

JOSEPH, HUSBAND OF MARY

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1:18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ happened this way. While his mother Mary was engaged to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. 1:19 Because Joseph, her husband to be, was a righteous man, and because he did not want to disgrace her, he intended to divorce her privately. 1:20 When he had contemplated 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 as your wife, because the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 1:21 She will give birth to a son and you will name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." 1:22 This all happened so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet would be fulfilled: 1:23 "Look! The virgin will conceive and bear a son, and they will call him Emmanuel," which means "God with us." 1:24 When Joseph awoke from sleep he did what the angel of the Lord told him. He took his wife, 1:25 but did not have marital relations with her until she gave birth to a son, whom he named Jesus.

Today, let's meet Joseph (husband of Mary).

He was of the house and lineage of King David, as reported by both Matthew (1:16) and Luke (1:27; 2:4), and attested by the angel who spoke with him (Matthew 1:20). Both Mary and Joseph descended from David through different sons (Luke 3:31 and Matthew 1:6), but it was Joseph who provided the connection to the promised royal line of David (through Solomon).

He and Mary lived in Nazareth (a town in the hills of Galilee), where he was a carpenter (furniture maker).

Joseph's Concern

1:18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ happened this way. While his mother Mary was engaged to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.

A virginal conception has been debated for generations. While it seems likely from the records that the disciples of Jesus were not fully aware of His miraculous conception, it is clear that the early followers of the Resurrected Lord were persuaded of its truth, Matthew and Luke both attesting to it in their Gospel accounts.

Theologically, the idea is consistent with the preexistence of Christ. Indeed, it's difficult to see how God could become genuinely human without a birth of some extraordinary means.

Jewish marriages were prearranged by the parents of the two families. When an agreement was struck, the young man and woman were formally engaged (betrothed), which initiated a one-year waiting period to prove their faithfulness to each other. During this time, each lived in the home of their parents. Although they lived apart, they were considered legally married, and any breach of that arrangement was a punishable offense.

According to Moses' law (Deuteronomy 22:23-24), the punishment was specific:

²³ "Suppose a man meets a young woman, a virgin who is engaged to be married, and he has sexual intercourse with her. If this happens within a town, ²⁴ you must take both of them to the gates of that town and stone them to death. The woman is guilty because she did not scream for help. The man must die because he violated another man's wife. In this way, you will purge this evil from among you.

Joseph was in an awkward spot. His own reputation was on the line, and with it, Mary's life.

Joseph's Character

^{1:19} Because Joseph, her husband to be, was a righteous man, and because he did not want to disgrace her, he intended to divorce her privately.

There were very few options open to Joseph.

(1) As a "righteous man," he could reveal Mary's condition, to preserve his own reputation, and she would be stoned to death, according to the law of Moses. And, we are told, Joseph was a law-abiding soul, who respected the law of Moses. However, this was a cold, unfeeling solution.

Joseph was torn. More than his own reputation, he was concerned for Mary's dignity.

(2) In order to avoid Mary's immediate public disgrace, Joseph planned a private divorce. This would permit Mary to marry the man responsible for her pregnancy, and carry on with her life. This was a kind solution. He chose this plan.

Surely, this tells us about the noble character of this hard-working man. He chose kindness over judgment.

Joseph's Crisis

^{1:20} When he had contemplated 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 as your wife, because the child conceived

in her is from the Holy Spirit. ^{1:21} She will give birth to a son and you will name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” ^{1:22} This all happened so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet would be fulfilled: ^{1:23} “Look! The virgin will conceive and bear a son, and they will call him Emmanuel,” which means “God with us.”

The angel’s explanation of Mary’s pregnancy could not have been received as matter-of-fact information; who had ever heard of such a thing! If anyone had good reason to question whether or not they had heard from God, Joseph could. But the fact that he did not, suggests that much more than words were exchanged here. God knows how to reveal Himself to you. He knows how to convince you of His plan, if you will give Him your attention.

