

## Joseph's Integrity

**<sup>18a</sup> Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way.**

The gospels of Matthew and Luke are the only gospels  
That record the birth of Jesus.

All of what we know comes from combining these accounts.

Each describes different aspects of the birth narrative.

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Luke tells us of the census issued by Caesar Augustus  
And the requirement for Joseph, a descendant of David  
To go to Bethlehem.

Luke includes the story of the shepherds  
Out watching their flocks by night.

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Matthew, on the other hand, never mentions these.

Matthew tells us of the visit of the wise men  
And the family's escape into Egypt  
Following King Herod's violent decree.

Luke's account focuses more on the person of Mary  
While Matthew's focus is on Joseph.

Interestingly, neither gospel gives much detail  
Concerning the persons of Mary and Joseph.  
As important a role as they play in the story  
We really don't know much about them.

For instance Joseph . . .

We know his name, his Davidic lineage

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And that he was a carpenter from Nazareth.

By the end of chapter 2, in both Matthew and Luke  
That's it . . . no more of Joseph.

Today's lesson is about as much information as we are given.

Perhaps there's enough here to get a sense of who he was.

And maybe we can learn why God chose Joseph  
To be the Christ child's earthly father  
Of all the potential fathers in the world.

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**18b When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph,  
before they came together she was found to be with child  
from the Holy Spirit.**

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So that's kind of like your fiancé telling you she's pregnant.

There's a shocker for you.

How often do we read this passage  
Without considering the full impact  
It must have had on Joseph?

Mary, this seemingly innocent young girl  
Faithful and pure  
Engaged to be his wife  
His bride to be . . . PREGNANT?

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The text doesn't describe how Joseph reacted.

I know how most men would react.

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Matthew Henry states in his commentary,

*“He is loath to believe so ill a thing  
Of one whom he believed to be so good a woman*

*And yet the matter as it is  
Is too bad to be excused  
Is also too obvious to be denied.”*

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What should Joseph do?

**19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.**

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Let me say a word concerning this terminology.

There are three steps to a Jewish marriage.

In the first step the parents of both the bride and groom  
Agree to the marriage.

The second step is the public announcement  
Of the intent to wed.

This is what we'd call engagement.

This is where we find Joseph and Mary  
They were pledged or betrothed to one another.

Even though they are not married, Joseph is the husband.

Now, the only way they could break off the engagement,

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Was either through the death of one of the parties,  
Or through what they called a divorce.

The third step then is the actual wedding and marriage,  
When they begin to live their lives together.

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At the news of Mary's pregnancy,  
Joseph had three options before him.

The first option was to have Mary put to death.

Seriously, according to the Levitical Law,  
He could have Mary and her lover  
Stoned to death for adultery.

In Deuteronomy 22:23-24;

**<sup>23</sup> “If there is a betrothed virgin, and a man meets her in the city and lies with her, <sup>24</sup> then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death . . . .**

Our text states that Joseph was a just man  
And for him this was not an option.

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The second option was to divorce her  
That is break off the engagement.

Initially, this seems to be merciful.

And I suppose in light of stoning her, it is.  
Initially, that is.

Yes, this would save Mary's life,

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But would her life be worth living!

In that time and place and culture  
She would have been shamed and humiliated  
Rejected by her own people.

She would have found it impossible to marry.

What eligible man would want her now?

Even her parents would find it difficult to accept her  
Into their household.

She would have had to wear the Scarlet Letter A,  
For the rest of her life.

And the child would have felt the shame and humiliation  
For the rest of their life, too.

To Joseph this might have been a better way  
To divorce her quietly . . .  
But who ever heard of such a thing?

Have you seen a divorce be a quiet thing?

But that way he could keep his honor  
Find another maiden to marry.

This would be the way his parents would have approved.

Better to stay clear of such a woman  
Than to bring one, the likes of her, into the family!

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<sup>20a</sup> **But as he considered these things . . .**

This small phrase may be one of the most important  
In understanding the character of Joseph.

He hadn't made his decision.

Yes, he had in mind to divorce her.

But he considered his options.

Joseph was not impulsive  
Did not let his feelings get the best of him.

Sure he was angry  
Sure he was hurt  
Sure it pained him to be betrayed like this!

He would be justified to take quick action  
And to come down hard on Mary.

But Joseph was not hasty  
Did not respond on a gut-level, knee jerk level.

He was also not willing to make any decisions  
Based on what the family wanted  
Or what the law required.

Joseph was deliberate.

A good lesson for all of us today!

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We can avoid a lot of conflict in life  
If we can refrain from making hasty decisions  
Out of pain, hurt and anger.

Joseph had in mind to divorce Mary  
But decided to dwell on it for a while

Giving God a chance to influence his decision  
And reveal to Joseph the real situation.

Things are not as they appear!

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**<sup>20</sup> 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.**

**<sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”**

Joseph's third option was to take Mary as his wife.

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There is never a moment when faced with a dilemma  
That God doesn't give you an option.

When faced with a couple of difficult options  
God gave Joseph another choice  
The right choice, the just thing to do,  
The most godly, gracious way:

To go through with his plans to marry Mary.

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**<sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: <sup>23</sup> “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear**

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**a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).**

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Mary conceived and no doubt, the town is a buzz with gossip.

Regardless, the angel tells Joseph:

“Don’t worry, Joseph, go ahead and marry  
For it is not as it seems.”

It took a man of God to believe

That this child was God’s doing

And that this was all part of God’s plan.

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**<sup>24</sup>When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, <sup>25</sup>but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.**

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The world could do with a whole lot more like Joseph.

A good and just man

Sensitive to Mary’s plight

Not one to react in a hasty fashion

And receptive to God’s will.

How many of us men in this room

Would have done the same?

Would we have trusted God in this matter?

Wouldn’t many of us, persuaded by family and friends,

Break off the engagement to avoid scandal?

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Wouldn't many of us respond out of hurt and anger  
And send her packing?

Wouldn't many of us make a hasty decision and say,  
"And that's final, I've made my decision!"

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We do well to remember Joseph.

His willingness to take on dishonor to do what was right  
Despite popular opinion.

This child was not his!

Yet, he graciously received him as his own  
Adopted him into the family of David.

Now, here's my question . . .

How much influence did his earthly parents have  
In raising him to adulthood?

It is a difficult question.

Personality traits are sometimes hard to figure.

Parents' influence

Environmental influence  
Genetic makeup.

Add that Jesus was the Son of God  
And it makes it all that much more complex.

Were Jesus' characteristics of compassion, mercy, and love  
Qualities that came only from his Heavenly Father?

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Or did his earthly parents influence Jesus?

If you ask me

I believe Jesus' parents had a huge influence on him.

As well as his humble environment on his worldview.

Along with his divine nature.

That's why God chose Mary and Joseph

To be Jesus' earthly parents.

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We know nothing more about Joseph,

Following these early chapters of Luke and Matthew.

Nothing more is said of him.

We don't know what happened to Joseph.

Don't you wish we could know?

We can only pray that when the time came

For Joseph to leave this earth

Mary his devoted wife

Jesus, his adopted son,

Family, friends and loved ones

Gathered around his bed,

And shared their final words of love and appreciation

To Joseph, truly a man of integrity.

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Joseph played a very special role,  
In helping to fulfill God's plan of redemption.

A carpenter by trade  
From the small town of Nazareth  
With no notable reputation

And yet, Joseph did his part  
To prepare a way for the coming of Christ

Will you?