



GOD IN THE ARTS

Editor: The Revd Michael Burgess (Parish Pump, UK) continues his series on God in the Arts with a look at - 'St Joseph the Carpenter' by Georges de la Tour. It now hangs in The Louvre in Paris.

The hidden years

When St Paul wrote about the birth and humanity of Jesus to the Philippians, he described it as an emptying and a humbling. Jesus humbled Himself, he wrote, 'and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.' In obedience and love Jesus followed the will of His Father through His ministry

from baptism to the cross and Easter beyond.

But what about that period called 'the hidden years', after the Holy Family's return from Egypt? The Gospels tell us of only one event in that period leading up to adulthood: the pilgrimage to Jerusalem when Jesus was 12. For the rest of those 30 years, He lived with Mary and Joseph 'growing in wisdom and in divine and human favour.' Just as He followed His heavenly Father's will in His ministry, so in these growing years He followed the guidance and teaching of Mary and Joseph.

This month's painting highlights one moment in those years of growth: '*St Joseph the Carpenter*' by Georges de la Tour. 'Highlights' is the right word, because this painting captures the strong contrast of light and darkness. Georges de la Tour lived from 1593 to 1652 in Lorraine. He was part of a Franciscan-led revival in that area, and this work from the 1640s captures St Joseph and the Christ-Child with Franciscan tenderness and insight.

We can see the tools of Joseph's trade on the ground. He leans over them, hard at work on a piece of wood. Jesus is sitting by his side, his face lit by the candle, which lights up the carpenter's shop. As well as contrasting light and dark, there is the contrast of young and old, and the thought that the child learning from the old man is also the one who can teach us. De la Tour was particularly fascinated by light and shadows cast by a candle or a lantern. Here the artist shows the candlelight illuminating the face of the child Jesus who will grow up to the Light of the world.

As this New Year begins, we can think back to the light from the Bethlehem manger we celebrated at Christmas. We can look ahead to the light shining from the adult Jesus through His teaching and healing. Here in these hidden years, we

can celebrate the light of wisdom and divine favour, as Luke calls them, shining on the face of the child Jesus. We pray for that light to guide us through this New Year. When the way ahead may look dark and uncertain, let us pray that God's light will make clear the path ahead.

The graphic is a faithful photographic reproduction of a two-dimensional, public domain work of art. It can be found at:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Georges_de_La_Tour._St._Joseph,_the_Carpenter.JPG