtedly refers to all of Israel, but Matthew uses it to prepare the Jesus–Israel typology, which he will develop in the main part of his Gospel (cf. Matt 4:1–11). In the strict sense, the quotation is not from the Septuagint, which speaks of children here (τὰ τέκνα αὐτοῦ), but from the Hebrew Bible. The lapidary nature of the quote raises doubts about the subject to whom it refers. Most commentators accept its Christological character, thus recognising that the phrase: ἐξ Αἰγύπτου ἐκάλεσα τὸν υἱόν μου (Matt 2:15) points to Jesus. However, Wucherphennig⁵¹ takes the position that it should be understood as referring Joseph.

Joseph Instructed in a Dream

The figure of Jesus' guardian and the narratives about the patriarchs are linked by the recurring motif of dreams,⁵² although the connection appears to be rather ambiguous. In Matthew's descriptions, it involves the return of the heavenly instruction, which takes place during Joseph's nightly rest.⁵³ This theme occupies almost half of the material devoted to his character. Joseph experiences dreams, which serve as a kind of communication channel with God.⁵⁴

The evangelist never mentions God contacting Jesus' guardian during the day, when he is fully conscious. God's guidance is limited to the nighttime and is communicated through

50 Wucherphennig, *Josef der Gerechte*, 213.

51 Wucherphennig, *Josef der Gerechte*, 147. The German Jesuit argues that: "Das Zitat aus Hosea bezieht sich syntaktisch nämlich nicht auf Jesus, sondern auf Josef in Ägypten [...] Josef und der Engel sind die einzigen handelnden Figuren in der Erzählung. Der Bezug des Prophetenwortes lässt sich daher nicht auf die Person Jesu begrenzen." The postulate is as original as it is questionable. Almost all commentators read it Christologically; see Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 121; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 123; Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 36; Davies – Allison, *Matthew*, I, 262–263.

52 The subject of dreams present in the Old Testament narratives has recently spawned a collective work in Polish: G.M. Baran (ed.), *Sny prorocze, sny wieszczce, objawienia Boże przez sny w tradycji starotestamentalnej* (Tarnów: Biblos 2017). The foreign-language literature is very rich. More recent publications include E.J. Hamori – J. Stoki (eds.), *Perchance to Dream. Dream Divination in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (ANEM 21; Atlanta, GA: SBL Press 2018).

53 Joseph's dreams have already been studied before, cf. R. Gnuse, "Dream Genre in the Matthean Infancy Narratives," *NovT* 32 (1990) 97–120; M. Frenschkowski, "Traum und Traumdeutung im Matthäusevangelium: Einige Beobachtungen," *JAC* 41 (1998) 21–32. A number of publications are also given by A. Kubiś ("Biblijny obraz św. Józefa," 15); W.J. Subash, *The Dreams of Matthew 1:18–2:23. Tradition, Form, and Theological Investigation* (New York – Washington, DC – Bern: Lang 2012); D.S. Dodson, *Reading Dreams. An Audience-Critical Approach to the Dreams in the Gospel of Matthew* (Library of the New Testament Studies 397; London – New York: Clark 2009).

54 This belief was widespread in antiquity. There are also specific biblical accounts of the so-called incubation, i.e. the practice of sleeping within a sanctuary in order to receive special instruction (cf. 1 Kgs 3:5–15). For more on the phenomenon of incubation, see K.C. Patton, "A Great and Strange Correction: Intentionality, Locality, and Epiphany in the Category of Dream Incubation," *HR* 43/3 (2004) 194–223; G.H. Renberg, *Where Dreams May Come. Incubation Sanctuaries in the Graeco-Roman World* (RGRW 184; Leiden – Boston, MA: Brill 2017).

an angel. An angel appears to Joseph in a dream three times, describing his situation to him and giving him a mission to fulfil (Matt 1:20; 2:13, 19). Only the last description of a dream instruction does not mention the figure of an angel (Matt 2:22). As this is the last scene of a dream combined with instruction, it is possible to see the presence of an angel in it as well, although it is not explicitly indicated.⁵⁵ The evangelist's rather abbreviated message seems to be a result of the narrative dynamics of the whole scene (cf. Matt 2:12).⁵⁶ In any case, God continues to guide Joseph, who reaches Nazareth with the Child and His Mother (Matt 2:23).

