



Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes (Spanish, 1746-1828)
St. Joseph's Dream (El Sueño de San José), ca. 1771-73
Mural painting transferred to canvas
50.4 x 36.6 inches (128 x 93 cm.)
Museum of Zaragoza, Spain

Francisco Goya (1746-1828) is considered one of the most important Spanish artists of the late 18th and early 19th century. He is known for both his paintings and his series of etchings. His life and career parallel a very tumultuous time in Spain, going from a period of enlightenment, to French occupation, to a "reign of terror." His later work portrays this political turmoil.

Background on Goya

Born in Fuendetodos, Aragon, Goya later moved with his family to Zaragoza where by the age of 14 he was studying painting. In 1774 he joined the Royal workshops, drawing tapestry “cartoons” and subsequently painting portraits of the aristocracy. He soon became the official court painter to the kings. After an illness in 1793, which left him deaf, his work began to take a dark and pessimistic turn - influenced by his precarious mental health and his strong feelings about the political upheavals in his country. He completed a number of series of etchings *Los Caprichos*; *Disasters of War*; *La Tourmaquia*; and *Los Disparates*. His paintings too depicted atrocities of war with one of his best known titled *The Third of May, 1808* which portrays an actual event. Between 1820-1823 Goya retreated to the country and painted a disturbing series of sinister and horrifying frescoes on the walls of his house now called the *Black Paintings*. In 1824 he moved to France, spending his final years in Bordeaux and Paris.

The Dream of St. Joseph Commission

This is an early painting by Goya, one of seven scenes commissioned for a private chapel by the Duke of Sobradiel for his Palace in Zaragoza, painted between the years 1771-1773. Goya had just finished painting frescos in the nearby Basilica de Nuestra Señora del Pilar the previous year. Goya traveled to Italy in 1770 and would have become familiar with many paintings in the grand churches of Rome. For *The Dream of St. Joseph*, Goya was influenced by a painting by the French painter Simon Vouet, via a print (after Vouet’s painting) by Michel Dorigny. The composition is very similar: In the middle left background we see a pregnant and introspective Mary seated against a wall. In the center foreground we see the archangel Gabriel flying down and placing his right hand on the sleeping Joseph’s shoulder, while his left hand gestures up towards the heavens. The slumbering Joseph is wrapped in a heavy vibrant gold cloak or blanket, with his head propped up on his left arm, and a red blanket and walking stick at his feet. Goya, and previously Vouet, have both painted a “youngish” version of Joseph.

A dream is a difficult image to portray. Goya has filled the center of the painting with a very active, winged Gabriel, while Mary and Joseph are both very still. Gabriel’s motion and gestures articulate to the viewer that this important message is coming directly from God. Goya’s version is taken from the book of Matthew 1:18-23 (the version below is from *The Message* by Eugene H. Peterson)

The Birth of Jesus

18-19 The birth of Jesus took place like this. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. Before they came to the marriage bed, Joseph discovered she was pregnant. (It was by the Holy Spirit, but he didn’t know that). Joseph, chagrined but noble, determined to take care of things quietly so Mary would not be disgraced.

20-23 While he was trying to figure a way out; he had a dream. God’s angel spoke in the dream: “Joseph, son of David, don’t hesitate to get married. Mary’s pregnancy is Spirit-conceived. God’s Holy Spirit has made her pregnant. She will bring a son to birth, and when she does, you, Joseph, will name him Jesus - ‘God saves’ - because he will save his people from their sins.” This would bring the prophet’s embryonic sermon to full term: Watch for this - a virgin will get pregnant and bear a son; They will name him Immanuel (Hebrew for “God is with us”).

Some time before 1926, the fresco painting was “lifted” from the wall and transferred to canvas. This transfer is a difficult conservation technique and often the painting is left with condition problems. Subsequently this painting underwent conservation treatment in 1966 and again in 1974. The painting is now part of the collection of the Museum of Zaragoza, Spain.