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The Characters of Christmas: Joseph, Part 1

Matthew 1:18-25

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel"

(which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

About a year ago, I got a call from a young couple, and they were very excited in their correspondence with me. They had just gotten engaged to be married, and they were wondering if I could preside over their wedding ceremony. I was honored to do so, and then began a deeper relationship with this young couple as we went through that year preparing for their wedding ceremony.

After a few months, we started to gather together to meet and talk about what marriage is about and talk about maybe what their past is like and what God might have for them in the future. And it was a real joy to walk with them. And I can tell you, as the time got closer for their ceremony, the excitement and enthusiasm grew as we visited and interacted and the the details of the planning came together more.

And then on November 8th, just a little over a month ago, several hundred people, actually many hundred people, gathered in this room right here. And we celebrated the wedding union of Dalton Clawson and Whitney Harris, who are watching here this morning. Congratulations to you two. What an exciting time that was.

Many, many years before that ceremony, I was a part of another ceremony of these two individuals. And these two individuals went through the same thing that Whitney and Dalton went through. That naive young man right there thought he was ready to be a husband.

And so he took the initiative to propose to this lady that you see in the photo here. And we did a short four month engagement. We were very excited. We were very enthused. We didn't want to wait long to get married. And then on June 8th, 1991, we stood in a ceremony of celebration ourselves, and we got married together.

The excitement was palpable, wasn't it, babe? It was fun, I can tell you that. I was also nervous and anxious. We had actually purchased a number of gallons of smokehouse almonds to serve at the reception, and the evidence was there that one gallon was missing when this ceremony and the reception showed up because the groom, in his nervousness, had eaten over a gallon of smokehouse almonds preparing for the ceremony. Clear evidence of his nervousness about the day. And I can tell you that the biological system does not tolerate one gallon of smokehouse almonds. Very well.

Long, long before these two ceremonies, there was preparations for yet another ceremony between a man named Joseph and a lady named Mary. We can only assume that they were excited as well, that there was enthusiasm in the air, a bit of anxiousness, maybe a bit of nervousness. But as the day would approach, the planning would continue, and the joy and the air would be palpable. Then Matthew 118 tells us Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph.

The ESV, which we read, says Mary had been betrothed to Joseph. More on that in a moment, but there had to be excitement and An enthusiasm. There had to be some some rockets going on in the small town of Nazareth. It's like that now, and we can assume it was like that back then.

We're talking about the characters of Christmas. We've talked about the angelic beings that God used to announce the coming of his son. We've talked about how God worked to prepare the way for the arrival of his son here on the earth, through a couple named Zechariah and Elizabeth, and how he gave them a miraculous child in their old age to come into the world to prepare the way until the hearts of people till them up, so that they would be ready to receive the coming Messiah.

And today we're looking at this man named Joseph, and I want to just talk with you a little bit about his journey in life. We actually don't know much about Joseph. We don't know his age, really. Some scholars say he was probably young, like Mary, but others say he might have been old. He might have been a widower because we don't know much about his life. After Jesus would be about 12 or 13 years old, there's really no record of him being there.

He might have been old and been a widower and married a young lady in his old age. We don't know. We don't know many other things about him. It seems that we know quite a bit about Mary, and we focus a lot on Mary at Christmas time. But Joseph is kind of known as a face in the background of the Christmas story, a face that's behind the scenes.

Yes, we see him in the nativity scenes, but we don't sing many songs about Joseph. We don't hear many sermons on Joseph. Think of some of the songs that we sing. The famous song, Silent Night, silent night, Holy night. All is calm, all is bright. Round yon virgin mother and child. But we never mentioned Joseph in some of these famous songs.

You've maybe heard the song, What child is this? Who laid to rest on Mary's lap is sleeping. I don't know if men have laps or not. Certainly when I was raising children with my wife, Chris, a lot of times the children were on her lap. But sometimes they were on mine goofing around and playing.

Maybe you've heard the song, Mary. Did you know? Mary, did you know that your baby boy would one day walk on water? But what did Joseph know? He knew some things. He'd had some revelations. Maybe you've heard the song Breath of Heaven. It's called Mary's song. I did find one song entitled Joseph.

Did you know you can look it up on Google? It doesn't have very many listens. But there is a song out there. We just don't know a lot about Joseph.

Some of the things we do know: he was in the lineage of King David, the son of Jacob. He was down the family tree from from this great king. Of course, all of us are in the lineage of Adam, and then through Noah and his sons, and then came King David. And in the line of King David would come the Messiah. And of course, David then in his lineage had a man named Joseph and a lady named Mary.

