

The Dream of Saint Joseph



This week I have chosen to compare two different depictions of Matthew 1:20 from the 18th century. On the left is a piece by French painter Pierre Parrocel, and on the right is a piece by German painter Anton Raphael Mengs. Both share the title *The Dream of Saint Joseph*.

Both paintings share a similar composition with the figure of Joseph in repose occupying the bottom left and the figure of the angel appearing over him in the top right. However, differences in personal style and interpretation of the event give each piece a distinct character. Though, mainly I would like to focus on the expression of Joseph.

In Parrocel's piece we see the event rendered in a light and airy tone with bright lighting, and faint pinks and reds. Joseph sleeps comfortably on a cushion with a peaceful and unworried expression. To me Parrocel's piece is the end of the dream after the angel has delivered God's message and quieted Joseph's confusion and fear over Mary's pregnancy.

On the other hand Mengs renders his piece in a darker style with earthier tones and deep shading on Joseph contrasted by stark whites and golds on the angel. Joseph sleeps upright, tools of his trade in hand, as if he fell asleep lost in thought. His face is wrinkled with worry. In Mengs' piece I see the beginning of the dream. The angel of the Lord has just now come to Joseph as he drifts off to sleep. He has stayed up far past his usual bed time anguishing over the news of Mary's pregnancy, distracting himself with work.

