

## Introduction

1. A father is a critical part of every family unit.
  - a. The father served as the primary teacher in the Hebrew family. He was responsible to lead the family in paths of righteousness and to train up his children to know and follow God.
  - b. This is still an important role for fathers in our families today.
  - c. Unfortunately in today's world, fathers often abdicate this role or fail to be godly fathers to their children either through abandonment or neglect.
  - d. Joseph served in the important role as the earthly father of Jesus, the Son of God.
  - e. Joseph had a choice to make about whether he would be Jesus' earthly father or not.
2. **Read Matthew 1:18-25.**

## A. Joseph's Dilemma (18-19)

1. What a troubling dilemma Joseph faced. Would he claim Mary and Jesus or reject them?
  - a. Joseph was a "righteous (Gk., *dikiaos*) man." He was not perfect but knew and tried to follow God's Law as closely as possible.
  - b. G. Campbell Morgan elucidates, "We talk to-day of a just man; and we may think of a man hard and cold. We talk of a righteous man, and we have said, 'Scarcely for a righteous man will one die; for peradventure for the good man some one would even dare to die.' The good man is the man of the simple heart. A blunt translation would be Joseph was a straight man, a true man. Not that he was severe and harshly just; not coldly and cynically righteous; but he was a true man, the carpenter, the village builder" (G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 13).
  - c. Would Joseph, a righteous, straight, true man, follow the letter of the Law or the heart of the Law?
2. The Letter of the Law
  - a. Betrothal lasted about a year and was much more than engagement.
    - 1) It could only be terminated by death or divorce.
    - 2) The wife continued to live in her father's house until her husband came to take her to live with him in the midst of a public ceremony.
    - 3) During this time they were considered to be married just not yet living together.
  - b. If a betrothed woman was found pregnant, the Law in Dt 22:20-21 said she should be stoned.
  - c. Her betrothed husband could choose simply to divorce her under the more lenient law in Dt 24:1.
3. The Heart of the Law
  - a. At first, Joseph thought that he would divorce Mary—not publicly but privately.
  - b. But Joseph's decision was changed by an angelic encounter in a dream that revealed Mary had not conceived this child through sin but through the Holy Spirit of God.

## B. Joseph's Angelic Visitor (20-23)

1. Joseph received a visit from an angel that helped him make the important decision to be a husband to Mary and a father to Jesus.
2. The angel addressed Joseph as "son of David" to remind him of his lineage as a descendant of David and the one who would be the earthly father to God's Son, Messiah Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us.
3. The angel commanded Joseph not to divorce Mary but to marry her.
  - a. This would make the child legally his son and so also legally a son of David.
  - b. Jesus would be the final king in David's line, the Messiah.
4. The angel also made four important revelations to Joseph:
  - a. "Do not be afraid . . ." (20).
    - 1) I believe the angel referred to fear in Joseph beyond that of the angel's wondrous appearance.
    - 2) We often fear new, unusual situations. Our fear causes us to want to run away or to fight.
    - 3) God's word to Joshua at Jericho comes to mind: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go" (Josh 1:9).
    - 4) The angel wanted Joseph to overcome his fear of the unknown in this unusual experience with Mary so that he could appreciate the wonder of what God was doing.

