

Christmas Through the Eyes of Joseph

December 11th, 2016

With Christmas coming up in just two weeks, you might just be feeling your holiday stress level above the green & into the red!

- As meaningful as this time of the year can be, it's amazing how much we add onto our already busy lives leading up to Christmas;
- From setting up all the **Christmas decorations & parties** to **Christmas presents & family gatherings...**

From **sending out cards to wrapping presents...** from **extra end-of-the-year stuff to do** at work to all the **extra baking...**

- Somehow this season of "peace on earth" and "silent night" can feel less *peaceful & quiet* than just about any other time of the year.
- But in spite of any ideas to the contrary, **what led up to that very first Christmas** two thousand years ago was, in reality, as far from peaceful as you could get.

Beyond their **lives lived in poverty** under the repressive Roman occupation of Israel,

- For Joseph & Mary **those few weeks before Christmas** were some of the most stressful days of their lives as a couple.
- In fact, if you read the early pages of the Book of Matthew then you're reminded, for example,
- of **just how difficult it was for them as they traveled between Nazareth & Bethlehem.**
- But of course, their stress didn't begin during that journey.

Even before the Angel told Mary she would be pregnant at the beginning of the Nativity Story, Mary was no doubt **stressing over her soon-to-be wedding.**

- Now if you've ever put together a wedding, then you know the intense amount of energy involved in making it all happen.
- Truth is, **some engagements barely survive** the wedding preparations! Talk about stress!

Even as I was writing this, I Googled the words “**stress**” & “**wedding preparation**” and hundreds of pages of websites and articles appeared.

- It seems as though just about every **Bridal** book and magazine **tries to offer some form of stress-free wedding preparation**, which, *if it's even possible*, is a good thing.
- But **what really cracks me up** are the huge numbers of bridal magazines out there.

In fact, when you combine their national and regional titles, Barnes & Noble alone carries more than 160 bridal magazine titles.

- Of course, there is **Bride Magazine, Modern Bride, Today's Bride, Premier Bride, Elegant Bride, Cosmopolitan Bride...** even **New Jersey Bride**.
- There's another one called **Bride Again** magazine...for the **encore bride**.

Now don't get me wrong... I'm not against bridal magazines... in fact, I'm completely indebted to them.

- After I knew I wanted to ask Joyce to marry me, the **only questions left** for me were “*when should I ask her*” and “*what if she said no?*”
- Well one day, while hanging out together at **Border's Bookshop**, I noticed her browsing through all the bridal magazines!
- It was her way of saying, “*If you ask me now, I'll say yes!*” It was perfect!

It's funny though. There is **one magazine you will never see** in any bookstore. You will never see “**Modern Groom!**”

- And why? Because, as I've said before, the groom is completely inconsequential to the wedding.
- Well, ok... maybe that's not entirely true. But, honestly, no one really **cares what the groom looks like** at a wedding!

I mean... **how many of you** have ever walked away from a wedding saying, “*Didn't that groom look radiant?*”

- You see... a groom at a wedding is basically a prop!

- **He's like a restroom in an art gallery: You have to have one, but nobody goes there to see one!**

Well, this morning I want to **look at a groom** who may not have looked all that radiant at his wedding...

- but who **proved himself to be a man of boundless love and courage...**
- a man **so often overlooked** in the Nativity Story... an incredible, heroic young man named Joseph...
- **A man Jesus was so proud to call His dad;**
- A man whom Mary, his wife, would also see as a man of **incredible character & integrity.**

Like four acts in a play, what I'd like to do is to **look at what little we know about Joseph** based on **Matthew 1:18-25.**

- And thru each of these four parts, **we'll be able to look a little deeper** at the kind of man Joseph really was...
- And how **he foreshadowed the kind of love & sacrifice our Heavenly Father had** in sending His only Son into this world to **redeem & rescue** us back to Himself.
- The **first part of Joseph's story is one of HAPPY expectation.**

1. HAPPY EXPECTATION

Verse 18 begins with these words, *"This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph."*

- Now, **to fully grasp** what's behind all this, we need to understand that **marriage** amongst the Jewish people of that time **consisted of 3 stages.**
- The first stage is the **engagement.**

Back then, when a man wanted to marry a woman, **he and his father would go to the girl's house** and speak to the girl's father.

- **If the girl's father approves of the young man,** he will pour a cup of wine and present it to his son,
- Who would then take a sip... and then **extend that cup to the girl** saying, *"This cup I offer to you"*.

By saying that, he was offering her his very life. It was an invitation to enter into the covenant of marriage.

- She could refuse his offer... or, she could take the cup saying, “I accept your life and, in return, I give you mine.”
- **By doing this, the couple would enter into the second stage** of Jewish marriage called the **“betrothal”** where the couple was “pledged” to one another.

