

“JOSEPH: THE UNSUNG HERO OF CHRISTMAS”

Matthew 1:18-25

Larry King was a famous talk show host who struggled with his faith. He was once asked this question—***“If you could select one person across all of history to interview, who would it be?”*** He said it would have to be Jesus Christ. The questioner then asked a follow up question—***“And what would you like to ask Him?”*** King responded...

***I would like to ask Him if He was
indeed virgin-born.
The answer to that question
would define history for me.***

There is at least one person in history who can answer that question with certainty. ***This person had the most to gain and the most to lose.*** His

name was *Joseph*. He is the unsung hero of Christmas. Today and for the next two weeks we're going to look at a series that I've entitled, "*Joseph's Christmas Story*."

Take your Bible and turn to Matthew 1. As you're finding that passage, I want to remind you that Matthew's gospel was written from a strong Jewish viewpoint. That's certainly evident as you focus on the genealogy of Jesus in 1:1-17. Three names are emphasized—*Abraham*, *David*, and *Jesus*.

Matthew 1:16–17... Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah. 17 So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations.

Matthew drew attention to God's promise to Abraham that through his seed all the families on earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3). Furthermore, he focused on God's promise to

David that his throne would be established forever (2 Samuel 7:16). Both of these promises were highly significant to the Jewish people, and they were fulfilled when Jesus, the Messiah, was born.

Legally, Joseph's ancestry as a descendant of both Abraham and David was transferred to Jesus. Biologically, the Holy Spirit placed the tiny embryo of the Son of God into the womb of the virgin Mary. All of this may seem mundane, but it is all an important part of God's plan to redeem a broken world. ***GOD ALWAYS KEEPS HIS WORD.***

Matthew 1:18... Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.

Mary was probably 13 or 14 years old when her father and Joseph's father agreed for them to marry each other. "Betrothal" was something like our engagement period even though the expectations were much more stringent...

- **This period usually lasted at least one year**
- **The couple were viewed as *husband/wife***
- **The girl still lived with her family**
- **The couple remained sexually pure**
- **Breaking a betrothal required a divorce**

After the year-long betrothal, the husband would take his wife to his house and consummate their relationship. Then the families would celebrate the marriage with a reception that could last for days.

At some point during the betrothal period ***“before they came together, she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.”*** Notice the emphasis upon the virgin birth here. Mary knew what was going on because an angel had told her about God’s plan. However, Joseph was temporarily left in the dark.

Matthew 1:19... And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly.

Joseph was known as *"a righteous man."* This means that he took his faith in God seriously. He wanted to what was right in the eyes of God and what was right in the relation to other people.

How did he find out that Mary was pregnant? I'm sure Mary told him. She might have said something like this...

***"Joseph, I'm pregnant but
I'm still a virgin. This is
the work of the Holy Spirit.
It's all a part of God's
plan for our lives."***

Needless to say, Joseph didn't buy Mary's story. He was a righteous man, so he wanted to honor God's Word as set forth in the Torah. God's law demanded divorce in these situations and the guilty party was to be punished. To complicate matters, Joseph loved Mary and he didn't want to disgrace her. So, he was between a rock and a hard place. Can you imagine how the gossiping

tongues of Nazareth must have reacted to this? People would assume that they had been sexually immoral or that Mary had cheated on him. The impact on Joseph was devastating . . .

- **His friends would shun him**
- **His manhood would be questioned**
- **His carpentry business would suffer**
- **His reputation would be destroyed.**
- **His dreams were shattered**

Can't you envision Joseph pacing the floor trying to come to grips with all of this. In an honor/shame culture, Joseph and Mary would have been humiliated. He had no choice but to **"send her away secretly."** He would take two witnesses to her father and give Mary a divorce.

One night he dosed off, and an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and brought a message from God Himself . . .

Matthew 1:20...But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do

not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.”

How would Joseph respond to this startling news? Keep in mind that nothing like this had ever happened before. Would the angel also clarify the situation for ...

- **Mary’s family**
- **Joseph’s family**
- **Joseph and Mary’s friends**
- **The people of Nazareth**
- **The town rabbi**

None of this was easy for Joseph or for Mary! One commentator observed...

“What the angel is saying here is that the very circumstances that you fear spell the death of your relationship are actually the beginning of your salvation.”

The angel continued to fill in the blanks . . .

Matthew 1:21... *“She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus (what He would do), for He will save His people from their sins.”*

Joseph was assigned the task of naming the Son of God. In Jewish culture, this signified that he would acknowledge Mary’s Son as his own son. He was to assign the name JESUS to this baby (Yeshua—“Yahweh is salvation”). Spurgeon commented on the name, *“Jesus”*...

But if there be one name sweeter than another in the believer’s ear, it is the name Jesus. It’s the name which moves the harps of heaven to melody. It is the sum total of all delights. It is the music with which the bells of heaven ring; a song in a word; an ocean for comprehension, although a drop for brevity; a matchless oratorio in two syllables; a gathering up of the hallelujahs of eternity in five letters. C.H.

Spurgeon, Morning and Evening: Daily Readings (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1995), February 8 AM.

The Apostle Paul wrote these words to Timothy...

1 Timothy 1:15... It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost *of all*.

How awestruck Joseph must have been. He was given the responsibility of rearing the Son of God, the Savior of the world, the Jewish Messiah.

Matthew 1:22–23... Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: **23 “BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL (WHO HE WAS),” which translated means, “GOD WITH US.”**

The virgin conception of Messiah was prophesied by Isaiah approximately 700 years before these events took place. God’s Son would be **Immanuel** meaning “*God With Us*.”

Jesus is the only One who can tell us and show us what God is like. In Jesus, we see the heart of God—*His compassion, His love, His holiness, His grace, His mercy, His truth*. We don’t have to

grope in the dark wondering what God is like or who He is. God is with us in the person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:20). How did Joseph respond to all of this?” Look at these next two verses . . .

Matthew 1:24–25... And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took *Mary* as his wife, 25 but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.

This was the first of four dreams Joseph would have in which he would receive instructions. With each dream, the instructions would change, but his response would not. Each time his response was one of submission and obedience.

I am flat out amazed at Joseph’s faith and obedience. He was willing to sacrifice his reputation, to lose his business, and to get way out of his comfort zone. He obeyed God by taking two very important legal steps . . .

- **“He took Mary as his wife.” (Public marriage)**

■ **“He called His name Jesus.” (Public adoption)**

Joseph should not be the unsung hero in the Christmas story. His reverence for God can be seen in this last verse—**“(He) kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a son.”**

CONCLUSION

Joseph experienced Christmas like no other man in human history. What can we learn from him as we get ready to experience Christmas this year? Here’s the timeless truth I want you to see...

LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP!

Making rash decisions in the heat of the moment can wreck your Christmas celebration. Following Joseph’s example, we must . . .

1. LIVE FOR THE LORD CONSISTENTLY

The Bible says that Joseph was a *“righteous man.”* He took his faith seriously. Instead of flying off the handle and making a knee-jerk decision, Joseph

considered how to be right with God and how to do the right thing with Mary. Study the Scriptures and pray on a regular basis! Don't wait until you are immersed in a crisis situation.

2. LISTEN TO GOD'S WORD INTENTLY

Joseph faced a dilemma. I can't imagine how precious his dream was as the angel of the Lord unpacked God's direction for him. Is God speaking to you this morning?

__about your salvation?

__about your baptism?

__about a perplexing issue in your life

3. RESPOND TO GOD OBEDIENTLY

Following the Lord Jesus Christ is not a cakewalk. There are consequences that come with obedience. Joseph was willing to embrace them. Are you?

LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP!