

Joseph of Arimathea

Read Matthew 27:57-61

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

Joseph was from Arimathea, a village just north of Jerusalem. The Bible indicates he was a wealthy man. He served on the Sanhedrin, the Jewish supreme council of 71 members. He was a secret disciple of Jesus out of fear of the other Jewish leaders who were against Jesus. He openly associated with Jesus only after his death on the cross as all 4 Gospels record his participation in the burial of Jesus.

Tradition and Legends

Joseph was an uncle of Mary, the mother of Jesus. When Jesus was a young boy Joseph took Jesus on a trip to England to buy tin. He brought the Christian message to England after Pentecost and brought with him the Holy Grail [the cup Jesus used at the Last Supper].

The Glastonbury Thorn (*Crataegus monogyna* 'Biflora') is a variety of hawthorn that flowers twice a year in winter and spring - or, given suitable conditions, at Christmas and Easter. The legend states that Joseph of Arimathea became a missionary after the death of Jesus and was eventually sent to England to preach the Gospel. He took with him the Holy Grail, and his pilgrim's staff. After landing in England he made his way to Glastonbury. When he stuck his pilgrim's staff in the ground at Wearyall Hill it overnight turned into a flowering thorn tree. In time Joseph converted thousands to Christianity, including, it is said, 18,000 in a single day at the town of Wells. He also converted Ethelbert, the local king. Joseph went on to found Glastonbury Abbey. He became so well-known and admired that when he died at the age of 86, his body was carried by six kings in the funeral procession. The Glastonbury Thorn is said to flower on Christmas Day every year, and blossom from the plant in the churchyard of St John's Church Glastonbury is said to be used to decorate the Christmas breakfast table of the Queen each year. St John's Church has a stained glass window commemorating Joseph of Arimathea.