

Joseph's Story

Teaching Notes

Introduction:

The text I want us to meditate upon for the 2023 Christmas season is Matthew 1:18-25. Matthew 1:18-25 is the part of the Christmas account in which God speaks to Joseph, Mary's fiancé. God reveals to Joseph the virgin birth. He reveals His plan for Joseph's life to take Mary's hand in marriage and to raise Jesus as an earthly father. God reveals to Joseph that the child in Mary's woman is the Savior of the world.

Our text this morning is somewhat like a character study of Joseph as it relates to the account of Christ's birth; and second, we will meditate upon the revelation of Jesus Christ that Joseph personally receives.

Matthew 1:18-25

(Matthew 1:18 *Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.*

Matthew 1:19 *Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.*

Matthew 1:20 *But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.*

Matthew 1:21 *And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."*

Matthew 1:22 *So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying:*

Matthew 1:23 *"Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."*

Matthew 1:24 *Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife,*

Matthew 1:25 *and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus.)*

Verse 18: The Situation

(Matthew 1:18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.)

“Betrothed” - Formal engagement.

“Before they came together” - Before marital consummation.

“Mary was found with child of the Holy Spirit.”

In Luke 1:26-35, you can read the account where the Angel Gabriel reveals first to Mary that God chose her to be the virgin by which the Messiah shall be born. Studying the account of Mary and Mary’s response is always a blessing for me to read in the Christmas season. I encourage you to read that account in Luke 1 later today if you have the chance. Possibly, next year we will do a character study on Mary. Nevertheless, for today’s study, we will do a character study on Joseph.

How did Joseph respond to the news that his fiancé Mary is pregnant? Let’s read verse 19 again:

Verse 19: Mary is Pregnant

(Matthew 1:19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.)

According to the Law of Moses, there was a process in which the young virgins verified their virginity; and this verification was relayed from the virgin’s parents to the family of the prospective husband. Virginity was meticulously protected, preserved, and admired among God’s people and according to God’s word. By this point, that process and verification happened between Mary’s family and Joseph’s family. Many times marriages were arranged by parents, which might have been the case between Mary and Joseph.

What you must understand about this betrothal (engagement) of the Jews is that it was established on ink. It was a formal contract.¹ Engagement was not

¹ Here is some [more](#) on this subject

like it is today in which one person can get out of engagement as easily as they got into it. And the only way to end a betrothal was by a certificate of divorce. If the engaged man or woman breached the contract, then a certificate of divorce was allowed. All to say, this was a BIG DEAL.

From Joseph's perspective, he will soon be the first and only man to have intercourse with his wife Mary.

So put yourself in Joseph's shoes: **When Joseph received the news that Mary is pregnant, it must have been absolutely confusing and heartbreaking.**

Joseph is tested: What is Joseph going to do?

According to the law of Moses, Joseph had a few biblical considerations:

Approach 1: Deuteronomy 22:23-24 revealed that if a Jewish virgin who was betrothed voluntarily had intercourse with another man, both she and the man were to be executed by stoning.

Approach 2: Deuteronomy 22:25-27 revealed that if a Jewish virgin who was betrothed was violated against her will, only the man who violated her was to be executed.

This verse reveals to us that "Joseph did not want to put Mary to shame." This gives us a clearer idea of what he thought about the situation. That's what I want us to reason through some more.

Before we do, let me say this: I'm sure a substantial number of us have read the various accounts of Christ's birth multiple times, and listened to them yearly on the "Christmas services." And some of you know this, you can continue time after time, with an open heart, study a familiar text and see amazing, glorious truths in the word of God.

Over the years, I've heard a few viewpoints concerning how Joseph found out Mary was pregnant and why he sought to secretly divorce: To warn you, this first one I find wrong and unscriptural:

First Look: Joseph found out because a relative (possibly friend) heard from so-and-so that so-and-so saw a baby bump on Mary. Essentially, a rumor or observance from someone drove Joseph to almost divorce Mary. I don't find this perspective satisfactory. Why?

(1). The Bible states in this text that Joseph was a righteous, just man. So, for Joseph to make such a huge decision based on hearsay is completely out of character. What do we learn of righteous men?

(Proverbs 15:28 The heart of the righteous studies [ponders - esv] how to answer, But the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil.)

(2). The second reason why I don't agree with this viewpoint is because it suggests that Joseph did not have any facts or evidence. It cancels the reality that Joseph only began to ponder and make decisions out of emotion rather than patience and righteousness. The viewpoint that I take is based on scripture, based on the truth that Joseph was righteous and had the evidence the Bible states he had.

