

## *Saint Joseph of Cupertino, The Flying Friar*

1603 ~ 1663

*In a shabby windowless building, a woman was in labor. Her carpenter husband had recently died and the family home was sold to settle debts, so she brought forth her child in a stable.*

*The child was Joseph Desa, born June 17, 1603 in Copertino, a small village between Brindisi and Otranto, near the heel of Italy. Joseph's childhood was unhappy since his widowed mother considered him a nuisance and treated him severely. He became extremely absentminded and wandered around town with his mouth open. In today's terms, Joseph would be considered mentally disabled, but authors writing his history define him as childlike. He was unpopular because of his hot temper but precocious in his religious duties.*

*At first rejected by the Conventual Franciscans and the Capuchins, he was later accepted by the Franciscans at Grotella as a servant in the stables. His ensuing humility, sweetness and love of mortification and penance gained him respect, and he was admitted in 1625 for study for holy orders.*

*His reading and writing was very poor and he lacked eloquence except on one text, "Blessed is the womb that bore thee" on which he could expound proficiently.*

*After ordination in 1628, his life was one long succession of ecstasies, miracles of healing and supernatural happenings on a scale not paralleled in the authenticated life of any other saint. Anything referring to God was liable to ravish him from his senses and make him oblivious to what was going on around him. The sight of a lamb caused him to be lost in contemplation on the spotless Lamb of God and caught up in the air with the animal in his arms. Lambs surrounded him to listen to his prayers and sparrows came and went at his word.*

*During Mass, he would be lifted off his feet in rapture and such levitation was recorded at least 70 times during his first 17 years at Grotella. His flights were not confined to small remote villages, but his baroque buoyancy was observed in Rome, Naples and other cities in front of cultivated and distinguished gatherings, including Pope Urban VIII and the Spanish ambassador.*

*Liturgy or contemplation would cause Joseph to fall into an ecstatic trance and uttering a loud cry, he would soar into the air, both in churches and in the open air. During the last six years of his life at Osimo, his fellow religious saw him fly up seven feet in the air to kiss the statue of the infant Jesus above the altar. He was known to catch up other friars, his confessor and a certain Chevalier Baldassare to fly around the room with him. On his return to earth, Baldassare was cured of a severe nervous complaint.*

*St Joseph attracted large crowds and convened many. In 1653 he was moved to a lonely friary in Pietrarossa where he lived in strict seclusion, unable to leave the convent or communicate in any way with the world. When he was discovered there by many tourists, he was spirited away to Fossombrone and later Osimo. Here he had supernatural manifestation daily and was in effect, deserted by all. He fell sick August 10, 1663 and died a few weeks later at age 60. He was canonized in 1767 and is the patron saint of aviators, air-travelers and students.*

