

MESSIAH'S BIRTH "Perspectives on Joseph"

We are all aware that the central figure of Christmas is the Lord Jesus. He left the glory of heaven to become flesh and tabernacle among us (John 1:14, Phil 2:5-8). Any true Christmas message is about Him. And though this is true of this Christmas message, we will be concentrating on someone else as well.

The Roman Catholic Church has made a religion out of focusing on Mary. Her role in the Christmas story is undeniable, crucial, and laudable. And though she was truly blessed among women (Luke 1:42) because she believed the word of the Lord to her (Luke 1:45), her position in the history of redemption doesn't warrant worshipping her as the Roman church does. I am thankful to God for Mary. Without her, Messiah would not have come. Even so, this message is not about her.

The shepherds and the Magi all played their part. Nativity scenes across the world give testimony to that sacred night as shepherds pay homage to the King born in a manger. And who hasn't heard of the mysterious wise men who knew of the Savior's birth because they saw His star in the east (Matt 2:2)? Their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh are so well known that tradition has numbered the wise men according to the classification of their gifts. But this message is not about how there were probably hundreds of them who came to worship Jesus versus just three.

No, this Christmas message is about a man or, more to the point, the character of the man who had one of the biggest roles in the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. As we examine his character, we will find that if we, like him, are obedient to God, we will become active participants in the fulfillment of His universal will. And not only will we become integral to God's universal plans, we will also be walking in His primary will for our lives and will thus forever affect the destiny of our children's lives. This man's name, of course, is Joseph.

Matt 1:18-19

18 This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.

19 Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. NIV

A Righteous Man-

One of the first things we learn about Joseph from Scripture is that he was a righteous man. How would you like that kind of introduction to posterity? What kind of life would you have to live that would cause historians to introduce you to their readers as "a righteous man?" Thayer defines the Greek word this way:

Dikaios - righteous, observing divine and human laws; **one who is such as he ought to be.**

Joseph was a man who behaved as he should. And his righteous demeanor affected his behavior. Because he was a righteous man, he did not desire to make a public example of Mary. He was going to divorce her quietly. When one considers that by the letter of the law he could have had her stoned (Deut 22:23-24), one realizes the compassion and mercy that Joseph walked in. Imagine that, a man who had compassion on one apparently “caught in adultery” and would not have her stoned! Do you think his compassion, outlook, and mercy had an influence on the Son he raised?

Matt 9:10-13

10 While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples.

11 When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"

12 On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.

13 But go and learn what this means: **I desire mercy, not sacrifice.** For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." NIV

“I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” Because he is merciful, Jesus was not only unashamed of being with sinners, he recognized their need for his influence. After consideration, we know that Joseph married Mary. He was a righteous man. He was a merciful man. He was not afraid to be associated for life with a woman who was thought to have been adulterous.

Matt 12:7

If you had known what these words mean, **I desire mercy, not sacrifice,** you would not have condemned the innocent. NIV

I believe Joseph understood that God desires mercy more than sacrifice, he therefore did not condemn the innocent.

James 2:12-13

12 Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom,

13 because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. **Mercy triumphs over judgment!** NIV

Is it possible that James began to learn the principle that “mercy triumphs over judgment” from the life of his father Joseph? Joseph was a righteous man showing mercy and compassion.

A Thoughtful Man-

Matt 1:20

But 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. NIV

Joseph did not give his situation casual consideration. The Greek term used comes from a combination of the Greek words en (in) and thumo (passion). He pondered it deeply. He thought about it passionately. He was looking for a solution to his dilemma. His idea of putting

Mary away privately wasn't a rash decision. It wasn't the best decision in light of the truth. But in light of the facts that he did have, it was a very compassionate decision. And then God broke into his thinking process while he was sleeping.

A Sensitive Man-

Matt 1:20-23

20 But 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.

21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

22 All 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." NIV

God spoke to Joseph in dreams (no small irony here) no less than four times in Matthew's gospel. Was God breaking into his life and situation? Yes. But Joseph was also sensitive God's leading him by the Spirit. What do we know about dreams in Scripture?

