

# Joseph The Guardian

A painting by Kendra Burton

*Dedicated to those who tenderly care for all of God's children.*

**This painting is intended to help people appreciate all of the wonderful, caring fathers in the world who are guardians of children who may not have been born as their own. It also symbolizes all who care for children, devoting time, talents, and love in making the world a better place for them and future generations.**

For nearly 20 years I felt impressed that I should do a painting of Joseph, the Guardian of Jesus. I searched for someone to represent Joseph who would have a kind, tender, heartfelt expression, with the look of awe and wonder in his eyes. His hands needed to be strong, yet gentle and loving. When I finally found the right person, he was honored, saying that his own middle name was Joseph.

After completing the painting, I showed it to a friend who had adopted several children. One of her sons had been teased at school about being adopted. She prayed for an answer that he could understand and accept. Being directed to the scriptures, she let them fall open. She began reading and realized it was the story about the birth of Christ. She gained new insight about Joseph caring for Jesus. It had never before occurred to her until that moment that the Savior of the world, the greatest and most perfect of all, had an "adopted" father, Joseph. She told this to her son. He was happy and completely satisfied with the answer because it made him feel more like Jesus.

My immediate and extended family members have adopted children with different backgrounds from many parts of the world. As I have watched these adoptive fathers tenderly care for the little ones, my heart has been touched by their unselfish love and devotion. Joseph represents them.

Before I began painting, I talked to an author and expert on Hebrew studies. She said that holding the child on the knees was part of a traditional ceremony to accept and welcome a child into a family. She pointed out several significant aspects of the composition including the baby's hand encompassed by Joseph's right hand, being the hand of the covenant. Following the lines of the heads to the wrist of Joseph's right hand, one can see, symbolically, the figure of a heart. There are also two main light sources. One is from the upper left, reaching from Father in Heaven, diagonally in the direction of Joseph's eyes to the eyes of the Christ Child. The other light source is radiating from the child, creating the shine in Joseph's eyes and the glow on his face.

While painting, I felt a particular closeness and direction from an uncle who passed away a few years earlier. Then I realized he, too, had adopted his eldest daughter after marrying her mother. He loved them both throughout his life and his guiding influence in the final stages of the painting witnessed his sweet devotion to them and the significant role he fulfilled in their lives. Many "blended" families find comfort in the message of Joseph.

I completed the painting one week before our nine year old, handicapped twin daughter passed away. I contemplated all of the many "Josephs," men and women, neighbors, teachers and friends, who were there watching out for her when she needed so much help. They truly gave unselfishly on behalf of our dear little child, fulfilling the scripture that says, "...Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these...ye have done it unto me", Matt. 25:40. Again, their love and kindness to her were symbolic of Joseph with Jesus.

One man stood before the painting with tears in his eyes. His newest grandchild had been born two days earlier. He said the face of Joseph captured the tender feelings of awe, love and gratitude that he had seen in his son's eyes, as a new father, holding his own tiny, precious child in his arms.

I hope that as people see this work of art, their hearts will be touched, that they will see what each of us can be as we follow Joseph's example in caring for all of God's children.

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