

# La Tour's *Joseph the Carpenter*

## *Background*

French artist Georges de La Tour (1593–1652) takes his place among the great Masters of the Baroque period (1600s) such as Bernini, Rembrandt, Rubens, Caravaggio, and others. La Tour lived in the region of Lorraine in northeastern France and is known for his chiaroscuro style (light/dark contrast) using candlelight to great effect. Toward the end of his career La Tour focused almost exclusively on religious subjects; the figures in his works are simple and meditative. Among his patrons were the famous Cardinal Richelieu and the king of France, Louis XIII. La Tour and his wife both died of the plague within two weeks of each other in 1652.

## *What to Look For*

**Posture:** Joseph is working on a project, but his gaze and attention are fixed on Jesus. The contrast of figures – old man / young child – speaks of the new order (grace) replacing the old order (law). Joseph's posture is as one bowing down to greet his Lord.

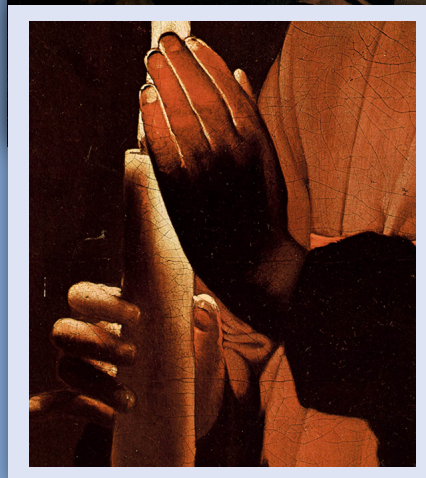
**Instrument:** Joseph's awl takes the shape of a cross; it is boring a hole into a plank of wood, foreshadowing the beam which would later receive the nails of crucifixion.

**Jesus Seated:** Although smaller than Joseph, the Child Jesus is seated in the traditional position of a teaching authority; his small body looks ironically adult-like to symbolize His maturity and divinity.

**The Face:** The face of the Christ Child is fully illuminated, a sign of the glory of His divinity, but we're not sure if the glow is from the candle or if it radiates from His face.

**The Hands:** Jesus' right hand grips the candle with three fingers while one finger extends outward, symbolic of both his human (1) and divine (3) natures; his translucent left hand raised in blessing expresses the Incarnation, His divinity shining through His humanity.

**The Word:** Jesus speaks; Joseph listens. Christ is the Eternal Word of the Father speaking to his foster-father on earth.



## *Arti-Facts*

- Date: 1642
- Size: approx. 51" x 32"  
(4 ft. 3 in. x 2 ft. 8 in.)
- Medium: Oil on canvas
- Location: The Louvre, Paris, France.