

Joseph's story
Matthew 1:18-25

Joseph is like Cary Grant in North By Northwest or Harrison Ford in The Fugitive – an ordinary man who gets caught up in something far bigger than himself. Before this is over, Joseph will have three visits from angels, will face public embarrassment of marrying a girl who is carrying someone else's child, and will have soldiers of the political leader invade his town looking for his infant child.

Those are significant events for a man who is silent in the pages of scripture.

Joseph is the most overlooked figure of Christmas. So little is known about him, so each thing we read is loaded with meaning.

In some ways he is more of a mute than Zacharias whose words are recorded, but with Joseph there are no words recorded, yet Joseph speaks loudly by his obedience of faith.

Matt 1:18-25

A brief portrayal of Joseph's story- focused on essential elements to prepare us for the rest of the life of Jesus.

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. 19 And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to divorce her to send her away secretly. 20 But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." 22 Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 23 "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which translated means, "God with us." 24 And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, 25 but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.

v. 1, 18, The book of the 'genesis' of Jesus Christ

Jesus stands in the line of Abraham and David and all of this is connected to the OT.

There are descendants of David who receive promises 2 Sam 7 and Jesus brings their fulfillment.

Jesus "Christ" = Messiah; not just any relative of David. This was IMPORTANT for the original Jewish audience. 2 Sam 7 – one to sit on David's son forever, David's greater Son, the true King to rule over all the nations. The audience knew their OT history- the ups and downs, the hopes and promises, the failures of past kings. Now Matthew speaks of a new king.

STARTLING ANNOUNCEMENT

This doesn't conform to the proper norms for a royal birth

But here we see a genealogy that is filled with scandal. The fact that the genealogy includes the unseemly aspects of the family tree lends authenticity. The Bible doesn't whitewash the history of humanity or its characters.

"Before they came together, she was found to be with child"

The betrothal was more serious than an engagement and often lasted around a year before the couple would actually live together as man and wife.

The contract could be broken only by death or divorce, and Mary's apparent sin could have resulted in either.

The big wedding plans came to an abrupt halt.

Taking a pregnant bride to the altar is a new spin on “my big fat Jewish wedding.”

What would Joseph think? What would you think?

“This is not the girl I thought she was.”

By all legal and moral “rights” Joseph could have had Mary tried for adultery; he could have made a public example of her. EX: NO HONOR KILLING is carried out by this righteous man.

Wangerin: “Evidently, one’s rights do not define one’s righteousness.”

In fact we could make the point that being a Christian means giving up our wrongs, but also giving up our rights – our self-righteousness, our right to exact payback when someone sins against us.

God didn’t exact payback from us – He sent His Son to die in our place; our right to defend our reputation is made void by the cross. Remember that it was our reputation that made the cross necessary.

Luke tells of how the angel came to Mary to explain what was going to happen. At some point she knows she has to have a very awkward conversation with Joseph.

Who will believe in a virgin birth? They weren’t such unsophisticated religious rubes that they didn’t know where babies came from.

This had never happened before.

Joseph had to be confused and bewildered and he surely felt betrayed, disillusioned.

v. 19 He was a just, righteous man – careful to keep the law.

The expectation would be exposure and divorce.

“yet unwilling to put her to shame” – a kind man, move to divorce her privately. He’d probably known her for years when the marriage was arranged.

Avoid the morality lesson of “be like Joseph or Mary”. The center of the lesson is the coming of Christ, God’s sovereignty moving through these real people who desire to honor Him.

GOSPEL REMINDER

. 20 But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit .

God sends an angel v. 20

This is so familiar to us, but not for them. The coming of angels was not a daily event.

Angelic activity in the gospels is focused on Jesus – his birth and resurrection

3 x in chap 1-2 we get angels. God is up to something BIG.

v. 20 “Son of David” – how many people called him that?

1:1. Joseph is not a pawn, he is from the lineage of David

“Don’t be afraid to take Mary” – that would have been the normal response.

WHY?

Her conception is from the Holy Spirit – incarnation.

We take it for granted because we are 2000 years down the road and have heard the term, but for the original audience, this idea was not on the radar. God become flesh – humanity joined to deity – was unthinkable. You can understand why the doctrine of the two natures of Christ has been the topic of so much discussion and debate in the history of the church. This is the great mystery and the great miracle.

John Donne- Annunciation

yea, thou art now
Thy Maker’s maker, and thy Father’s mother.

Thou hast light in dark, and shutt'st in little room
Immensity, cloistered in thy dear womb.