This is the stage Mary and Joseph were at here at in **verse 18**, where we’re told that, **“Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph.”**

- And yet, during this time of betrothal, which lasted about a year, each person continued to live with their parents.
- You see, during this betrothal period, no physical relationship was permitted.

Rather, it was a time of **building a relationship**, of **getting to know one another**. It was a time of **planning, dreaming, & happy expectation**.

- But remember, even though they didn’t live together, they **were still considered to be married**.
- Like marriage, the only way the betrothal could end was thru death or divorce.

Some thirty years later, **Jesus** sat with his disciples on Passover where he **drank from a cup of wine...**

- and then **extended that cup toward them**, and said, **“This cup I offer to you.”**
- The disciples understood how powerful this moment was. They understood **that, somehow...**
- **Jesus was inviting them to become part of His Bride with whom He will dwell in intimacy forever.**

You see, **when we take communion at the end of my message this morning...** when we take the cup and drink...

- **we are not only remembering what Jesus did** on the Cross...
- but we’re saying, **“I accept your proposal, I accept Your life in mine”**.

- If the girl accepts His offer and drinks from His cup, the man will then go to His father's house in order to prepare a place for her.

In other words, in this culture, the groom isn't going to go and buy a new house. Instead, he will add an extra room onto his father's house.

- You see, culturally, this was one of the reasons for the year spent apart during this betrothal period...
- it was the time where the bridegroom could go and prepare a place for his bride.
- **SHOW VIDEO CLIP #1, "BETROTHAL"** (from the Nativity Story)

Jesus said in John 14:1-2, *"Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 3 "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.*

- Thru this time of happy expectation, Joseph maintained such dignity and character as he honored Mary **and as he walked with such humility & obedience** to God.
- And yet, in spite of this happy expectation, the **second part in Joseph's story** is one of terrible disappointment.

2. TERRIBLE DISAPPOINTMENT

Verse 18 goes on to say, *"But before they came together, she was found to be with child."*

- In other words, before that one year "betrothal" period had ended **where they could then come together** physically,
- It was clear to those around her that Mary was pregnant.
- In the midst of **high expectations...** full of love and commitment...
- **Joseph's dreams melted into disappointment, shock, & betrayal.**

We don't know exactly when Mary told Joseph. But based on the expression, "*found to be with child*", I would guess that she told him in her third or fourth month.

- And, that probably **happened after she returned from spending three months with her cousin, Elizabeth**, who was pregnant herself (with John).
- She probably couldn't get herself to do it before she started showing, b/c, in a way, I'm sure that there was always a **little bit of doubt** whether she had imagined it all.

But once she could see it for herself... that all changed. **SHOW CLIP #2, "MARY IS BACK"**

Hoping that Joseph would respond the same way Elizabeth had to the news, Mary may have cautiously said something like,

- "*Joseph, I have the most wonderful news. I'm going to have a baby... and not just any baby. This is the Messiah, the one our people have been waiting for so many years.*"
- "I asked the angel, '*how can this possibly be b/c I have never slept with a man?*'"
- The angel said, **"that which is conceived in you is of the Holy Spirit."**

It's a miracle Joseph. Isn't it wonderful? Aren't you happy? **But Joseph wasn't happy.** How could he believe such a story?

- He must have **felt so utterly betrayed by her**... this young woman whom he loved & respected **had been totally unfaithful** to him.
- And yet, **as hurt and betrayed as he must've felt**, his character & love would overpower his desire for justice.
- His compassion so completely won out over any need for condemnation.

We're told, in verse 19, that Joseph **"was a righteous (just) man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace. So, he had it in mind to divorce her quietly."**

- Joseph's reputation as a **“righteous man”** meant that those in **his community** saw him **not only** as **“just”** but as a man of **integrity... a man of godly character.**
- He was courageous enough *as a young man* to live a godly life in a corrupt culture.

And, **even though his life wasn't driven** by what other people thought about him,

- **loosing the respect of his community** would have certainly hurt Joseph.
- But, more than that... **knowing that his own father's reputation** would be affected must've hurt him even more.

And so, the only way to clear his name & reputation would be to immediately separate himself from Mary.

- But by doing that, Joseph be making a public statement as to Mary's guilt...
- And, even though at this point, he believed that she had, in fact, betrayed him, he would not betray Mary that way.
- He loved her too much to disgrace her, **or hurt her** any further.
- So, we're told that he would come up with some excuse and **divorce her quietly**, in the hopes that **she could somehow rebuild her life** and so he could start his own life over again.