Angelophany in Joseph's dream has exactly the same pattern in all descriptions and consists of four elements:⁵⁷ 1. Introductory phrase, 2. Appearance of the angel, 3. Delivering the Lord's command, 4. Explanation of the reason why the presented actions are necessary. Thus, in the shortest possible way, Joseph is given a task to perform and an explanation of the reason for this situation. The time horizon of Joseph's dreams is very short. They do not concern the distant future, but are concrete instructions for the near future.

The manner in which Joseph's dreams are described and the absence of any additional elements of his contact with God make it problematic to draw a parallel between his character and the patriarchs. When reading the genealogy, the reader will certainly note the potential connection between Joseph of Egypt and Jesus' guardian, as they both have a father named Jacob (Matt 1:16; cf. Gen 30:24–25). The similarity grows when Matthew recounts Joseph's dreams (Matt 1:20) – however, his dreams do not contain any symbolic elements. Mary's husband does not demonstrate wisdom in explaining of the meaning of mysterious figures or objects, like the son of the patriarch Jacob, because his dreams do not contain any symbolic images,⁵⁸ or at least the evangelist does not inform his readers of this. The evidence of the supernatural nature of his dreams is the presence of the angel, but he

55 Wucherpfennig (*Josef der Gerechte*, 207) overemphasises the difference between the first three instructions and the latter. In fact, there is no reason to treat this last instruction as given by an angel as well.

56 The *passivum divinum* (χρηματισθέντες, χρηματισθείς) present in both texts allows one to conjecture the presence of an angel.

57 Raymond E. Brown (*Birth of the Messiah*, 108), followed by Frenshkowski ("Traum und Traumdeutung," 30) supplement the above list with Joseph's action in fulfilment of the command, but this element in the strict sense is no longer part of Joseph's dream. In contrast, Wucherpfennig (*Josef der Gerechte*, 207) limits himself to four elements, characterising them as follows: "(1) Der Engel ist wie in der Septuaginta ἄγγελος κυρίου genannt. (2) Das Medium des Traumes ist mit κατ' ὄναρ bezeichnet. (3) Eine Form des Verbs φαίνομαι drückt aus, dass es sich um eine visuelle Erscheinung handelt. (4) Das Wort des Engels schließt den Traum ab."

58 Such dreams and their interpretation belong to the sapiential tradition. Only a person endowed with a special gift of wisdom can properly interpret symbolic dreams (Gen 37:1–11; 41–42; cf. Dan 2:1–45; 4:1–27). In ancient times, people with such abilities were commonly consulted in royal courts. Flavius Josephus mentions dream explainers in Herod's court and among the Essenes (*B.J.* 2.112–113). Dream interpreters were itinerant teachers or used their gift to serve the local community. A dream tractate is preserved in the Babylonian Talmud (*b Berakhot* 55a/56b), which mentions several dream interpreters. According to the account, there were 24 professional dream interpreters in Jerusalem alone.

too lacks any attributes beyond his affiliation with the God of Israel (ἄγγελος κυρίου).⁵⁹ It is not even clear where exactly the dream vision took place.

Nevertheless, Joseph is counted among the ranks of biblical figures with whom God shares knowledge unavailable to an ordinary person. Just like in Abraham's case, secrets about the future are revealed to him, and God does not want to take action before sharing his intentions with him first (cf. Gen 18:17–18). His situation seems to set him apart from the young Joseph the patriarch, who can use his dream visions to reach events in the distant future (Gen 37:5–7, 9–10; cf. 42:6). Jesus' earthly father experiences heavenly direction but cannot see the big picture of God's plan and intentions, only the next step he must take. His actions are a response to the dream visions he has, which he regards as God's guidance without questioning the ultimate reasons for this particular course of events.

The angel addresses him in a manner typical of such scenes in the Old Testament (μὴ φοβηθῆς – Matt 1:20 cf. 28:5; Gen 15:1; 21:17; 26:24, etc.). Man's encounter with the realm of God breeds terror and fear for one's life. In Joseph's case, however, the fear seems to be primarily about going against the Law (παραλαβεῖν [...] τὴν γυναῖκά σου). No mention is made of Joseph's fright at the vision itself,⁶⁰ and the angel proceeds to deliver the message without further introductions. In this scene, the angel only acts as a messenger and limits his actions to conveying the message.

