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## The Characters of Christmas: Joseph, Part 2

### 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.

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The text says this: Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together in the huppah, 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, 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.

A 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.

So what's he to do? Joseph being a just man. A just man. He wanted to do what was right. Joseph being a just man, unwilling to put Mary to shame.

He had three options. Really. He could blow the whistle on her and put her to shame. And in those days, under the law of Moses, someone, a lady caught in adultery could be stoned to death. And he didn't want to put Mary to shame.

So he had this second option in mind, to divorce her quietly. Eventually she would experience shame because the baby would grow and people would know, but this seemed like the best option for Joseph, to just quietly nullify the marriage, kind of go their separate ways, or kind of at cost to his own shame.

Joseph could marry her and just say, Mary, I'm in. I don't know what's true about that baby, but I'm in.

And the text says he had in mind to do the second choice, to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, thinking about them, an angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him in a dream, Joseph, son of David, do not fear, do not fear.

So now we have Joseph. As time goes on, he's considering these things. He's bewildered, he's contemplative, and obviously he was afraid. He didn't know what to do. He's seeking God's wisdom.

What did the angel tell him not to be afraid of? The angel told him not to be afraid of option three. The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, Son of David, Joseph, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

You know, sometimes we have to hear from God ourselves. We just need a revelation ourselves. And Joseph here, he got his revelation.

Have you ever had news come to you that just all of a sudden, all the stress just fades off your body? Now, I think he's going from being bewildered and contemplative and afraid to just being relieved, because God has spoken to him and settled his soul and given him a word.

And this word had to just settle in his heart and say, oh, it's true. Mary has been telling me the truth. This child is from God. By faith, he just somehow knew it. You know when you know when you know when God speaks it into your soul.

The child that is within her, which is conceived, is from the Holy Spirit. And the angel went on, she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

When Joseph woke from his sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. He took his wife, but he knew her not until she had given birth to a son, and he called his name Jesus.

You know what's happening here. God is calling Joseph into his role in the work of the kingdom here on the earth. God is calling Joseph into his responsibility before God.

Do you know that men are like trucks? Like dump trucks. Big dump trucks. If you drive a dump truck empty down the road, it bounces around. It's not designed very well to drive empty. It kind of jumps on the highway, and it's harder to control. But if you put a load on a dump truck, an appropriate load, it sort of settles into how it's made, and it drives straighter and truer because it's designed to run that way.

Men are like this. Men that don't take on the responsibilities that God has for them in life, they bounce around all over. But when men absorb the load that God has given them and they take it upon themselves, they start to drive straight and true. They become real men who step up to the plate and do what God has called them to do.

And all of a sudden, God has spoken to Joseph and said, Joseph, here is your load. You are going to be the earthly father of the Messiah. Whew! That's a load. That's a load, friends.

And when Joseph woke from his sleep, he stepped up to the plate. And he did what the angel of the Lord commanded him. He was put literally in charge of this family. To name someone is to have authority over that.

And God was calling him up to be the leader of this family. You're to give this son the name Jesus. You're to protect this family. You're to be the father.

And what do we see of Joseph from here on out? He is a man of resolve, determined to obey, to carry his load.

In his book, *Immediate Obedience*, Rod Lloyd says this: Our willingness to obey God in our lives is the daily, uncomplicated proof of our love for Christ, our willingness to obey any, anytime, anywhere, anything, at any cost. God, I'll do it.

The great Christian author Richard Foster says, God's heart is the most tender and sensitive of all. No act of ours goes unnoticed by him, no matter how insignificant or small. God is all knowing. He sees every action you and I take.

Maybe today you're confused or perplexed or fearful, and you're like Joseph, in need of a word, in need of a revelation. Can I encourage you to keep seeking so that once you know from God what's next, you can obey. Because God wants this for us.

Jesus said it this way: If you love me, you'll do what I say. Whoever knows what I have said to them, and we have a lot of instructions in his word, and does what I've told him, they love me. And then he says this: I will show myself to them. I'll make my glory known to them.

In my life, when I sense the Holy Spirit nudging me to drop what I'm doing and go serve my wife, or drop what I'm doing and go serve someone, if I don't do it, I know that I'm not only withholding love from them, but I'm also telling God I don't really love you very much.

When God calls me to forgive someone, release them from an offense or something they've said, and I don't do it, I nurse it, I'm not just withholding freedom in my own spirit, but I'm saying to God, I don't really love you that much.

Joseph, if I could just say this about him, we know no words he ever spoke. We have no record of anything Joseph ever said, but we see this in the scriptures. He was a man of obedience to God. He was a man of action.

You've given me this load. You want me to do this? God. You want me to flee to Egypt? You want me to run from Herod and protect this family? You want me to name him Jesus? I'm in.

Joseph was a man of action with not many words. And could I just say this? We need more like him.

There's a lot of chatter in the world today. A lot of words. I have a sign in my office that says you can preach a better sermon with your life than with your words. And we see that in the sermon of Joseph's life.

James, the brother of Jesus, would later write these words: You tell me you have faith. Show me your faith by your actions. And that, I believe, is the message, at least a part of the message, of Joseph's life.

Next week will be more for the ladies when we look at Mary. But for today, I want to pray for all of us men that are here today, that God would give us insight into what he's calling us to do as a part of his work, his initiatives, right here, right now.

Because right now we're the characters of Christmas. We're the players in God's work here on the earth. And so let's pray together, shall we?

Father, we thank you for this opportunity to look into your word. We thank you for recording these things about Joseph for us so we could learn from his life. We understand that you gave us this scripture to teach us and instruct us in the ways of righteousness.

So I thank you for Joseph. I thank you for his faithfulness to your calling in his life. And I pray for all of us, especially the men here today, that we would be those who would take on the load that you put upon us joyfully, faithfully before you, that your Holy Spirit would seal our hearts and strengthen us to do what you're leading us to do.

And father, we not only pray that for the men, but we pray that for all of us here today as we move through this Christmas season. We continue to look at your work in the world 2000 years ago. Teach us about your work in our world right now.

We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.