



The Christmas Story and Joseph

BY DR. JERRY VINES

By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study Series from Jerry Vines Ministries
2295 Towne Lake Parkway • Suite 116 #249 • Woodstock, GA 30189

Let's Begin

For our lesson today, we want to look at Joseph, the husband of Mary and earthly father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Joseph often gets left out of the Christmas story. It's as if he gets lost in all the activity. But Joseph has a vital part in the story of the Lord Jesus Christ's birth. While the Holy Spirit chose not to give us a single word that Joseph ever spoke, his life is a reminder that our words are not nearly as important as we think they are. In fact, Joseph's actions speak so loudly that we do not need to hear the words he said.

What do we know about Joseph if we do not know anything he said? We know he was not a rich man. He was a carpenter, a laborer, so he represents those who make their living by their hands. As we will see, he was also a humble man. Who would have thought that

the Son of God would be brought up in the home of a humble carpenter like Joseph? Yet, He was; but at the same time, the blood of the royal kings of Israel also flowed through his veins. He was a descendant of King David (cp. Mt. 1:16). As we celebrate the birth of the Lord Jesus, let's use the outline below and consider the story of Christmas through the eyes of Joseph. As we do, we will see that he was just the kind of man Mary would need for a husband and the Lord Jesus would need for an earthly father through His growing years.

I. Joseph's Dilemma (vv. 18-19)

II. Joseph's Dream (vv. 20-23)

III. Joseph's Decision (vv. 24-25)

I. Joseph's Dilemma (vv. 18-19)

It is obvious as we begin to read Matthew's account of the Christmas story that Joseph was a man who had a dilemma like few people have ever experienced. His story actually starts off in a beautiful fashion. He was espoused or engaged to a young virgin named Mary (cp. Lk. 1:27). But, all of a sudden, his story takes a tragic plunge. Verse 18 tells us, "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as His mother Mary was

espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost." Joseph finds out that Mary is pregnant, and he knows that it is not his child. Can you imagine the emotions that must have gone on in his heart?

Mary, no doubt, told Joseph about how an angel appeared to her to tell her that she had been chosen by God to be the human vessel through whom the Messiah, the Savior of the world,

would be born (cp. Lk. 1:26-38). If she did, we have to wonder what Joseph thought when he first heard this news. Did he believe her? Could he believe her? Think about the different questions that must have gone through his mind: "Has Mary been unfaithful to me?" "What will my family think?" "What will the people in the community say?" "What should I do?"

Joseph had a real dilemma, but verse 19 tells us that he was a



“just man.” This means he was a true believer, and he was a man with convictions. At the same time, he also had compassion. He had convictions about right and wrong from God’s Word, but he also had love in his heart for Mary. He didn’t want anything to happen to her. What could he do? His dilemma was between law and love. On the one hand, he knew exactly what the law said about his situation. If a young lady was found to be unfaithful before her marriage took place, she could be stoned to death (cp. Deut. 22:23-24). Joseph could choose to make a public disgrace out of Mary. But he could also put her away privately, meaning he could quietly end their engagement. What would Joseph do? Instead of publicly humiliating Mary, he chooses to put her away privately. In the tension between

law and love, love wins out in Joseph’s heart.

This means he was a true believer, and he was a man with convictions. At the same time, he also had compassion.

Did you realize that, as only God can do, the baby Mary was carrying ultimately solved Joseph’s dilemma between law and love? Think about when the Lord Jesus talked with the woman who had been taken in adultery. The law said to stone her; but Jesus told her, “Go, and sin no more” (Jn. 8:11). It was not that Jesus was condoning her

sin or that He was setting aside the law. Jesus knew that He was going to the cross. He also knew that by His death on the cross He would fulfill the demands of the holy law of God concerning the punishment of sin. But He would also make it possible for a holy God to love us and bring us to Himself in salvation.

Reflection Connection

Read Romans 6:23 and discuss how this verse shows us the difference between law and love.

II. Joseph’s Dream (vv. 20-23)

Verse 20 tells us that God solved Joseph’s dilemma through a dream. We read, “But while he (Joseph) thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.” Joseph didn’t know what to do, but God knew what to do. In the very atmosphere of Joseph’s confusion, God has His angel speak to him through

a dream. We do know that in those days it was not uncommon for God to communicate through dreams. But we need to remember that we have something far better than dreams today. Hebrews tells us, “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds” (Heb. 1:1-2). Today we do not

need dreams because we have the complete Word of God.

When the angel of the Lord appears to Joseph he first tells him, “Joseph, thou son of David, fear not ...” Before the Lord answers Joseph’s problem, He wants him not to be afraid. This is God’s message from heaven for our hearts today as well. There are many fears today. There is the fear of failure, the fear of rejection, and even the fear of loneliness. So many different kinds of fears can grip



the hearts of people today. But Psalm 56:3 tells us what to do with our fears. It says, “What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee.” When we have fears and do not know what to do, we need to turn to the Lord and trust Him. Proverbs 3:6 tells us, “In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.” Instead of fearing, we can take our fears to the Lord. Then we can be patient and wait on Him to show us what to do.

The angel next has a message for Joseph that will remove his fears. In fact, the angel is going to whisper two secrets in Joseph’s ear in this dream. First, the angel reveals to Joseph the cause of Mary’s conception. Look at what he says in the last part of verse 20, “Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.” He explains to Joseph the cause of Mary’s conception. It was of the Holy Spirit; it was something God did. This birth was going to be the result of a miracle. Mary had not been unfaithful.