In almost all of Matthew's angelophany scenes, the connection between the revelation and the action of the recipient is crucial. The dream instruction of the wise men is presented in a similar way, although in their case the figure of an angel is not mentioned (Matt 2:12). Matthew's account of Pilate's wife's dream is slightly different. Although the evangelist does not share the details of the dream with the reader in this case either, he nevertheless points out that it concerned Jesus and cost her much suffering (Matt 27:19). The motif of obedience is not fulfilled this time, as Pilate does not follow his wife's advice. It is also noteworthy that the goal of all the dreams presented in the first Gospel is protecting Jesus, but the last one fails to achieve it, as Pilate's wife was unable to prevent the conviction.

For humans, the realm of sleep remains a mysterious realm over which they have no control. At the same time, a suggestive dream can have a significant impact on the dreamer's life. This is particularly true for recurring dreams or dreams which are shared by many people regardless of time and space. Joseph's four dreams are not linked to either of these cases. Matthew does not inform the reader that anyone other than Joseph participated in the dream experience. Each dream of Jesus' guardian is a separate instruction

59 The second angelophany described by Matthew is much more detailed. It is known that at the Resurrection the angel rolled away the grave stone, on which he then sat, but he is also known for his shining lightning-like appearance and white robes (ἡ εἰδέα αὐτοῦ ὡς ἀστραπὴ καὶ τὸ ἔνδυμα αὐτοῦ λευκὸν ὡς χιῶν – Matt 28:2–3). However, a common element of both angelophanies is the angel's call to refrain from fear. For studies of other scenes involving angels in the Gospels, see A. Kubiś, "Człowiek czy anioł? Tożsamość młodzieńca w Markowej narracji o pustym grobie Jezusa (16,5–7)," *Przegląd Tomistyczny* 21 (2015) 385–420; A. Kubiś, "Znaczenie pozycji aniołów w grobie Jezusa w J 20,11," *BibAn* 6/3 (2016) 459–493.

60 The situation is different in Luke's angelophany, where both Zechariah and Mary initially react with fear at the sight of God's messenger (ταράσσω, διατάρασσω – Luke 1:12, 29).

that differs from the previous one. However, they form a logical sequence of precepts and explanations that share a common goal.⁶¹ They are aimed at protecting the life of the newborn Jesus and getting him safely to Nazareth, where he will get ready for his future mission. A prerequisite for the fulfilment of this goal is an attitude of faithful obedience on Joseph's part.⁶²

5. Husband and Father in the Shadow (Matt 1:25; 13:55)

Similarly to Luke, the narrator of the first Gospel hardly reveals Joseph's inner life. The reader knows nothing about his internal experiences related to the subsequent twists and turns that result from God's plans. In fact, Matthew does not make an assessment of Joseph's attitude either, letting the reader derive it from his indirect descriptions (*showing*). Jesus' guardian remains in the shadow of events and in the shadow of the One who sovereignly directs the individual events of salvation history. This narrative phenomenon once inspired a Polish writer, Jan Dobraczyński, who decided to describe the story of Joseph in his book.⁶³ It was recently recalled by Pope Francis in an apostolic letter devoted to St. Joseph.⁶⁴

a. *A sui generis* Head of the Family

As Luke's Gospel, Matthew's narrative of the Infancy Narrative leaves the reader with the understanding that Joseph retains his parental function. However, the evangelist does not include any text that mentions this other than some Nazarene people's reference to the time of Jesus' upbringing, when he was commonly known as the "carpenter's son" (ὁ τοῦ τέκτονος υἱός – Matt 13:55). The parallel text of the third evangelist differs not only in its invocation of Joseph by name (οὐχὶ υἱὸς ἐστὶν Ἰωσήφ οὗτος;), but also plays the role of a narrative hint concerning the ignorance of the people of Nazareth.⁶⁵ The reader of Luke's

61 The interconnectedness of the dreams is further emphasised by preparing their recipient for future instruction: "...be thou there [in Egypt] until I bring thee word" (Matt 2:13).

