

Sermon outline and notes:

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## Matthew 1:18-25; 2:13-14 “Joseph: Chosen to Raise God’s Son”

Intro. When we tell the Christmas story, Joseph often just barely gets mentioned. It seems Mary gets far more attention. It’s kind of like men at a wedding. The ladies have on their beautiful dresses and the flowers. They seem to get all the attention. So Joseph is kind of like that. It seems like Mary and the other characters of the Christmas story get most of the attention. But Joseph is really a vital part of the Christmas message. In fact, Matthew’s account of the Nativity sets Joseph in the foreground. Joseph was a remarkable man, and we should give attention to him as well. We must keep in mind that God chose Joseph as well as Mary to raise His Son, and our Savior.

As I prepared for this message, I was surprised to find that there is no recorded word of Joseph in the entire Bible. I’m sure that Joseph said something. But the Holy Spirit has chosen not to give us a single word that Joseph ever spoke. But in his case, his actions spoke louder than words. Joseph seems to have been a strong, silent kind of man. Some of you have a man like that in your home.

Let me give you some background on Joseph. Many believe he was a good bit older than Mary, because no mention is made of his presence with Mary in the Gospels or the early church. It appears he was already dead. Also, he seems quite mature, able to move and adjust to a new city, and even a new country. But that is not necessarily the case. He may have been just a little older than Mary, perhaps in his mid to late twenties.

Something else about Joseph was the fact that he was a carpenter. Joseph represents all of those of you who make your living by your hands—a laborer. And when God chose to send His Son into the world, He placed Him in the home of a humble carpenter like Joseph, not in the home of the ruling class, but in the home of the working class. He was to be the Savior of all men, and He wanted to identify fully with those He came to save. Yet we should also remember that the blood of King David flowed through Joseph’s veins (v.20; Luke 1:27).

Now let’s see the Christmas story from Joseph’s perspective. We will begin with v.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.” Here we see first of all:

### I. JOSEPH’S DILEMMA

The story starts off in a beautiful fashion. It is a love story. We read that “Mary was betrothed to Joseph.” Joseph was an eligible bachelor there in Nazareth. I like to think that Mary was the prettiest girl in the village. I can imagine that Mary had beautiful dark hair. I have a feeling her eyes were dark and sparkling. Maybe in the synagogue, on the Sabbath day, Joseph would cast his eyes on young Mary. Love began to blossom in their hearts. Joseph is a young man in love and he is going to marry the lovely Mary. They are going through the engagement process. It’s just a matter of time now before they come together as man and wife. But then something happens that really complicates everything. We see in our text:

A. The Shocking Discovery – In the last of v.18 we read that “before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.” All of a sudden the story takes a tragic turn, at least in

terms of their storybook hopes and dreams. At some point in the year-long engagement, our text says, “she was found with child....” It became quite clear that she was indeed pregnant, just as the angel had said to her. It could not be hidden from Joseph any longer. She must tell him. So she says to Joseph, “We need to have a talk.” Perhaps she said something like, “Joseph, I know this is going to be an incredible story for you but, I must tell you that I am pregnant.” What a shocking revelation! He could hardly believe his ears. Of course, Joseph knows that it is not his child. No doubt Joseph had followed the Old Testament standards of sexual morality, and he had refrained from premarital relations, even after they were engaged. But what about Mary? Nothing he knew about her unblemished character was consistent with such a confession. But what other explanation could there be? I would imagine that she tried to explain that an angel informed her that her child would be conceived by the Holy Spirit, and that child would be the Messiah. Yet it seems from v.19 that he did not believe her story. It was simply too far-fetched. So we can only imagine the agony and heartache he experienced when he first heard Mary was carrying a child he knew wasn’t his. Joseph must have felt his whole world was coming to an end.

