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**Translation by Rev. Michael J. Houser**  
May 16, 2013

In his work *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, Pope Benedict XVI discusses the relationship between Mary and Joseph at the time of the Incarnation of Our Lord.<sup>1</sup> The English translation is not an entirely accurate rendering of the German original, and can lead to some confusion regarding the nature of the marriage which in fact already existed between Mary and Joseph at that time.

The original German text could be translated thus:

Matthew informs us first that Mary was betrothed to Joseph. According to the Jewish law which was in force, the betrothal already established a legal union of the two partners, so that Mary could be called Joseph's wife, even when the "bringing-home," (*Heimholung*) which established the marital community, had not yet taken place. As betrothed, "the wife lived still in the parents' house and remained under the *patria potestas* (power of the father). After a year, the bringing-home or conclusion of the marriage followed." (Gnilka, *Das Mattäusevangelium. Erster Teil*, p. 17) At this time Joseph must have realized that Mary "was carrying a child from the Holy Spirit." (Mt 1:18) (*Jesus von Nazareth*, p. 48, translation mine)

This makes it clear that in fact there was a legal bond of marriage between the husband and wife even before they lived together. The English edition, on the other hand, obscures this by saying that Joseph "had not yet taken her into his home—the step which established the married state." (*Jesus of Nazareth*, p. 38) While the "marital community" (*die eheliche Gemeinschaft*) was established when the wife was taken into the husband's home, the marital state, in a legal sense, already existed with the "betrothal," which, as Fr. Tosato's work makes clear, would be more accurately rendered as "espousals," since it was not a "betrothal" in the sense of a mere engagement to be married.

Similarly, the English translation follows the RSV in rendering Mary's question to the angel at the Annunciation as "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" (*Jesus of Nazareth*, p. 34) The German, on the other hand, reads more correctly, "How shall this come about, since I know no man?" (*Jesus von Nazareth*, p. 44: "Wie soll das geschehen, da ich keinen Mann erkenne?") The original text of Pope Benedict's work, then, agrees that Mary and Joseph were in fact legally married at the time of the Annunciation.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Ratzinger/Benedikt XVI, *Jesus von Nazareth. Prolog: Die Kindheitsgeschichten* (Freiburg: Herder, 2012). English edition: *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, trans. Philip J. Whitmore (New York: Image, 2012).