62 Joseph's dreams seem to connect to another theme, which was already presented above, that of righteousness. This can be seen especially in the context of the first dream, thanks to which he corrects his original intention. Until the angelic intervention, Joseph remains within the realm of God's commandments as recorded in the Torah. The dream enables him to go beyond this realm and directs him towards God's active guidance. Joseph remains righteous according to the criteria of Judaism, but through the dreams he develops a bond with God that is the privilege of only some biblical heroes; see Wucherpfennig, *Jesus der Gerechte*, 212.

63 J. Dobraczyński, *Cień Ojca* (Warszawa: PAX 1977).

64 See: Francis, *Patris Corde*, no. 7.

65 According to Joel B. Green (*The Gospel of Luke* [NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1997] 215), the question of the people from Nazareth is a manifestation of their "parochial understanding." Joseph Fitzmyer (*The Gospel according to Luke I–IX. Introduction, Translation, and Notes* [AB 28A; New Haven, CT – London: Yale University Press 2008] 535) writes simply of "common understanding" linking the question of the compatriots to positive admiration. On the other hand, John Nolland (*Luke 1:1–9:20* [WBC 35A; Dallas, TX: Word Books 2002] 199) sees it as "an objection to Jesus' claims."

Gospel is in a better position than Jesus' Galilean countrymen because the reader has been informed about the real identity of His Father (Luke 2:49). Thus, the question challenges rather than reveals Joseph's paternity, although in a sense it highlights his function as a legal guardian.⁶⁶

The first evangelist supplements his information in 13:55 with the name of the mother (Μαριάμ) and a list of brothers (Ἰάκωβος καὶ Ἰωσήφ καὶ Σίμων καὶ Ἰούδας), which has given rise to heated debates about the nature of Jesus' family.⁶⁷ This last motif ties the mention of Joseph the carpenter very strongly to the end of the first scene reporting the circumstances of the Messiah's birth (Matt 1:25). In the last sentence of this scene, the reader is informed that Joseph, when receiving his wife in his home. "The verb γινώσκω used in the imperfectum denotes an activity that lasts a long time or is repeated many times, and negated by the particle οὐκ excludes any activity to which it refers. In this case, the sense of marital "knowing" is clear and concerns sexual intercourse, with Matthew setting the end of this state for the moment of Jesus' birth (ἕως οὗ ἔτεκεν υἱόν). Although in some translations the phrase may imply that the activities of married life were undertaken after the birth of Jesus, exegetes mostly agree that the Greek text does not settle this issue.⁶⁸ This understanding also follows from the context of the story, the main purpose of which is to guarantee the virgin conception of Jesus.⁶⁹ It is essential for the evangelist that the reader finishes reading the Gospel with the conviction that the incarnation of Jesus was accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit as foretold by the prophet Isaiah (παρθένος 7:14 [LXX]). Joseph's physical paternity in relation to Jesus is therefore impossible.

The lapidary phrase about not knowing his wife until the birth of his son (οὐκ ἐγίνωσκεν αὐτήν ἕως οὗ ἔτεκεν υἱόν)⁷⁰ has exactly the same function as Luke's ὡς ἐνομιζέτο⁷¹

66 Cyrus H. Gordon ("Paternity at Two Levels," *JBL* 96 [1977] 101) sees Joseph as a "mediator of Jesus' genealogical identity."

67 The Church Fathers mostly rejected the possibility of further natural offspring from Mary. The tension existing in the text has been explained most often by considering that Jesus' brothers were sons of Joseph from his first marriage (*Protoevangelium of James* and St. Epiphanius of Salamis). Others indicated that the brothers were descendants of Joseph and Mary's immediate family (Jerome). However, the patristic sources also know of authors who spoke of natural children of the holy spouses (Helvidius, Jovinian, Bonosus, Bishop of Sardica); see Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 132, 605–607; J.P. Meier, "The Brothers and Sisters of Jesus in Ecumenical Perspective," *CBQ* 54 (1992) 1–28; R. Bauckham, "The Brothers and Sisters of Jesus: An Epiphonian Response to John P. Meier," *CBQ* 56 (1994) 687–700; J. Painter, "James 'the Brother of the Lord' and the Epistle of James," *Reading the Epistle of James. A Resource for Students* (eds. E.F. Mason – D.R. Lockett) (RBS 94; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature 2019) 231–251.