There’s probably no time of year where the sinfulness of people is more pronounced and more visible than it is at Christmas time.

Every baby that is born is truly 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 but no earthly father. He had a heavenly Father but no heavenly mother. He is the only baby ever born who was older than His mother and as old as His Father. His was a divine miracle birth.

After the angel whispers into Joseph’s ear the cause of Mary’s conception, he tells him about the character of her child. As he does, he gives him the baby’s name: “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name JESUS ...” (v. 21a). Jesus is the human name of our Lord. It was a common name in those days as it was the New Testament form of the Old Testament name of Joshua. But Jesus is no longer a common name. Since the day Jesus was born, His name has become the name above all names. Jesus means “Savior.” Joseph would “call His name Jesus for He shall save His people from their sins” (v. 21b). That’s the message of Christmas! The first touch of Christmas to the human heart is that we are sinners and need a Savior. The first message of Christmas is not about our goodness; it’s about our badness and our desperate need of a Savior to save us from our sins. Notice, the angel said Jesus would save His people *from* their sins, not *in* their sins. When God saves us, He doesn’t leave us in our sins; He saves us from our sins. We are sinners,

but we have a Savior. His name is Jesus. This is what Christmas is all about.

There’s probably no time of year where the sinfulness of people is more pronounced and more visible than it is at Christmas time. Just think about all the drunkenness, selfishness, and materialism that go along with Christmas. As believers, this means that the Christmas season is actually a wonderful time of the year to tell poor lost sinners that there is a Savior who will save them from their sins and His name is Jesus. Let’s make sure we are telling them!

Verse 22 and 23 let us know that Jesus’ virgin birth was to fulfill prophecy. We read, “Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.” Not only would Joseph call the baby’s name Jesus, but this baby would also be “Immanuel, God with us.” This was prophesied in Isaiah 7:14, which says, “Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel.” This prophecy was made hundreds of years before it was fulfilled. It’s as if an empty cup was placed on the table of history. All through the centuries that cup remained empty. Then, when Jesus was born in



Bethlehem, it's as if God filled that empty cup to the full because when Jesus was born, Emmanuel, "God with us," was born. Think about it. Christmas means God has come down with us. He has come to dwell among us.

Holidays are some of the loneliest times of the year for some folks. Think about the widows and widowers who have lost their mates. Then there are those who are shut-ins or are

living in nursing homes. There are others who are single or are away from their families like our deployed military personnel. Christmas can be a lonely time for them. The good news of Christmas is that if we know Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we are never really alone. God is always with us. This means He is with us in our hour of need, and He will never leave us or forsake us (cp. Heb. 13:5). Through every experience of our lives, He is with us. Even when we come to the chilly waters of death, we

do not have to be afraid. Because David knew this he could say, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me ..." (Ps. 23:4).

Reflection Connection

Read Philippians 4:6-7 and discuss what these verses tell us to do when we do not know what to do about a situation.

III. Joseph's Decision (vv. 24-25)

What did Joseph decide to do? Verse 24 tells us, "Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife." In faith and in obedience he made his decision. Joseph decided to be faithful to the will of God. He did not hesitate at all; but as soon as he woke up, he obeyed the Lord. Think about what was involved in his decision to do the will of God in his life. God chose Joseph for a special task like few men have ever been given on the earth. He was going to endure the hostile stares and the carping critics of people. He was going to have to put up with gossiping and finger-pointing behind his back. Everybody was going to think something had been going on between him and Mary, or even worse, between Mary and another man. Who

He did not hesitate at all; but as soon as he woke up, he obeyed the Lord. Think about what was involved in his decision to do the will of God in his life.

would believe the truth of the matter? Joseph's decision to do the will of God would even eventually put him in physical danger. When Herod the king hears about the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, he will set out to kill Him. But Joseph will be directed

by the Lord through another dream to take Jesus and Mary to the safety of Egypt (cp. 2:13-15).

The best decision we can ever make is to do the will of God. Sometimes we can get the idea that the will of God is easy and simple. No. Sometimes we enjoy the will of God, but at other times we endure the will of God. It's not always easy to do His will. But if we will make the decision, whatever it takes and wherever it takes us, to do the will of God, we will have no regrets. When we come to the end of our life's journey, we will be so glad we made the decision to do God's will.

Joseph decided something else too. He decided to link his life to the Son of God. Verse 25 tells us that Joseph "knew her (Mary) not till she had brought forth her



firstborn son: and he called his name Jesus.” In the Gospel of Luke Gabriel told Mary that she would “call His name Jesus” (Lk. 1:31). This means that Joseph and Mary were together in the naming of Jesus.

Reflection Connection

Read 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 and discuss why Paul's words are an encouragement for us to always want to do the will of God.

Wrap Up

Again, the Holy Spirit chose not to record anything Joseph ever spoke, but his actions tell us so much about him. What about us? If people never heard a word we said, would our actions tell them that we love the Lord and live to honor Him? Do our actions keep people from hearing what we say? When we have a dilemma between law and love, does love win? When we have decisions to make, do we turn to the Lord and His Word so we can have His direction and guidance in our lives? When we know God's will for our lives, do we hesitate or do we immediately do it? As we celebrate our Lord's birth this Christmas season, let's let Joseph's life be an encouragement and inspiration to us! Let's also be sure that we are using this season to share with the lost that Jesus came to save His people from their sins!