SHOW CLIP #3, “Reason I Chose You”

For a season, things were going so well for Joseph. But **out of nowhere**, just as we experience in our own lives, **a terrible storm has suddenly invaded his life.**

- And yet, in the midst of this storm, Joseph didn't loose his moorings.
- **In spite of all the hurt, loss, and humiliation** Joseph had experienced,
- he continued **not only to feel, but to demonstrate** both his **love toward Mary** and his **strength as a man of God.**

Joseph's life tells us that no matter what comes against us from the outside, **who we are on the inside** should never change.

- We know that **life's trials have a way of testing our character.**
- And **through this crisis in Joseph's life**, we're able to see the kind of man he really is... **a godly man of courage and grace.**

3. JOYFUL REALIZATION

As you know, **the story doesn't end** with the divorce of Joseph & Mary, because **what followed Joseph's terrible disappointment** was a time of **joyful realization.**

- Listen as I begin reading at **verse 20...**
- *²⁰But 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. ²¹She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." ²²All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"-which means, "God with us."*

It's interesting that it was **"after he considered"** the question of what to do with Mary that the angel of the Lord appeared.

- In a way, the **Lord was giving Joseph the opportunity to make the right decision** based on what he understood to be true.
- But now, an angel of God appeared to him in a dream and said, ***"Don't be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."***
- ***"Mary is not lying to you... she's been completely truthful... she hasn't been unfaithful at all... but completely devoted to you."***

Notice that the angel addresses Joseph as a ***"son of David"***... that **he is of royal decent of the house of David.**

- I think it's the author's way of reminding us that **Joseph isn't an outsider to all that is happening here.**

- It's interesting that **the only other person** in the NT who is called "son of David" is the Lord Jesus Himself...
- and yet that is how the angel addresses Joseph.

I would imagine, because of his religious training, Joseph was aware of all those verses, which spoke of the coming Messiah...

- Such as... **Isaiah 7:14** where Isaiah speaks to the House of David saying,
- *"Therefore the Lord will Himself give you a sign. The Virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and shall call Him Immanuel."*
- Of course, Immanuel wasn't meant to be His proper name... but a description of who He is... "God with us".

We all know **Isaiah 9:6**, *"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."*

- These names, like Immanuel, **would all describe who this son would be.**
- God with Us, Prince of Peace, Wonderful Counselor, Everlasting Father, Mighty God.

The **angel then tells Joseph** that the baby inside Mary, born of the Spirit, should be given the name,

- **the proper name, JESUS**, *"because He will save His people from their sins!"*
- What would this **Prince of Peace, Wonderful Counselor, Everlasting Father** Do??
- **He will save his people from their sins!**
- The name Jesus is the Greek form of the name Joshua... it literally means *"Jehovah is Salvation."*

So, with this angelic announcement, **Joseph's brokenness and disappointment turned into joy!**

- Look at this clip from the Nativity Story where Joseph tells Mary that he too has heard from an angel regarding the baby...
- **SHOW CLIP #4, "I BELIEVE YOU"**

4. OBEDIENCE TO GOD

The **last part of Joseph's story** is a story of his obedience and sacrifice to God. Listen to **verses 24-25**.

- *“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.”*
- This is so powerful. Joseph was **willing to break with tradition and took Mary in as his wife**,
- even though the customary one-year waiting period had not passed.

Why? So that people would assume that he was to blame. He is **willing to bear the social stigma** so that Mary wouldn't.

- Think of it... Mary is showing... Joseph ends the waiting period and takes Mary into his house.
- Of course, **everyone is going to think that they had been unfaithful** to the Jewish marriage laws... unfaithful to God.

Up until now, **Joseph's life was so completely integrated with the religious life** of his town.

- And yet, **as soon as he took Mary in**, it's most likely that he was **no longer allowed to participate in the life of the synagogue**.
- But even though everyone just assumes that Joseph and Mary had broken their vows...
- Even though they are living in the same home... **we know from verse 25 that he continued to refrain himself from any physical relationship** with her.

It must've been tough... **everyone assumes it's happening... they're being treated as though it's happening...**

- So... It might as well be happening! But Joseph had an unwavering commitment and love for God.
- In spite of the social stigma attached to his decision... he was willing to do it.

- **Because of his love for Mary and God**, he was willing to throw away his reputation.

Perhaps they tried to explain to those they were closest to... *“The baby is of the Holy Spirit. An angel told me.” “Yeh right!”*

- If their families didn’t understand, no one else likely would have... so, I would imagine, they **just stopped trying to explain** to anyone.
- But **there was a higher price Joseph would have to pay** beyond the gossip and embarrassment.

Some years later, we see in **Mark 6:3**, how **Jesus came back to his hometown** to minister.