68 R.E. Brown *et al.* (eds.), *Mary in the New Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress 1978) 96.

69 Brown, *Mary in the New Testament*, 83–96; cf. A. Paciorek, *Ewangelia według świętego Mateusza*, 96.

70 Craig Keener (*The Gospel of Matthew. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* [Grand Rapids, MI – Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans 2009] 90) theorises about the poor couple sleeping in one bed who were able to restrain their sexual desires. The American exegete cites the opinions of other scholars (Goodman, Stambaugh and Balch) on this matter, but the lack of any details in Matthew's narrative makes these deliberations rough speculation at best.

71 Green (*The Gospel of Luke*, 189) calls this phrase a signal from Luke that it is "an assumption, wrongly made," and thus applies to the entire genealogy. In contrast, Fitzmyer (*The Gospel according to Luke I–IX*, 499)

(“as was supposed”) which, together with the scene of the Annunciation (Luke 1:25–36), clearly indicates the absence of a biological relationship between Joseph and Jesus (Luke 1:34). This is all the more evident as a list of His alleged ancestors was placed in close proximity to the theophany at Jordan, where the Father Himself proclaimed His filial identity (Luke 3:22).

Joseph’s characterisation needs to be supplemented by another important aspect, namely the bond that existed between the spouses throughout their lives. Matthew is silent about the prior circumstances in which the marriage contract between Joseph and Mary’s families took place.⁷² The narrative finds the protagonists at the stage when the marriage is already decided, and a premature pregnancy without Joseph’s involvement becomes a serious challenge to the relationship. There is no indication that Joseph had any prior knowledge that his marriage was part of God’s salvific plan. Only the angel’s intervention with regard to Joseph’s decision on the future fate of his wife reveals its extraordinary character. He will not be the biological father of the Child conceived in the womb of his Wife; moreover, her blessed state is due to the action of the Holy Spirit. The rest of their life together is marked by marital asceticism and total devotion to his Wife and Son. Their safety dictates all of Joseph’s decisions. Matthew is silent about Joseph, Mary and Jesus’ life together in Galilee. However, the last mention of them made by people from Nazareth suggests they led ordinary everyday family life, which did not indicate (at least not directly) the extraordinary nature of this relationship.

Hence, Joseph’s relationship with Mary can be arranged in the following sequence: Love – decision of a permanent union (1:18) – bewilderment and uncertainty – decision to send Mary off (1:19) – obedience to God’s plan (1:24) – no marital intercourse [at least] until the birth of the Son (1:25) – caring for the Wife and the Son (protection, support, leadership) (2:13–15, 19–21) – settling in Nazareth and daily marital and family life (2:22–23; cf. Matt 13:55).

relates it only to the first object (ὁν υἱός [...] Ἰωσήφ). François Bovon (*Luke 1. A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50* [Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 2002] 136), on the other hand, sees two ways to understand Luke’s expression: (1) ‘He was considered to be Joseph’s biological son’ (but I, Luke, know this is not true); (2) ‘He was rightfully declared to be Joseph’s son’ (and I, Luke, agree with this). The Swiss exegete favours the latter solution because, in his view, the former would defeat the purpose of including the genealogy in the story. So does Nolland (*Luke 1:1–9:20*, 171) and many others. Michael Wolter (*The Gospel according to Luke* [Tübingen – Waco, TX: Mohr Siebeck – Baylor University Press 2016] I, 178–179) mentions that the identical phrase casting doubt on someone’s paternity can be found in many extra-biblical texts: e.g., in Appian (*Libyca* [= *Punica*] 111.525), in Pausanias 2.10.3, as well as in Favorinus of Arles, *De exilio*, 379.8, and in Harpocration 68.18.