The angel’s explanation may have reminded Joseph of the words of Jeremiah (31:31-37), which promised a new covenant, based on God’s mercy:

³¹ “The day is coming,” says the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. ³² This covenant will not be like the one I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant, though I loved them as a husband loves his wife,” says the Lord.

³³ “But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel after those days,” says the Lord. “I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴ And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their relatives, saying, ‘You should know the Lord.’ For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already,” says the Lord. “And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins.”

³⁵ It is the Lord who provides the sun to light the day and the moon and stars to light the night, and who stirs the sea into roaring waves. His name is the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, and this is what he says:

³⁶ “I am as likely to reject my people Israel as I am to abolish the laws of nature!”

³⁷ This is what the Lord says:

“Just as the heavens cannot be measured and the foundations of the earth cannot be explored, so I will not consider casting them away for the evil they have done. I, the Lord, have spoken!

The angel explicitly reminded Joseph of Isaiah’s 700-year-old prophecy, as the promise of which this was the fulfillment. Isaiah’s words (7:13-14) expressed God’s firm intention to bless His stubborn people with His gracious presence, and they were addressed to the royal line of David:

¹³ Then Isaiah said, “Listen well, you royal family of David! Isn’t it enough to exhaust human patience? Must you exhaust the patience of my God as well? ¹⁴ All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means ‘God is with us’).

Perhaps it was this word that captured Joseph’s heart. Suddenly, a third reasonable option occurred to him: He could take Mary into his home immediately, ignoring the one-year waiting

period. Though this would break with tradition, it was not unheard of, and it would cover her pregnancy. This was an act of mercy. Joseph chose mercy over judgment or kindness.

Joseph's Commitment

1:24 When Joseph awoke from sleep he did what the angel of the Lord told him. He took his wife, 1:25 but did not have marital relations with her until she gave birth to a son, whom he named Jesus.

It became Joseph's pattern to follow the voice of the Lord. On two other occasions, at least (Matthew 2:13, 19), Joseph was advised by an angel of the Lord concerning the welfare of his family, and he promptly took action accordingly.

It was also his pattern to respect the plan of God. Joseph believed that God could and would fulfill His plan in His way. And Joseph was willing to wait for God's timetable, and then do his part. He lived a celibate life with Mary until her firstborn was delivered. God's honor and Joseph's obedience were more important to him than sex, so he waited.

And when her son was born, breaking again with tradition, Joseph did not name Him after himself or one of his close relatives, but gave Him the auspicious name that God had chosen: Jesus, which means "Yahweh Saves."

Conclusion

You will inevitably have concerns about circumstances in your life, or your family, or the world around you. Your character dictates how you will respond.

And if your character is godly, including traits like *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control* (Galatians 5:22-23), you will be drawn into crises of decision.

You will choose between good and evil; but you will also have to choose between good and God. Sometimes, what seems acceptable is actually unacceptable, if you want to see God's plan unfold.

Crises demand prayer; God alone has the wisdom we need to navigate such storms. Do not be afraid that you will misunderstand; God knows how to communicate His will to you—whether by a verse of Scripture, the counsel of a godly friend, the persistent prayer support of others, or the voice of the Angel of the Lord. Reach out to Him until He responds. Then trust His answer and determine what you will do. (Don't get your determination ahead of your trust!)

And remember, the fulfillment of a promise from God is never a conclusion, but only the next step in a series of divine promises, for the goodness of God knows no end.

Sending Jesus fulfilled many prophetic promises. The life He lived fulfilled even more. The death He died fulfilled even more, securing our salvation. His resurrection, His ascension, His intercession, and His return will fulfill even more. But even then the story will not be complete! Our life with Him throughout eternity will continue to unfold the glorious truth and grace of God in the Person of Jesus Christ.

His grace is more than enough for your life. His extravagant love is everlasting. Count on it!