- And yet, in spite of the incredible reception He’s received all throughout Galilee, **those in his own hometown ask one another**, *“Isn’t this Jesus, the son of Mary?”*
- Again, in that culture, no one would refer to a man that way...
- Instead, a man would be **referred to as the son of his father...** even after the father has passed away.

And so, in this case, Jesus should have been referred to as **Jesus bar Joseph**.

- You see, what we learn here from **Mark 6:3** is that decades later in their little village,
- **Joseph’s reputation still had not recovered** from his act of love and sacrifice toward Mary... and ultimately, toward God.

While all of this had no doubt been **deeply painful for Joseph and Mary on an emotional level**,

- they would now face a time of **great physical stress**:
- Because they had to return to the place of Joseph’s birth in order to register for the census,
- They had to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem (a distance of around 75 miles).
- Needless to say, they **didn’t have an air-conditioned bus...** but rather walked and rode on the back of a donkey or on a donkey-driven cart.

Have any of you ridden on a donkey or mule before? Would you like to try it while **9 months pregnant on rough terrain**?

- While I think that Mary had already fallen in love with Joseph, this clip from the Nativity Story shows how this journey may have really connected them together as a young couple.

- **SHOW CLIP #5, "CAN I EVEN TEACH HIM"**

And when they do finally arrive in Bethlehem, they find the **streets utterly crowded with thieves everywhere** trying to hustle them out of their money.

- Finally, they come to **that famous inn that refused them** a place to rest.
- Eventually, they **managed to occupy a dirty stable**, where Mary would soon give birth to the Savior of the world.
- From everything we've seen so far, **Joseph's love for Mary is so clear!**

Yet, on that night, **trying somehow to rest in that dirty, smelly stable, there was very little he was able to give her.**

- It is **hard not to be able to care for the ones you love**... you want to buy them pearls but you can barely pay for a loaf of bread.
- For certain, he wanted Mary to have a **safe, clean place** to have the baby... but **the stable was the best he could offer.**

Needless to say, **Joseph also hoped to have a midwife to help Mary with the delivery.**

- But as Mary began her labor... there was **no one to help**. He was on his own...
- and believe me... he hadn't taken any Lamaze courses on how to coach your wife.
- In fact, he probably **didn't know the slightest thing about "women's issues"**! But finally, the baby is born!

A very terrified Joseph **cuts the umbilical cord** and **wraps the baby in swaddling clothes** and **lays him in the feeding trough.**

- He goes over and tells Mary how much he loves her.

- They've traveled a hundred miles... they're exhausted and sore... and yet **the Savior of the World is born!**

For the most part, that's all we'll ever know about Joseph. But, for me, he is an incredible model **both of courage & tenderness... and strength & compassion.**

- For some reason, we **often see Joseph as playing a secondary role** in the Christmas story.
- And yet, he's the man God selected **to protect & care** for Jesus, even before He was born.

Through this Nativity Story, we learn of a young man, maybe 20 years old, and a young woman, maybe 15 years old...

- both of whom, **in spite of the incredibly difficult implications,** accepted God's will for their lives...
- even when circumstances made it so difficult.

They knew that God had blessed them... but they also knew that **God's unspeakable blessing** on their lives **wouldn't guarantee them an easy, stress-free life.**

- But their goal wasn't an easy life; it was **a life passionately committed to knowing and worshiping God...**
- **in spite of the painful seasons** that seemed to always make their way into their young lives.

Through this passage in Matthew 1, we learn of a man who **gives everything he has for his wife...** a man who **understands that...**

- **being a man is as much about being tender & caring & loving as it is being strong.**
- And we learn of a woman whose amazing, yet **simple faith allowed her to trust in the goodness of God** in spite of circumstances that were too impossible to believe.
- **And, of course, we learn how their love leads to the greatest love story of all...** the story of Christmas.

Title Slide... WORSHIP TEAM

Into this cold & dark world was born the Savior of the world. He **came to touch our lives** and to change us forever.

- He **came to reach down and save us** from the penalty of our sins and rescue us from an eternity away from God.
- He **came to love us and give us access to the Father...** so we can live the life of intimacy we were created to live.

He comes to us, as Paul writes in **2 Corinthians 9:15**, as an **indescribable gift**.

- The One who has loved you with an everlasting love... has come to you.
- And, **just as Joseph extended the cup to Mary**, promising his life to her,
- Jesus is extending the communion cup to you this morning.
“This cup I offer to you... it’s an offer of My life and presence.”

And, **like Mary, we can turn away from that offer...** Or, we can take the cup and drink, saying,

- ***“I accept your life and, in return, I give you mine.”***
- It’s **why the Bible describes those** who have given their lives to Jesus as ***“His Bride.”***