⁷² The historical background of Jesus’ time allows one to imagine the Jewish wedding ceremony, which included a wide variety of elements strongly stretched over time. The first, still informal, act was the preliminary agreement on the terms (תנאים – *tenāim*), which allowed for verification that the families of the future spouses saw no obstacles to the marriage. The details of the betrothal and the marriage itself were also determined on this occasion; see B. Cohen, “On the Theme of Betrothal in Jewish and Roman Law,” *PAAJR* 18 (1948) 70, esp. 78; S. Zeitlin, “Personal Status in Israel,” *JQR* 49/2 (1958) 125–126.

b. Joseph the Silent

The narrative conveyed to the reader does not consist solely of a positive message i.e. providing some concrete information about the character. Sometimes a more meaningful way to characterise a person is the continued absence of certain information.⁷³ In Joseph's case, such a charged dimension is his attitude of silence. Despite his active participation in the narrative and interaction with the divine sphere, Joseph was not given his own voice. Throughout the entire description of Jesus' childhood, his guardian does not utter a single word, which is indeed characteristic of both evangelists. Thus, silence became an essential element of his depiction, indicating an important spiritual dimension, namely the receptive dimension of his life. Joseph is active insofar as it is required of him. He does exactly what he has been asked to do.⁷⁴

Although Matthew shares with the reader information about Joseph's communication with the angel, he does not record any utterance by Joseph himself. Even where recording the character's internal dialogue seems perfectly natural, the evangelist only notes that Joseph was considering the question of his wife's dismissal (ταῦτα δὲ αὐτοῦ ἐνθυμηθέντος – Matt 1:20). The description of his reception of Mary with her Son and naming him in accordance with the angel's message consists of just two short sentences containing three general verbs explaining the phrase ἐποίησεν ὡς προσέταξεν αὐτῷ ὁ ἄγγελος: παραλαμβάνω, [οὐκ] γινώσκω, καλέω (Matt 1:24–25). Matthew applied an identical narrative strategy to Joseph's actions during the flight to Egypt and the family's stay there. The pattern is repeated during their return to the Land of Israel. Short, simple sentences do not go beyond what is absolutely necessary.

Joseph's silence naturally focuses the reader's attention on the only form of communication that has been confirmed, namely the interaction between the characters of the narrative. The difference is that the angel's activity includes specific words, while Mary's spouse responds with action.⁷⁵ Wucherpfennig considers silence an important sign of righteousness, but this argument can hardly be considered accurate.⁷⁶ Rather, it should be noted that

73 See: J.A. Darr, "Narrator as Character: Mapping a Reader-Oriented Approach to Narration in Luke-Acts," *Semeia* 65 (1993) 54.

74 Matthew does not suggest that Joseph actually never spoke a word. After all, God's plan included naming Jesus (Matt 1:21), and this rite required the father to pray publicly. The naming ceremony was combined with circumcision and entailed the active participation of the father; see *EncJud* IV, 733–734.

75 The third evangelist uses silence much more extensively. It is not only Joseph who is silent, Zechariah is also deprived of his voice for some time (Luke 1:20), at least until he accepts God's plans with faith (Luke 1:68–79).

76 See: Wucherpfennig, *Jesus der Gerechte*, 203. One can agree with the German Jesuit, building on Bar Kapar's statement from the 3rd century that "the righteous are men of action," but does this simultaneously mean a lack of verbal communication? Much better is the comparison of the righteous to God, who "speaks little and does much" (Pirkei Avot 1:15), but this statement does not explain Joseph's complete silence. Similarly, Theophrastus' classical work from the 4th century BC: *Characters* (ed. J. Diggle) (Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2022) esp. paragraphs on garrulity [the chatterbox, 73–77] and chattiness [the talker, 87–89]), suggests a proper balance between the words spoken and the actions taken. However, it does not call for total silence. Likewise, the author of the Book of Sirach sees wisdom in remaining silent at the right time (20:7).

very few words are spoken throughout the narrative of Jesus' early life, and only certain characters have the privilege of speaking. The one who speaks the most is the messenger of God, the evangelist also included one utterance of the wise men (2:2), Herod (2:8)⁷⁷ and the scribes (2:5–6). Compared to them, the figure of John the Baptist from the beginning of the Gospel proper makes an exceptionally extensive statement (Matt 3:2–3, 7–12, 14; 11:3), as does the devil in the temptation scene (Matt 4:3, 6, 9). Even the disciples, who are present in the narrative throughout almost the entire Gospel, speak little and usually strictly in reference to the teaching and person of Jesus.