Second Look:

When you look at the historical customs, we can presume that the first to discover that Mary was pregnant were her parents and immediate family. When you study Mary's godliness and faith, all of us are impressed by her love for the Lord at such a young age. By her faith alone, I'd suggest she had good, godly parents. And after she told her immediate family she then told her extended family. **How do I know that?**

Luke 1:39 reveals to us that Mary was allowed (by her family) to go to the home of their relative, Elizabeth the mother of John the Baptist. Already by that point, Elizabeth heard that her relative, the virgin Mary, was pregnant with the Messiah. For what did Elizabeth tell Mary?

(Luke 1:42 Then she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and your child will be blessed!")

Luke 1:43 *How could this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?)*

Maybe a few of Mary's relatives did not believe her, but it is absolutely clear that her family, notably Elizabeth, believed wholeheartedly that the prophecy of the Messiah's birth to a virgin was fulfilled in Mary. Luke 1:42-43 proved that Mary's relatives believed. And I could imagine Mary's relatives asking all these questions, which Mary and possibly her parents were able to answer.

Imagine that moment when members of Mary's family heard these things and believed that the Savior of the world was in Mary's womb!

(A). Did Mary's parents contact Joseph's parents and relay all this information to them? We do not know.

(B). Did Joseph know all of this? The angelic encounter; the proof of Mary's virginity while carrying a child? The prophecies concerning the Messiah? God's choice for Mary to be the mother and to raise the Son of God? The answer is **yes**. Look at verse 20:

Verse 20: Joseph's Sensitivity

(Matthew 1:20 But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.)

What things was he pondering? The answer is not in verse 19 because verse 19 communicates what Joseph decided to do after learning of "those things." So the answer is found in verse 18. Verse 18 reveals the things that Joseph was pondering:

(Matthew 1:18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.)

Joseph was told that the child in Mary's womb was by miraculous conception.

Put yourself in the mind of Joseph:

(A). He's probably pondering what the word of God says in Deuteronomy 22:

- (1). There's no other man.
- (2). Mary was not violated against her will.

He's probably pondering the scriptures that concern the One man who was to be born of the virgin, the Messiah, God in the Flesh, who'd come from the lineage of David!

- (3). Her parents still have proof that she is a virgin and pregnant.
- (4). The family is claiming this child is of the Holy Spirit according to the prophecies of old and according to the angelic encounter. All to say,

This must have been the most perplexing situation for Joseph.

Before we read of the angel's appearance to Joseph and Joseph's response, I want to say two more things:

(1). Back in verse 19, we are told he decided to divorce her. Now, I've pondered this myself. After everything Joseph knew, why did Joseph decide that the righteous thing to do was secretly divorce her? There is an answer, but the Bible is silent concerning this.

(2). Verse 20 tells us he didn't finalize the divorce just yet; although he made up his mind, he still chose to be patient and keep thinking about all of this.

Side Application:

This inspires me because Joseph outshines all of us for not responding with emotions; he doesn't quickly do something in anger, confusion, sadness, or frustration. He's pondering. He's patient. He's probably seeking counsel, praying, seeking the scriptures for clarity as to what to do. **He is patient because the primary desire of his heart is to do the right thing.** I want to be like Joseph in situations that rock my world. And I want the same for you. What happens in this period of patience and pondering? God shows up!

Verses 20b-25: The Call of Joseph

(Matthew 1:20 *But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, **do not be afraid** to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.*

Matthew 1:21 *And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."*

Matthew 1:22 *So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying:*

Matthew 1:23 *"Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."*

Matthew 1:24 *Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife,*

Matthew 1:25 *and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus.) This is amazing!*

Verse 20:

Don't you just find so much comfort and joy when you read verses like verse 20, "**DO NOT BE AFRAID.**" So many times in scripture, God says, "do not be afraid." This is one of those examples.

Verses 20b + 22-23:

God wanted Joseph to realize that this was a miraculous conception. God wanted Joseph to personally realize that the only time in human history where such an IMPOSSIBLE MIRACLE would occur was the birth of the Messiah, God in the Flesh, who will redeem mankind from sin!

And God, in His mercy and grace, **chose** Joseph to father the Messiah! And Joseph knew his broken, cursed lineage. And so, it was crystal clear that his lineage and seed would not be allowed to produce the Messiah and reign on the throne. But God in His grace, gave the lineage of Solomon in Joseph a **second chance** - the second chance, not to have a king from the lineage of Solomon, but to raise and father the Messiah.

- Joseph's story inspires me to think of Naomi. Naomi lost her husband and two sons. One of the spouses of one of her sons leaves. But Ruth, her daughter-in-law, decides to go back to Israel with her. Naomi is so heartbroken by all the events that transpired in her life. As old friends and relatives see her again after a long hiatus away in a different country, she tells everyone to call her Mari, which means bitter. By the end of the book of Ruth, Naomi is given a second chance at life. She is given the privilege to nurse and help raise Ruth's son, Obed. And who was Obed? The grandfather of David, the lineage of the Messiah.
- Sometimes horrific events happen in life that we cannot change; and sometimes things like a cursed family lineage seem to hold you down. But God always shows Himself to be gracious to us. God always has the best plan and best future for our lives.