Packer-

But in fact, the real difficulty, the supreme mystery with which the gospel confronts us, does not lie here [in the atonement, the resurrection, or the Gospel miracles] at all. It lies not in the Good Friday message of atonement, nor in the Easter message of resurrection, but in the Christmas message of Incarnation. The really staggering Christian claim is that Jesus of Nazareth was God made man – that the second person of the Godhead became the “second man” (1 Cor 15:47), determining human destiny, the second representative head of the race, and that he took humanity without loss of deity, so that Jesus of Nazareth was as truly and fully divine as he was human.” (J.I. Packer, Knowing God, p.53)

Joseph had no category for this at all.

The angel instructs and commands Joseph. V 21

21 She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”

Even as a righteous man HE NEEDED A SAVIOR.

Joseph doesn't say, “Listen angel, I'm a righteous man so this savior won't be for me. Didn't you read v.19 which describes me as righteous. I don't need a savior.”

Jesus' name is linked to his mission- to save his people from their sin.

Christmas is not about God coming to reward those who have been good and righteous. It's not about God sending an example for those who are trying harder to be better. It is about God coming to save those who have been unfaithful, unbelieving and rebellious.

MY TESTIMONY – going to college thinking “If everybody just believed like I do the world will be a great place. I've got the answers; THEY'RE all messed up.”

A few months later – “I'm in trouble with life.” A short while after that God brought me to faith by showing me that I didn't need a better example to follow. I needed a SAVIOR.

He will save his people from their sins. Such a child. What child is this?

The child of promise from Gen 3

The OT IS Filled with language of salvation and deliverance and of language of a new covenant when God would deal with sin and renew the hearts of his people – Jer 31, Ezek 36; Isaiah 53

The angels' announcement gathers up the OT promises and focuses them on this baby.

Jesus did not come to be a banner for those seeking to get rid of Rome or to be the rallying cry for any political party or movement focused on social evils or injustice.

Jesus came to deal with the ROOT of all evil – our sinful twisted hearts and our rebellion against our Creator.

A COSMIC PURPOSE

v. 22 – to fulfill the word of the Prophet

In Jesus all of God's purposes have been fulfilled. Matthew often points this out. He uses many OT references to draw the connection between the Jewish OT and the person and work of Christ as Messiah.

Matthew grasps the ultimate significance of the sign that is given – “God with Us”.

Joseph could have said, “My home is going to be ground zero for God's Immanuel Agenda? Yeah, right.”
But He walked by faith in the promise.

Friends, we need to walk by faith because God wants to make not just our homes, but our hearts, ground zero for his Immanuel Agenda. Do you believe that?

Don't let this just be a doctrine. See the wonder and glory of it. God has come to dwell with us. He came to be with us, walk with us, suffer with us, die for us, rise for us.

The God who created the universe came to live on this planet that He made. He endured the cold winters and the hot summers that are the result of how he placed the earth in just the right distance from the sun.

One might wonder if Jesus ever looked up at the stars and thought, "Wow, they look different from down here."

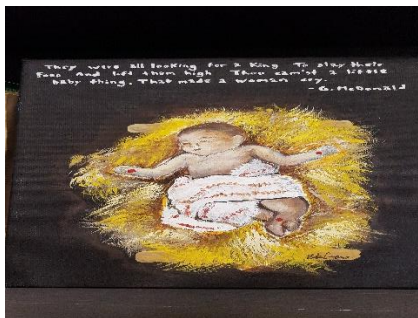
As the eternal Son, the second person of the Trinity, he had always seen them from a different vantage point, but as the son of Joseph and Mary, He saw them as we do.

He was conceived in the womb and entered the world as a child so that he could one day be our substitute for sin and gain eternal life for us. He is the Savior.

Because of him we now have access before the throne of the Father and He has the name that is above all names.

The Hallmark version of Christmas must never obscure the connection between the manger and the cross.

They all were looking for a king
To slay their foes and lift them high;
Thou cam'st a little baby thing
That made a woman cry.



The Incarnation is not a Plan B. It was always God's plan to rescue His people and bring them to Himself. Joseph was in on the ground floor of this Amazing fulfillment of God's plan.

We don't know much about Joseph, but we do know that He walked by faith in the promises of God.

While Joseph has a unique perspective on the Christmas story, he knew that the center of the story was the baby, the God made flesh Christ child.

In my lifetime there has never been a year when the news of "God With Us" has been so needed and so welcome. The incarnation is not a side item on the church buffet bar. IT is central; it is part of the main course.

This is the core of the fulfillment of God's Promise to save a people for Himself.

21 She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

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