During the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew's Jesus encourages all his present and future disciples to exercise restraint in prayer (βαττολογέω, πολυλογία – Matt 6:7). This attitude is motivated by God the Father's omniscience of human needs (οἶδεν γὰρ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὧν χρεῖαν ἔχετε – Matt 6:8). However, Jesus' teaching according to Matthew is not limited to weighing one's words in prayer. The first evangelist's own tradition includes logia that are a warning to Christians not to speak words thoughtlessly, as everyone will be held accountable for what they say (ῥῆμα ἀργόν, ἀποδίδωμι – Matt 12:36). In connection with the Last Judgement scene, it is clear that a disciple of Christ must know the weight of their words and deeds (Matt 25:31–46), which in the most perfect sense are simply the realisation of God's love. In other words, the disciple's words and actions must be integrated and in line with God's plans (Matt 7:21). In the case of Joseph, the absence of words only reinforces the complete subordination of his actions to the will of God.⁷⁸

Joseph's attitude evokes associations with the Genesis account of the biblical patriarchs, as they also reveal their character traits through action. Nevertheless, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob cannot be reduced only to their deeds. Although all three of them do speak little, and the lack of words is very significant in many scenes, their words play an equally important role in the narratives concerning them.⁷⁹ Meanwhile, Joseph's characterisation seems to be the closest to Noah's character descriptions. This is because the narrative of the Flood does not contain any of his statements. Only the final curses and blessings change this situation (Gen 7:25–27). Until the last scene, the dynamics of the story correspond to those portrayed by Matthew in the Infancy Narrative. God makes certain demands on Noah, and he follows every word he hears. The parallel is not only formal. For Noah's obedience saves the human race from extinction, just as Joseph's obedience saves the newborn Jesus from

⁷⁷ In Herod's case, of course, it is known that he undertook an intensive interrogation of both Jewish scholars (2:4) and wise men from the East (2:7), but Matthew does not quote the content of these conversations. Herod also issues the order to kill children in the Bethlehem area, but it is only descriptive as well, since the narrator does not let him speak (2:16).

⁷⁸ Wucherpfennig, *Jesus der Gerechte*, 203.

⁷⁹ See: Zdzisław Pawłowski's ("Próba Abrahama. Lektura narracyjna Rdz 22. The Test of Abraham. The Narrative Reading of Genesis 22," *Biblica et Patristica Thorunensia* 4 [2011] 37–62) excellent narrative analysis of the trial of Abraham (Gen 21). The author emphasises the extremely important role of the main character's words throughout the narrative, *ibidem*, 39–40.

death. Moreover, God Himself calls Noah δίκαιος (*ṣaddiq*), which corresponds to the characterisation of Joseph in Matt 1:19.⁸⁰

Only then is Joseph's silence captured as characterisation. Joseph has his biblical model in the patriarch Noah, but Joseph's silence goes even deeper than Noah's. The Saviour has been entrusted to him because he is willing to endure hardships without words. The silence shows him alone in constant conversation with God.

6. Final Classification and Evaluation

Joseph's character in Matthew's Gospel is not particularly complex. The evangelist undoubtedly subordinates it to the main theme of his work, i.e. portraying the figure of Jesus. Nonetheless, in the narrative of the Infancy Narrative, he plays the leading role of the righteous Israelite who, to the best of his understanding, seeks to please God and keep His Law. The salvation plan prepared by God changes his notions of piety and righteousness and directs him towards unfamiliar grounds. Without hesitation and without protest, Joseph follows the revelation given to him thus entering a new level of righteousness. Although the narrative shows him primarily with a receptive attitude – as an obedient recipient of God's instructions – the untold events from his marital, family and social life suggest a character of an integrated nature, capable of enacting God's plans, if necessary even immediately upon receiving the command (Matt 2:14).