As you live your life, you will receive news from time to time that will jolt your world. Sometimes it’s true. Sometimes what you hear is a misunderstanding. Perhaps you find out that your daughter is pregnant outside of marriage. Perhaps you hear a report that your spouse has been unfaithful, or been involved in some illegal activity. How will you handle such situations?

Let’s move on to v.19 & see how Joseph handled the situation he was facing. Notice:

B. The Choices He Faced - In that day engagement was as binding as marriage itself. Sexual unfaithfulness during engagement was considered adultery, not just fornication. Imagine the thoughts that go racing through his head. “What will the people in the community think?” In times of crisis a person’s character will determine their actions. Notice in v.19 that Joseph was a “just man.” He was a man of principle, one who wanted to live in accordance with the will of God with his whole heart. He knew God took so very seriously the breaking of the marriage vow. He wanted to do the right thing. He wanted to follow God’s law.

But what was the right thing to do in this situation? He knew that the Word of God should guide his actions. Strictly speaking, Deut. 22:20-21 demanded that a woman who became pregnant with a child outside of marriage should be put to death. But that was rarely practiced in Joseph’s day, and it wasn’t even legal under Roman law. So v.19 gives the two options that he had under Jewish law. One, he could make her a public example. That is, he could charge her with adultery in a public court. She would be brought to trial, convicted in front of everyone, and forever ruined in terms of reputation. A hotheaded man would immediately have done this. But Joseph loved Mary. He just couldn’t bring himself to make Mary a public example. He was a kindhearted, gentle person, so he chose the other possibility. He could quietly before two or three witnesses write a bill of divorce (Dt. 24:1), and end their relationship. She could simply go away somewhere and secretly bear and raise the child.

Both options would have upheld a standard for righteousness that Joseph wanted to follow. But only the later option was consistent with his love and compassion for Mary. So guided by both righteousness and love, he knew what he should do. He made his decision to put her away privately.

Years later Jesus Christ was faced with a dilemma. A woman was brought to him who had been caught in the act of adultery. The law said she should be stoned. But Jesus knew the religious leaders who just using her to test him. I would imagine that He sensed her shame & repentance. And so knowing that He would soon die for her sin on the cross, Jesus said, “He that is without sin,

let him cast the first stone.” His love for her saved her life. Yet He upheld righteousness by saying, “go and sin no more” (Jn. 8:11).

In this sinful, fallen world in which we live, you will face some great dilemmas also. You may be facing a major decision relating to your work. Or you may be facing some problems in dealing with your children or in your marriage. If you are facing dilemmas in your home and you don’t know what to do, let the Word of God guide you to do what is right. But be sure to balance righteousness with love & mercy. Furthermore, trust God, & wait on Him. God can do miracles in your life, and He will show you what to do. He can resolve the dilemmas of life, just as in the case of Joseph. And that leads to my next point. Not only do we see Joseph’s dilemma, but also:

## II. JOSEPH’S DREAM

Joseph must have spent considerable time thinking about his dilemma, because the Scripture says, “while he thought about these things” (v.20). Joseph was meditating, mulling over what he had to do. While he was still pondering his options, he fell asleep. Then the Lord intervened by means of a dream.

In the days before Christ it was not uncommon for God to communicate with dreams. In v.20 we read, “behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream.” It seems to me that he did not just dream about an angel, but a real angel came to him in a vision while he was sleeping. By the way, the angels worked overtime when Jesus was born. They appear several times before and just after the birth of the Lord Jesus.

Notice in v.20 what the angel says, “...do not be afraid...” Isn’t that a good message for us! Evidently Joseph was afraid of something. But what? For one thing, he was fearful of what people would think if he went ahead & married Mary. Word had probably already gotten out that Mary was pregnant. Gossip was already spreading that in small town. Would marrying her be viewed as covering up their own immorality?

Many times God says in the Bible, “Fear not.” Why is that? It is because there are many fears even today. Fear of failure. Fear of rejection. Fear of losing one’s job. Fear of what other people will think. What if I take of stand for Jesus, like Tim Tebow. What will people think? God has a message from heaven for your heart. God says, “Fear not! Just wait!” If you trust in God, He will get an answer to you for your problem.

