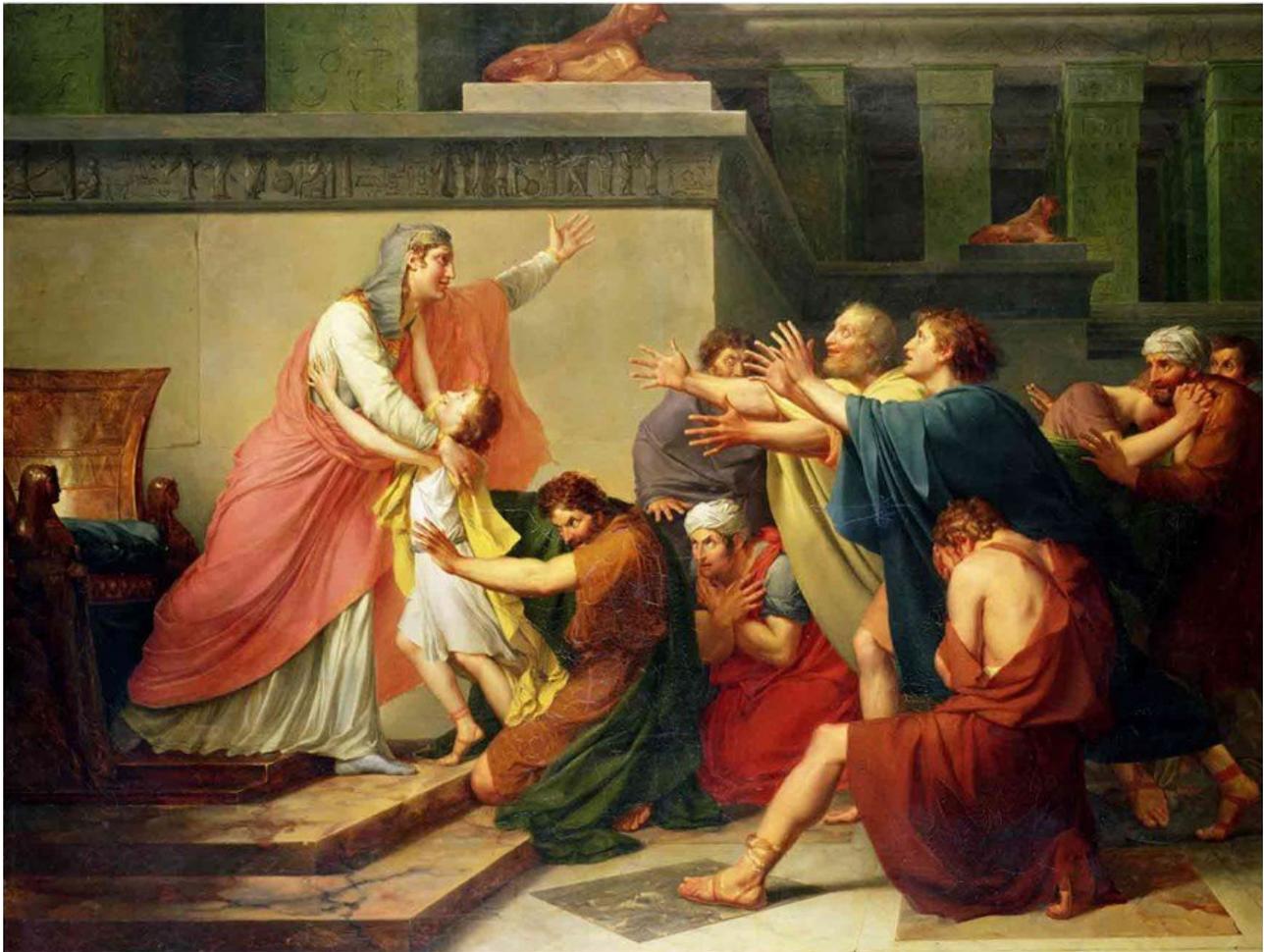


# Arts & Faith

Art and Commentary for Epiphany +7C by [Hovak Najarian](#)



*Joseph Recognized by Brothers*, oil on canvas, c.1800,  
Francois Gerard, 1770-1817.

**J**oseph was born at a time when his father, Jacob, was old and he became the favorite son. This favoritism caused resentment among his brothers. Negative feelings resulted also from a dream Joseph had that was interpreted to mean someday his brothers would bow down to him. Joseph was seventeen years old when he went to his brothers as they were tending sheep. When his brothers saw him coming they plotted to kill him but then instead, sold him as a slave to a passing merchant who was going to Egypt. In Egypt, Joseph, interpreted Pharaoh's dream which revealed there would be seven years of abundance followed by seven years of famine. With Joseph's guidance, grain was stored during the time of abundance and Egypt was well prepared. When famine was experienced in Canaan, Joseph's father sent his brothers to Egypt to purchase food. Unbeknownst to them, Joseph in the ensuing years had become a high Egyptian official and he was the one they would have to meet.

Francois Gerard's painting, *Joseph Recognized by Brothers*, depicts the moment Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers. The brothers are shown displaying a range of emotions; some are kneeling and in body language seem to be exhibiting guilt and remorse for what they did. In contrast to this, two of the brothers and Joseph are reaching out to each other in joy. The brothers at the far right are staying back and holding each other. Perhaps they are fearful of what Joseph might do. The young boy reaching and looking up at Joseph is likely a nephew who came with his father. Joseph places his hand gently on the child's shoulder.

In 1663, France initiated the Prix de Rome which gave artists (and later, musicians and architects) an opportunity to study in Italy. The purpose of this award was to put promising artists in contact with Roman culture and the masters of the Italian Renaissance. One outcome of this was a trend toward classicism in French art.

In the late 1700s after years of turmoil, the French Revolution overthrew King Louis XVI and Napoleon Bonaparte took charge ultimately as 1st Consul. Classicism in art suited Napoleon perfectly and he appointed Jacques Louis David, an avid classicist, to be the head of the French Academy of art. David's art promoted what Napoleon favored; discipline, honor, sacrifice strength of character and devotion of one's efforts to the state.

Though classicism was sanctioned by the state, the concept of romanticism was always present in art and Napoleon's campaign in Egypt (1798-1801) generated great interest in Egyptology. It set off fashion fads in both France and England, and piqued the interest of painters as well. Francois Gerard's *Joseph Recognized by Brothers* was painted during the time of Napoleon's Egyptian military venture.

Gerard studied under David and elements of classicism in the painting of Joseph and his brothers are apparent in their robes. Gerard's nod to this scene's Egyptian location is brought in by Joseph's headdress and the sphinxes on the arms of Joseph's chair and the background building. Were it not for these details and its title, this painting might be taken for an illustration of a Greek tragedy.

Winning the Prize of Rome was coveted, difficult and highly competitive. Gerard's teacher Jacques Louis David was rejected three times and considered suicide before receiving the award on his fourth attempt. [In later years Eduard Degas and Maurice Ravel were rejected.] Gerard, too, was rejected but because of his mother's death, he was unable to complete a painting to submit to the jury the following year. After that he fell into poverty but recovered to gain success and acclaim through portraiture. Napoleon commissioned paintings from him and then after he fell from power, Gerard became the court painter of Louis XVIII.

## Learn more

- [Genesis 46:3-11, 15](#) (appointed to be read on Epiphany +7 Year C)
- [Classicism and Romanticism in Art](#) (An essay by Hovak Najarian further exploring these two terms.)
- The stories of [Genesis 12-50](#) a short video presentation (~8 minutes) by the [BibleProject](#) (~5:20 into the video the story of Joseph is presented).
- [Joseph](#) an entry in the [Encyclopedia of the Bible](#) (on [Bible Gateway](#)). “The contents of this encyclopedia derive from a previously published work known as The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, 5 Volume Set.”
- [Hear what the Spirit is saying](#). A website started by Stan Hirsch in 2011 for the Sunday Morning Forum at St. Margaret’s Episcopal Church in Palm Desert, CA. Search *Hovak Najarian* for more commentaries. Note: for many years Stan edited a handout for the Sunday Morning Forum and these are being edited for publishing to this website.
- [Arts & Faith](#) homepage curated by Loyola Press.
- [About Arts & Faith](#)
- [Arts & Faith: Lent](#) Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, March 2, 2022. A new visual art meditation for Ash Wednesday and each week in Lent for Year C is now available on the Loyola Press website.