We know that he lived in Nazareth, this small town that was in Israel at that time. We know that he was a in the Greek tekton. He was a carpenter, a skilled craftsman, an artisan with wood. We can also assume that being betrothed, Joseph was probably excited to have the opportunity to have a bride in his life, as we talked about earlier.

King Solomon wrote that when a man finds a wife, he finds a good thing and has received favor from God. And I would think Joseph knew the scriptures and was excited that God was giving him the gift of a wife. Enthused, he was betrothed. The Bible says a betrothal would begin with what in the Greek word is a kid you seen? It was sort of a contract signed between two families, because the parents would often arrange weddings.

Back in this day, I know this doesn't sound very interesting to us in our day, but parents back then thought leaving such emotional issues of the heart to young people was not wise. And so marriages were arranged by families, and they would use wisdom and judgment in who they decided to have betrothed together. A contract would be signed and a dowry would be paid. A bride's fee would be paid from the husband to the wife's family, the would be wife's family.

And I can just simply say that many of these marriages worked out very well. Maybe there's something to be learned from some of this. I know when my son was younger, we were talking with him often about two major decisions that he would make in his life. Number one, who would be his master and who he would serve for his life. And then the second major decision would be, who would be your mate? Who would be your spouse?

And we I guess we drilled it into him pretty hard, because one day he and I were walking outside together, and I was talking to him about picking the right woman when he got older. And finally he just kind of came up beside me and said, dad, maybe you and mom could just pick her out.

And I can only say, if we would have picked one, we would have picked the one he has right now. Catherine.

They were betrothed. It would last for 12 months. Sexual purity was a high value back then in God's economy. It always has been. And so they were to be separated for this year and waiting and preparing for their marriage union, so that then when they came to the time of the huppah, the wedding celebration, they could consummate their marriage, having grown and matured emotionally and mentally outside of the physical attraction of a marriage union.

And the huppah would come, and there would be much planning in these who would last 6 or 7 days sometimes back then. And the joy and anticipation would build as they were heading through the betrothal towards this time of celebration.

And so the text says this: Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together in the huppa, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

I don't know how he found out. The Bible says that after Mary was told that she was going to conceive and bear a son, she went off to visit her relative Elizabeth for three months. And so, after three months, she's probably starting to get a little bump out front with the new baby growing in her womb.

And I don't know how it went down. Maybe after the three months she came home and she had her first opportunity to see Joseph during this betrothal, and her stomach sticking out a little bit. And Joseph looks at her and says, what's going on there, Mary? Well, she says, I'm pregnant. I have conceived. And Joseph, by the way, it's from the Holy Spirit.

Put yourself in Joseph's shoes. I bet his enthusiasm has changed to a bit of shock and confusion. What has happened to this lady? Is she even sane? Maybe he thought she was joking and said, hey, what do you have under there?

Have you ever had anyone tell you an unlikely story? I remember when my son Ike was about seven, eight years old. I walked around the barn, and he was sitting. He had a little mini horse named buddy, and he was sitting on the horse, and he was holding on to the mane of the horse. And he said, dad, you wouldn't believe it. You wouldn't believe it.

Now buddy had sore hooves. He didn't run that often. But my son said, dad, he took off like a racehorse. He went down around the trees there. We ran along the highway. Then he came back around the fence. I was hanging on for dear life, he said. Then we came up around and he stopped right here. I'm just so happy to be alive, he said.

And I said, really, I. He said, no, just kidding. I wish that would have happened, he said.

Joseph was probably waiting for the just kidding.

Little side note here. God is at work. He's ushering in the Messiah, the Savior of the world. And I want you to think about God. He sits in heaven. Psalm 115 says, and he does whatever he pleases. He is not bound by human standards. He is not bound by social mores. He is not bound by human tradition. He does things whatever he wants, whenever he wants, and he is perfectly good and loving in all that he does.

At one point in human history, God, in his holiness and justice and love and mercy for humankind, he wiped out every living creature and thing on the earth except for those in a boat, because that's what he pleased to do.

What we're celebrating at Christmas is when the time had fully come. God, in his own will and purpose, sent His Son into the world in a very unique way, confusing, shocking and confusing.

This man named Joseph, who is betrothed to this woman in a contract of marriage, and she comes up pregnant by God. By God himself. God is hard to predict. He's hard to control. We never know what he's going to do.

Joseph is stammering around because God has invaded.