In our story today the angel has a message for Joseph that will remove his fear. In fact, the angel is going to whisper two secrets in Joseph’s ear in this dream. The first secret is this. The angel is going to reveal to Joseph:

A. The Cause of Mary’s Conception - Mary probably tried to explain to Joseph that the baby was conceived by God, but do you think he would have instantly believed her? In all of human history there had never been a virgin birth. To Joseph, this very idea of a virgin conceiving was altogether new. He would never have accepted it had not an angel sent by God conveyed this information to him. So the angel became her advocate. The angel of the Lord dispelled the cloud of suspicion that hung ominously over Mary. He said, “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” (v.20). The angel explained that Mary was pregnant with the Son of God, and that the child she was carrying had been miraculously conceived by the Holy Spirit. That must have been more astonishing to Joseph than the original news that Mary was pregnant! Mary had not been unfaithful after all! Any baby born is a miracle. But Mary’s baby was a unique miracle. There had never before been and there

will never again be a miracle like the birth of Jesus. Jesus is the only baby born who had an earthly mother and no earthly father. He is the only baby ever born who was older than His mother and as old as His father. It was a divine miracle birth. Furthermore, it was necessary for Him to enter this world through an earthly mother, but not to be begotten by an earthly father. That is the only way He could be both human, & the sinless Son of God.

Now in light of the miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit, Matthew comments in vv.22-23, “So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son....’” The prophet of old predicted a great sign: “the virgin shall be with child.” Now we know how it could happen. The Holy Spirit caused the Virgin Mary to conceive.

Do you have any trouble believing that Jesus was born of a virgin? I don’t, because I believe God can do miracles! If I can believe Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” everything else in the Bible is a piece of cake. If God can create the heavens & the earth, He can create & implant the seed that caused conception in Mary’s womb. So I don’t have any trouble believing the biblical story of the virgin birth of Jesus, especially in light of who Jesus turned out to be and do.

Secondly, he whispers into Joseph’s ear:

B. The Character of Mary’s Child – In biblical days, a name reflected the character of a person. And the angel gives a name for the baby Mary was carrying:

1. Jesus - He says in v.21, “And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS....” What a lovely name—the name of Jesus. Many a Jewish boy was named Jesus, or Joshua, which was the Hebrew form of the name. Both mean “the Lord saves.” They were named after the warrior leader who led Israel into the Promised Land. And no doubt, the name was often given to children in those days of foreign dominion by fathers who hoped that Israel might again fight for freedom. But holier thoughts were to be Joseph’s, and the salvation from God which was expressed by this name was to be of another kind than Joshua of old had brought. It was to be salvation from sin. In fact, the angel said in the last of v.21, “you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.” Notice that Jesus is the One God sent to save us from our sins. No one else can save you. Acts 4:12 says, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (KJV).

Suppose I were to write you a check for a million dollars. You would be no better off, for my name is not good for that kind of money. But if Bill Gates were to write you a check for that amount, you would be a million dollars richer. What makes the difference? The name.

That’s the message of Christmas. Though we are all sinners, God sent His Son to save us from our sins. Only Jesus can save you. He died for your sins on the cross. He offers forgiveness and eternal life to all who will believe in Him. Not only would Jesus be able to save us from the *penalty* of sin, but also the *power* of sin! We can overcome sinful habits in our lives through the power of Jesus Christ. I am still a sinner, but I’m not the sinner I used to be! I hope you can say the same thing through the saving power of Jesus Christ.

