

Book Club Discussion Guide

Some stories give us every detail. Joseph's does not.

The Gospels tell us remarkably little about the man entrusted with raising Jesus. They record his lineage, his betrothal to Mary, his dreams, his obedience, the flight into Egypt, the family's return, and a handful of later moments. They do not record a single word Joseph spoke.

That silence leaves enormous space, and it matters what fills it. Some events in this novel come directly from the Gospel accounts. Others draw on ancient history and on later traditions surrounding the Holy Family. Still others, including characters, conversations, relationships, motives, and whole events, are invention.

This book is not offered as another Gospel. It is an attempt to imagine the human lives taking place between its verses.

Which is where the argument starts.

Let's Start With Joseph

1. Before reading this novel, what was your picture of Joseph? Did the man you met in these pages change it, and what surprised you most?
2. Here is the uncomfortable one. Would you have married Mary?
Answer from where Joseph stood, before the angel explained anything, knowing only what he knew.
3. Rank these four from bravest to most reckless: believing the angel, taking Mary home, leaving the girls in Bethlehem, running for Egypt.
Commit to an order before anyone explains themselves. Then compare.

Mary, Melcha, and the Women Around Joseph

4. Did you like Mary? Not admire. Not revere. Like. What made her human to you, or kept her from it?
5. Joseph believes he is Mary's protector. Where is she plainly the stronger of the two?
6. Which woman changed Joseph most: Mary, Melcha, his mother, one of his daughters, or Anna? What did she give him that he could not have found alone?

Faith, Fear, and Some Terrible Choices

7. Put the rabbis on trial. Jehu and Hezron deliberately keep from Joseph what they know about him. Were they protecting him or using him?
Appoint someone to defend them and someone to prosecute. Everybody else votes at the end.
8. Which of Joseph's decisions did you most disagree with? Did the novel eventually bring you around, or do you still think he got it wrong?
9. Joseph repeatedly acts on dreams. Strip away your knowledge of how the story ends. Is that faith, recklessness, or both?

10. Scripture gives Joseph no words at all. If you could read one page of his journal, which night would you want it from?

Herod, Rome, and the World Behind Christmas

11. Herod is capable of horror, and the novel does not make him a monster in every scene. Did that make him more frightening, less, or simply more believable?
12. We know the child survives. The characters do not. Where did knowing the ending create more tension for you rather than less?
13. Joseph had family in Bethlehem. So why a manger? What does this novel's answer do to the version you grew up with?

Now Argue About the Author

14. Scripture sometimes gives an entire episode in two sentences. How much freedom should a novelist have to imagine what happened between them? Where exactly would you draw the line?
15. If you could force the author to cut one invented scene or character for going too far, what goes? And if you could demand one scene Scripture leaves unexplored, what do you want to see?

Before Everybody Goes Home

16. Which character would you least want beside you on the road to Egypt?

And before anyone reaches for a coat, go around the room and finish this without thinking too long. "I came into this book thinking Joseph was _____. I finished it thinking he was _____."

Want to go deeper?

A free six-session Bible study exploring Joseph, Scripture, obedience, protection, and the world behind the novel is available at MichaelDupontAuthor.com.