

Joseph's Story

Dec 20, 2020

Here we are again in the season based on the wonderful Christmas stories. The stories of Joseph and the Magi are in Matthew. The stories of Mary and the shepherds are in Luke. We are very familiar with these stories. You could possibly recite them from memory. This morning we are going to read the Joseph story.

Matthew 1:18-25 (NIV) This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"--which means, "God with us."

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Let's examine more closely some different aspects of Joseph's story.

The Setting

The Hebrews of the first century practiced a one-year engagement period. Only their engagement was unlike ours. Joseph and Mary were legally married during this year, but not living together yet. Joseph's story takes place during this year.

The Man

We don't know much about Joseph. We know he was of the tribe of Judah, a descendent of King David. We do not know how old he was. Some think he may have been middle-aged. That would account for the evidence fact of him being dead 30 years later when Jesus began his teaching ministry. But Joseph might have been as young as Mary. Arranged marriages were common in those days. Marriages are still arranged in some places today.

Joseph is described as a righteous man. As Christians we most often use the word "righteous" in our relationships to God. In this none of us are righteous with God. But the word is also used to describe someone in their relationships with others. A man who is generally regarded as moral, good, and faithful to the Law of Moses would be labeled a righteous man. We see that Joseph had that reputation.

The Dilemma

We assume it was Mary that told Joseph about the pregnancy. You can imagine how it went down. “Joseph, I am pregnant, but I wasn’t unfaithful to you. And I wasn’t raped. I am pregnant by the Holy Spirit of God.”

Even if Joseph wanted to believe her he couldn’t. Nothing like what she said had ever happened before.

He left that meeting unsure of what to do, confused, hurt, angry. Joseph faced a situation he did not create and did not want.

I want to stop the story here and talk about us for a moment. We all have a story too. It is the story of our lives. We are living that story right now. The year starting with the news of Mary’s pregnancy was the most life-changing year of his life.

2020 may be the most life-changing year of your life. None of us, a year ago, imagined such a year as this has been. This year will shape you, possibly more than any other one year of your life. For the rest of our lives we will be telling 2020 stories. You who are teens now will tell them to your children and your grandchildren.

Mary’s pregnancy put Joseph in a dilemma he did not want or choose. The pandemic has done the same to us. Do we go shopping or not? Do we wear a mask or not? Do we purchase fast food or not? Do we take a trip or not? Do we have worship services or not? Do we quarantine or not?

We did not ask for such a life, such a conflict, such a dilemma. But this is what the pandemic has brought to us.

Joseph had several options. He could forgive her and go on with the marriage. Or he could divorce her. If he chose divorce he had still more options. He could make it very public. That might mean her death as the penalty for this, under the Law of Moses, was death. Or he could do it quietly, keeping her out of the public spotlight. This was the kinder thing to do, and the one he chose. It was a good decision. It was a decision he would be able to look back on with satisfaction the rest of his life.

We all face decisions that will affect us for the rest of our lives. I have made decisions that I regret to this day. I would give money to go back and make a different choice.

On-the-other-hand, there were decisions that bring me satisfaction years later. I look back and thank God for the wisdom to have made a good decision in those instances. Joseph made that kind of decision. He could feel good for the rest of his life about his decision to be kind to Mary.

Joseph made the best decision he could with the information he had available to him. He chose to be kind to Mary.

Some men are good, moral men. But they are not kind. They think little of the needs or feelings of others. Other men are bad morally, but may show kindness to children or animals.

Joseph was both good and kind. He did not want her stoned for adultery. He did not want her publicly disgraced. He considered divorce to be the right thing in that situation. But he would do so quietly, even secretly. This says something good about his character, about the kind of man he was.

The Revelation

God eventually revealed the truth of the situation before Joseph carried out his decision. Just as God stepped in once Abraham decided to put his son to death in obedience to God, so God stepped in before Joseph had the marriage ended.

Now think about this. God could have told Joseph what was going to happen before Mary was made pregnant. That would have avoided an awkward conversation with her. It would have avoided her worry about telling Joseph. It would have prevented his dilemma about what to do. God set it up for him to have to make his decision.

There is a lesson in this for us. **God will not spare us from having to make hard decisions.** God is working to fulfil his purposes in us and through us. And he uses such dilemmas to teach us things about ourselves.

God already knew what Joseph would do. But Joseph didn't know what he would do in such a circumstance until he had to.

Joseph's Response

Joseph obeyed. He knew it was God's will that he remain married to Mary, name the baby Jesus, and raise him as his own.

Are you obeying the Lord in this time of testing? That's what the pandemic is for us, a time of testing. God is testing our love for him. Are you being faithful to him in this time of testing?

Joseph in God's Long-Range Plan

God revealed to Matthew that Jesus' virgin birth was in fulfillment of a prophecy delivered by Isaiah, the prophet centuries before.

The central meaning of Christmas is that God has given us a savior. Joseph was to name the child, Jesus. The name Jesus means savior, rescuer. The angel said to name the child Jesus because he would save his people from their sins. That is why Jesus is named Jesus.

As you celebrate the birth of the gift of your savior, keep him as the central focus of your celebration.

As important as family is, don't let family be the focus of your Christmas.

As enjoyable as giving and receiving presents are, don't let presents be the focus of your Christmas.

Don't let seasonal sweets be the focus. Don't let decorations be the focus. Don't let carols be the focus. Don't let lights be the focus. Don't let Christmas trees be the focus.

Enjoy these things, but make praising and thanking Jesus the focus of your Christmas.

You can receive Jesus as your savior today if you never have. He died for your sins too. And God's forgiveness will stretch to cover you if you receive Jesus as your savior and let him be Lord of your life.