So Jesus received a name that would fit His mission as Savior. Next, Matthew quotes from the prophet, who gave another name for the coming Messiah:

2. Immanuel – V.23 says they will call His name Immanuel. That is what the prophet Isaiah foretold. As our text says, Immanuel means, “God with us.” Think about that. Christmas means God has come down to us, and He has come to abide with us. He could only save us from our sins by becoming one with us. Only a man could die for other men. And only the

God-man could live a sinless life, so that He would not die for His own sins, but for the sins of others. Immanuel, God with us, means salvation. That fact that Jesus was virgin born justifies the fact that He was called Immanuel. He could not be Immanuel any other way!

But the name Immanuel means more. When you accept Jesus as your Savior, where does He come to dwell? In your heart! He is our Immanuel, God with us. What a cure that is for loneliness! Holidays are some of the loneliest times of the year for some folks. The good news of Christmas is that if you know Jesus, you are never really alone. God is with you.

So we have discussed Joseph's dilemma and Joseph's dream. Now let's move on to v.24 and see:

### III. JOSEPH'S DECISIONS

What did this strong, good man decide to do? He made a series of decisions, and each time, he was obedient to the will of God. Joseph is a fine example for all of us to follow. First of all, he took Mary as his wife and provided a home for Jesus. Look at v.24. "Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife." What joy there must have been when he woke up. He realized that the dream meant that he could marry his beloved after all. He could marry her with the full approval of Heaven, which far outweighed the disapproval they would face from man. So Joseph just decided he would obey the Lord. When he awoke, he took Mary as his wife. They had the wedding ceremony, probably without much delay. She would need a husband to protect her, & spare her the shame and disgrace and loneliness of having to bear the child alone. God's plan is for a child to be raised by a mother *and* a father, so Joseph agreed to be a father to Mary's baby. He must have been a good man. Can you imagine the Almighty God of the universe depositing His only Son in the home of a man who wasn't?

This wasn't an easy decision for Joseph. He's going to endure the hostile stares and the carping critics of people. He's going to have to put up with the giggling and the gossiping and the finger-pointing behind his back. In fact, he makes a decision here that later will put him in physical danger.

Then in chapter 2 we see that when Herod the king hears about the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, he sets out to kill Him. Joseph risked his own life by going against the command of the king. In vv.13-14 we see that once again, Joseph was obedient to the messenger of God, and he took Mary & baby Jesus down to Egypt, where there was a large Jewish community. They were far from home in a strange land. But he was obeying God, and protecting Mary's son. All through this story one thing that stands out is Joseph's obedience to God. And he did not hesitate to obey God.

When I was a 17 year old teenager, God called me to preach. I committed myself to do the will of God in my life. Following God's call has taken me to Texas, to Minnesota, back to Georgia, and here to Virginia. I trust that Cheryl and I have been willing to go wherever the Lord has led us. I look back on the journey and I'm so glad I decided to do the will of God.

What about you? Are you, like Joseph, doing the will of God? Are you willing to do the will of God, even if doing so seems difficult? If you take a stand for Jesus and for righteousness, I can assure you that you will face some negative consequences. You may lose a so-called friend here or there. You may have people talking about you. But if you please God, what does it matter if you displease some others? So would you decide in this very service that you will just do the will of God? It's not always easy to do the will of God. But if you will make the decision, I'm convinced that the Scripture is right. You will find God's will to be "good and acceptable and

perfect” (Romans 12:2). So we see that Joseph just decides to do the will of God without hesitation and without complaint. What an example for us!

Conclusion: Christian, are you doing the will of God? Are you struggling with a difficult decision to do the will of God? Well follow Joseph’s example. God will work things out as He did for Mary & Joseph. God will bless those who are obedient to Him.

Do you know this Jesus as your Savior? I’m going to make you a promise. I promise you, you can have the greatest Christmas you’ve ever experienced if you will come to receive Jesus Christ as your personal Savior.

Sources: William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973); John Phillips, *Exploring The Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, Vol 6* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House); Dr. John MacArthur, *God With Us: The Miracle of Christmas* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 51-59; J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:10] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2011); Dr. Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on this text dated 11/16/97); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Loyal: Matthew* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1980); Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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