Joel 2:28

'And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, **your old men will dream dreams**, your young men will see visions. NIV

We know that the Lord can and does communicate through dreams. And we will see that Joseph was obedient to the directions of the dreams. But we are looking at his sensitivity, his faith in the communication if you will. For contrast, let's look at Zechariah.

Luke 1:8-20

8 Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God,
9 he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense.

10 And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.

12 When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear.

13 But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John.

14 He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth,

15 for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth.

16 Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God.

17 And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous-to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

18 Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

19 The angel answered, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news.

20 And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time." NIV

Zechariah was a priest ministering to the Lord at the golden altar of incense and wide away when an angel spoke to him. And yet, he doubted and did not believe. Joseph received a dream of an angel about marrying an already pregnant woman and showed his faith in the promise received ("he will save his people from their sins") by obeying!

An Obedient Man-

Matt 1:24

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. NIV

Please note that Joseph didn't spend the next week considering whether the dream was "of God" or not. He woke up and obeyed. This was characteristic of the man. He was obedient to God's direction and his obedience was immediate.

Not only was he characterized by a lifestyle of obedience to God, he was also a man who submitted himself to governmental authority.

Luke 2:1-7

1 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.

2(This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.)

3 And everyone went to his own town to register.

4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.

5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born,

7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. NIV

What would have happened if he had decided to join the Zealots and not go to Bethlehem and register for the census?

Rom 13:1-2

1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. NIV

God works through authority structures. When we rebel against them, we more often than not are rebelling against the plan of God for our lives. Imagine the destiny Joseph (and Jesus) might have missed had Joseph not been a man who was submitted to authority.

A Reverent Man-

Matt 1:25 NIV

But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

*Joseph had respect for sacred things. The angel had quoted to him the prophecy of Isaiah. Joseph knew that Messiah was to be **born** of a virgin. He therefore restrained himself from pursuing his own carnal needs. Not only was he respectful of the sanctity of this birth, he also had reverence towards his wife and the time of her cleansing.*

Luke 2:22-24

22 When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord

23(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"),

24 and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons." NIV

The law of Moses mandated that the couple have no marital relations for forty days after the birth of a male child and eighty days after the birth of a female child (Lev 12:1-8). Joseph had respect toward God in obeying this law and showed that he cherished his wife by letting her repair after the birth before they consummated their marriage. Joseph was a reverent man.

A Protective Man-

Matt 2:13-15

13 When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

14 **So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night** and left for Egypt,

15 where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son." NIV

Joseph did not procrastinate when it came to the safety of his family. When the dream was done, he got up and left. He and Mary had been living in Bethlehem for a while now. How much sense does it make to move to a foreign country in the middle of the night because you had a bad dream? But Joseph did. And by doing so, he protected the baby Jesus from an untimely death.

Matt 2:19-23

19 After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt

20 and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead."

21 **So he got up, took the child** and his mother and went to the land of Israel.

22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, 23 and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene." NIV

Again, we see Joseph's prompt obedience. At each stage, the move to Egypt, the move out of Egypt, and the move to Nazareth, we see his concern for the safety of his family.

Joseph was a remarkable man. He was a righteous man who showed compassion and mercy. He was a thoughtful man not given to rash decisions. He was a man that was sensitive to the Spirit of God. He was an obedient man who was submitted to authority. He was a man who had reverence for holy things. And he was a man who protected his family. Because of all of this, Joseph was an active participant in the fulfillment of Scripture.

- ◆ He named Jesus and helped fulfill Isa 7:14.
- ◆ He went to Bethlehem for the census and helped fulfill Micah 5:2.
- ◆ He fled to Egypt and helped fulfill Hosea 11:1.
- ◆ He moved to Nazareth and helped fulfill the word of the prophets that Messiah would be called a Nazarene.

Because God has made us righteous in Christ Jesus (1 Cor 1:30), we can live righteously. When we live like Joseph did, we become active participants in God's universal plan. And not only will we become integral to God's universal plans, we will also be walking in His primary will for our lives and will thus forever affect the destiny of our children's lives. Amen? Amen!