

The Making of HIStory: God Uses the Reluctant

DECEMBER 11, 2022

PREPARATION

▶ STUDY

Spend the week studying Matthew 1:18-25. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools to enhance your preparation.

▶ PRAY

Pray for our pastors and this week's message, the upcoming group time, your group members and their openness to God's Word.

▶ LANDING POINT

Faithfulness and obedience are key when life doesn't go according to plan.

GROUP DISCUSSION

▶ **CONFIDENTIALITY** | What's said in the group stays in the group.

▶ **NO CROSS-TALK** | Be considerate of others as they share. Refrain from side conversations and texting during group time.

▶ **NO FIXING** | We are not in the group to fix each other. Jesus does that part.

▶ **SHARING** | Be sensitive to the amount of time you share. Don't talk too much or too little. Every person brings something valuable to the group.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

A LOWLY CARPENTER FROM BETHLEHEM

The first Christmas took place during a time when the people of Israel were hoping and waiting for the Messiah to come. Once again Israel was under the oppressive rule of a foreign power (Rome), but the stage in Israel's history is unique because for the past 400 years God had been silent. Then, out of the silence, God spoke and a new story was written—the Story of Jesus, Israel's Messiah.

Last week we discussed Jesus's genealogy and the fact that God uses ordinary people to be part of His extraordinary salvation story. One ordinary person God used who's mentioned in Jesus's genealogy is Joseph, a lowly carpenter from Bethlehem. This week we're going to discuss how God used him, despite the fact that he was reluctant to believe the wild story that the woman he had promised to marry was somehow both a virgin *and* pregnant.

Q: *Who is an ordinary person God has used to impact your spiritual life? What difference did their impact make?*

DEEPER DIVE

IN A CRISIS

Joseph found himself at the center of a potential scandal when Mary, the woman he was betrothed to, became pregnant. To make matters even more bizarre, she said an angel told her she got pregnant through the Holy Spirit. One can only imagine what must have gone through Joseph's head when he heard the news. This was a bona fide crisis and Joseph didn't know what to do.

Let's take a look at the way God spoke to Joseph and assured him that what Mary said was true and that the child she was carrying was unlike any other.

Q: *Have a volunteer read Matthew 1:18-25. Based on this passage, how would you describe Joseph's character?*

Q: *What are important things to remember when you face a crisis or when things don't go according to plan?*

Q: *Joseph responds in obedience to God's command. What things can stand in the way of our being obedient to God?*

REFLECTION AND NEXT STEPS

JOSEPH'S FAITHFULNESS AND OBEDIENCE

Joseph and Mary had already made plans for their lives. They thought they had a good future planned for their marriage and, eventually, for a family. But God had other plans which were bigger and better than anything they could have imagined. They would be responsible for bringing the Messiah, God's Savior, into the world and raising him.

Joseph faced a crisis and showed some reluctance to believe what his wife told him. However, he faithfully went through with his original plan to take Mary as his wife after God spoke to him through an angel in a dream.

Like Joseph, each of us makes plans for the future. Sometimes we encounter a crisis or some event that threatens to unravel our plans. How are we to respond when we encounter the unexpected in our lives and things don't go according to plan? We can be like Joseph and respond in two key ways—with *faithfulness* and *obedience*.

Faithfulness – Joseph was faithful to Mary and he was faithful to God. He went through with his plan to take Mary as his wife, despite the scandal her pregnancy likely caused in their community. He was faithful to the plans God had for him, even though they weren't the original plans he had for his life.

Obedience – Joseph woke up from his dream a changed man. He was no longer reluctant. Instead, he did everything God told him to do.

Q: *Share about a time when God changed your plans for something bigger and better.*

Q: *How would you live differently if you were faithful and obedient to whatever plans God has for you? How would that affect the way you see hardship and suffering?*

Q: In what ways could you increase your level of faithfulness and obedience?

Q: How can the group be praying for you this week?

COMMENTARY

Born to a Virgin

"Why is it so important that the Christ, the promised king, be born to a virgin? The virgin birth is more than a miracle to draw attention to the unique nature of this child. Because Mary was a virgin, only God could have been the father of Jesus, making Jesus the one and only God-Man in all the universe. God's plan would have been impossible if Jesus had been anything less."

Understanding the Concept of Betrothal in the 1st Century

"Mary had been betrothed to Joseph. The custom of betrothal was different from 'engagement' in modern society. Customarily, the parents of a young man chose a young woman to be engaged to their son. A second stage of betrothal involved official arrangements and a prenuptial agreement before witnesses, which was a legally binding contract and could be broken only by a formal process of divorce. **found to be with child.** Mary is about four months pregnant, having spent three months with Elizabeth, her 'relative' (Luke 1:36, 56).

Betrothed partners were referred to as **husband** and 'wife' (v. 20), though they were not yet considered to be married, and having sexual relations during that period was considered immoral. **put her to shame.** Sexual unfaithfulness during betrothal was considered adultery, and under the Mosaic law carried the death penalty by stoning. **divorce her quietly.** Joseph intended to maintain his personal righteousness, yet he desired to show compassion even though Mary appeared to be an adulteress."

Prophecy Fulfilled in Matthew

"Twelve times (here; 2:15, 23; 3:15; 4:14; 5:17; 8:17; 12:17; 13:14, 35; 21:4; 27:9) Matthew speaks of the OT being fulfilled in the events of Jesus' life. Some of these prophecies are uniquely fulfilled by Jesus, while others are typological, where Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of an OT type (see note on 2:15). Here the OT text in question is Isa 7:14. The immediate OT context suggests a partial fulfillment in Isaiah's day: "Before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste" (Isa 7:16) refers back to Rezin and Pekah (Isa 7:1)."

Names of Jesus

"The name Jesus means "Saviour" and comes from the Hebrew name, Joshua ("Jehovah is salvation"). There were many Jewish boys with the name Joshua (or, in the Greek, Jesus); but Mary's Boy was called "Jesus the Christ." The word *Christ* means "anointed"; it is the Greek equivalent of *Messiah*. He is "Jesus the Messiah." Jesus is His human name; Christ is His official title; and Immanuel describes who He is—"God with us." Jesus Christ is God! We find this name "Immanuel" in Isaiah 7:14 and 8:8."

ENDNOTES:

1. Stuart K. Weber, *Matthew*, vol. 1, *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 17.
2. D. A. Carson, "The Gospels and Acts," in *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 1699.
3. Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 14.