Joseph's inner life remains almost unknown to the reader. Through the lips of the angel, the evangelist reveals Joseph's fear of transgressing the rules of the Torah, which ultimately means an attitude of fear of God (Matt 1:20), and his fear of the threat posed by Archelaus (Matt 2:22). In the latter case, however, the evangelist emphasises that he was led to Nazareth not by fear of the king, but by a heavenly command. The only important motif of development at the spiritual level is the transition from righteousness (justice) at the level of the Law to righteousness understood as the fulfilment of God's will (Matt 1:20–24). However, throughout the narrative, he undergoes a series of rapid transformations – from an almost fulfilled spouse embedded in the customs of Israel, through an ascetic companion of his pregnant wife, to a husband who, at least in the opinion of his neighbours, led the ordinary life of a devout Israelite and hired himself out as a carpenter. At the same time, the evangelist emphasises his constancy and obedience resembling the Old Testament patriarchs. Thus, Joseph cannot be reduced to only a secondary character, and in Matt 1–2 to a character completely subordinated to the main objectives of the first gospel. His individual qualities classify him rather in the category of a link (*ficelle*) – a typical character serving the main purposes of the narrative, and in the context of the Infancy Narrative, he

⁸⁰ Wucherpennig (*Jesus der Gerechte*, 206–207) seeks sources of inspiration for the characterisation of Joseph also in the Graeco-Roman world, invoking the ideal of an ancient philosopher, but the evangelist's intentional use of these traditions is rather unlikely.

can even be considered a figure (*card*) – a character who supports and illuminates the main protagonist, i.e. Jesus.⁸¹

Joseph's attitude in light of Matthew's narrative assumptions is essentially adequate, but not without some twists. The human dilemmas of the pious Israelite and his fear of the ruler give him the characteristics of a living person and make him a multidimensional rather than a flat character.⁸² In this way, Joseph also becomes a model for the contemporary readers of the Gospel who, following God to the best of their understanding, remain faithful despite the many adversities and challenges of life, and, guided by His inspiration, accept the role that God has assigned to them.

Using the proposal of Cornelis Bennema,⁸³ the characterisation of Joseph can be expressed as follows:

Joseph – the righteous one of the Old and New Covenants, a descendant of the Patriarchs and Legal father of Jesus	
Narrative Appearances	Matt 1–2; 13:55
Origin	Bethlehem
	House of Jesse, son of Jacob
Upbringing	Profession: carpenter
External goods	Epithets, reputation Narrator: A faithful follower of Judaism, a loving spouse, a responsible parent
	Age, marital status Mature man, married
	Socioeconomic status, wealth Poorer middle class
	Place of residence/operation Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Egypt, Nazareth
	Occupation, positions held Carpenter
	Group affiliation, friends No data

⁸¹ See: W.J. Harvey, *Character and the Novel* (London: Chatto & Windus 1965) 52–73.

⁸² Classic character categories proposed by Edward M. Forster (*Aspects of the Novel* [New York: Penguin 1976] 73–81).

⁸³ Bennema, *A Theory of Character in New Testament*, 111.

Speech and actions	<p>Meetings with the main character Jesus' guardian Fulfilment of paternal duties towards his son in accordance with the provisions of the Law</p> <hr/> <p>Interaction with other characters: <i>Miriam:</i> – rise above the provisions of the Law – care for his wife and son – preparation of the journey to Egypt – preparation of the return to the Land of Israel – finding refuge in Nazareth in Galilee <i>Angel of the Lord:</i> – acceptance of the message – silent obedience</p>
Death	No data
Character analysis	<p>Complexity – typical character (ficelle) A small number of features, subordinate to the plot</p> <hr/> <p>Development – no development. Constancy in faithfulness to his function as a pious Israelite, spouse and father</p> <hr/> <p>Inner life: – constancy – determination – authority – love – faithfulness to God – the bond with his wife and son</p>
Character classification	<p>Degree of characterisation Indirect characterisation – <i>showing</i>. Appearances are limited almost exclusively to Matt 1–2, i.e. the childhood of Jesus</p>
Character evaluation	<p>As regards the point of view of the author and the main character – Jesus: – Adequate attitude – Submission to God's plans – Faithful love toward Jesus and His Mother</p> <hr/> <p>As regards the role in the plot: Silent and loyal implementer of God's plans Guardian of Jesus and Mary</p>
Significance of the character	<p>Characteristic value of the character: – Loving and faithful spouse of Mary and father of Jesus – Silent implementer of God's will – the righteous one of the Old and New Covenants</p>

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