And so here, Joseph, knowing very well how undeserving he was to father and raise the Messiah, is shown this amazing grace.

Also see that the Lord God is encouraging and commanding Joseph to fulfill God's plan for Joseph's life. And verse 24 is always encouraging:

Verse 24:

Joseph obeyed the Lord.

What I see clearly in this text is that Joseph believed. And his faith was moved to action.

- Look at the book of James. True faith is confirmed by one's godly decisions.

After that divine dream, Joseph knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that Mary was carrying the living God in the Flesh, the Messiah! And Joseph never looked back. **No matter the shame; no matter the difficulty; no matter the sacrifice, Joseph believed in the gospel and spent his whole life serving his Lord.**

Verse 25:

Verse 25 adds that "cherry-on-top" moment of grace: Joseph was given the privilege to know the name by which the Son of God would be called. And, Joseph was the first to call the Son of God by His name, **Jesus**.

This was Joseph's personal testimony of faith! We got a glimpse into the journey of faith he was on. In this crucible in Joseph's life, he comes forth from it with faith - walking in God's gracious plan for his life.

I think of my faith journey. The tests of faith. The events that led up to some of the most important faith decisions in my life. **And so, Joseph's story of faith in Jesus Christ, the story of Christ's step-father (so-to-speak), inspires me.**

The Gospel Presentation:

I want us to meditate on what the angel told Joseph, what the Holy Spirit highlights as supremely important for us to know:

Verse 21:

The Messiah's name was Jesus. The definition of this name was, "He will save His people from their sins."

As we gather this Sunday morning, we can rejoice in what the angel told Joseph. The Son of God must be called Jesus because He is the Savior! Fast-forward 30+ years later, Jesus will reveal Himself to Israel as the Messiah. Jesus will reveal how He was sent by the Father to redeem mankind for our sins. He died on the cross as a sacrifice for the sin of mankind. He willingly received all the wrath of God for sin. After He died on the cross for sin, 3 days later He resurrected from the grave. He defeated death. And He ascended back to heaven where He is seated on His throne, redeeming more and more people until He returns to set up His kingdom on earth. And for the redeemed, we are headed to heaven where there will be no more suffering, no more pain, no more tears, no more sin, and no more death.

Each one of us is a sinner. You were born into sin. The human race is plagued with sin. We sinned against God. And every generation has continued to sin against a holy God? We are all sinners. But there is a difference. There is the sinner who rejects the forgiveness and redemption in Jesus Christ. And there is the sinner who believes in Jesus Christ for salvation. There are sinners who are redeemed. I am so thankful I am redeemed!

And for the unredeemed in this room, you might say, "Well, at least I'm not as bad as so-and-so. I'm not that bad of a sinner." It doesn't matter. All sin, every sinner, cannot stand before the presence of a holy God. All sin is deserving of wrath. You have a choice. Either, you believe in Jesus Christ and receive God's forgiveness; or you reject Jesus Christ and receive the just wrath of God forever in hell. Either you are redeemed or unredeemed.

Hell is a choice. God's wrath is a choice. But God's forgiveness and His redemption in Christ is also a choice. **Today, you are given the opportunity in this life to receive God's mercy and love by believing in Jesus Christ.**

The command by God is that you acknowledge and confess that you are a sinner. Confess your sins. And repent of your sins by believing in Jesus Christ, the only who can save you from sin - the only one who can forgive you.

He loves you. God sent His Son, our Savior Jesus, to become a man because He loves you. Jesus Christ took your personal penalty of sin so that you can

know Him and live with Him forever. Do you want to know Him? Do you want to be born-again with a new heart that is set free from sin, that is destined for eternal life with God forever?

Verse 23:

This verse is a quote from the prophet Isaiah, in his book Isaiah 7:14. This quote reveals the other name of the Son of God that was given to Christ, commencing at His birth:

Immanuel: God with us.

After you confess the faith, you might still have a couple of years left to live on this earth. And so this second name becomes more and more wonderful as the years go by:

The Bible declares that God's Spirit will come to live inside of you after you are born-again. And He will live in you and be with you forever. One day you will see your Savior face to face, but until that day, He is with you by His Spirit.

Many of us can give God so much praise that Jesus is our Savior; and that He is with His people always and forever.

I thank God more and more that He lives in me; that He is with me; that He is leading my life till He brings me home.

And we have the privilege, as the redeemed of God, to share this good news to anyone and everyone.

Joseph chose to believe this day in the gospel of Jesus, the Messiah to redeem sinners.

And so for those who were invited by family members and friends, the question I have for you: **Will you believe?**

- I hope that every one of you chooses to believe!

For all of us who do believe, let's worship, praise, give thanks to the Lord who has saved us and who is with us!

May all of you enjoy another wonderful Christmas until Jesus comes to take each and all of us home.