- b. “. . . what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit” (20).
- 1) We have already addressed the overshadowing of Mary by the Holy Spirit and the miraculous, divine conception of Jesus (cf., Lk 1:35).
  - 2) Joseph now was given a specific word about the miraculous, divine conception of Jesus.
- c. “. . . give him the name Jesus . . .” (21)
- 1) The name Jesus in Hebrew is Joshua or *Yeshua*, which means “Yahweh/God saves.”
  - 2) Jesus was a name of prophetic hope for the future when God would bring salvation to His people.
  - 3) It was a name of hope given by many Hebrew parents to their sons.
  - 4) Morgan writes, “. . . mark how the angel told heaven’s secret in heaven’s language. What the people thought they wanted was a Joshua who could reveal himself to this material Jerusalem as King, break the power of Rome, and set up an earthly Kingdom. The angel said the deeper trouble was not that of the Roman yoke; or that they had been beaten in battle; the trouble with them was that they were sinners—‘He shall save His people from their sins.’ He will not come to battle with externalities, but to grip sin at its heart. . . . What name was it? ‘That in the name of *Jesus* every knee should bow.’ It was prophecy at His birth. It is an evangel on the Ascension morning. It was an indication of purpose when He was born. It is a declaration of accomplishment when He ascended on high. . . . Never was there so much music as there is in that Name” (Morgan, 14-15).
- d. “. . . they will call him Immanuel (which means ‘God with us’).” (23)
- 1) Jesus would also be called Immanuel since His miraculous birth dynamically fulfilled the prophecy given in Isa 7:14.
    - a) In Isaiah 7-9, King Ahaz and Judah faced the threat of destruction at the hands of an alliance formed by King Pekah of Israel and King Rezin of Syria.
    - b) God sent Isaiah with a word of hope that Judah would not be destroyed by this alliance.
    - c) God told Ahaz to ask for a sign to confirm His word was true. Ahaz refused to ask for one.
    - d) God gave the sign of Immanuel, a child who would be miraculously born in Ahaz’s day and who would not reach maturity before the threat against God’s people was eliminated.
    - e) That child was born, and God’s word to Ahaz and Judah was fulfilled in that day, but there was more to this prophecy than Ahaz’s day could contain.
  - 2) Morgan proposes, “Long centuries passed, and an angel came in a dream to a man and told him that the ultimate fulfilment of that prophecy was at hand. While the words of Isaiah had local applications, they had vaster values than such applications could contain. So the birth of Jesus was for the fulfilment of those vaster values that lay within the old-time prophecy. This hope must be interpreted in its local setting, and yet with that more spacious intention which it evidently contains” (Morgan, 13).
  - 3) Craig Blomberg notes, “Verse 21 introduces the key Matthean theme of God’s presence with his people, which is emphasized again at the end of his Gospel in 28:18-20. . . . Too often those who have rightly contended for Jesus’ full deity have created a God to whom they do not feel close rather than one who became human in every way like them but without sin (Heb 4:15). As God ‘with us,’ Jesus enables us to come boldly before God’s throne (Heb 4:16) when we accept the forgiveness of sins he made available (Matt 2:21) and develop an intimate relationship with him” (Craig Blomberg, *Matthew* in NIV, 60-61).
- e. So, Jesus was given two important names from Jewish history pointing to His important mission. He would be both Jesus, “God saves,” and Immanuel, “God with us.”
- f. Morgan observes, “The second is a prophecy of the past, expressing the hope of the people. The past looked on, and looked up, and looked out, and sighed for ‘Immanuel—God with us.’ The first is the prophecy which tells us how that hope has been realized. The angel declares that all that longing is to be answered, for Jesus is to be born, Who is to save His people from their sins” (Morgan, 11).

### C. Joseph's Response (24-25)

1. Like Mary, Joseph trusted in God's plan as evidenced by his wholehearted obedience.
  - a. He overcame his fear as he listened to and followed the angel's instruction.
  - b. He took Mary home as his wife and honored his marriage contract with her.
  - c. He gave the baby the name Jesus and accepted Him as his son.

2. My friends, Bob and Suzanne Achgill, went to St. Petersburg Russia as missionaries just after the fall of the Berlin Wall.
  - a. The following story did not happen to the Achgills but is one told to them by two other missionaries doing similar work in 1994.
  - b. It was nearing the holiday season, and some orphans were to hear for the first time the traditional Christmas story. The missionaries told them about Mary and Joseph arriving in Bethlehem and finding no room in the inn. The couple went to a stable, where Jesus was born and placed in the manger. Throughout the story, the children, according to one of the missionaries, “. . . sat in amazement as they listened. Some sat on the edges of their stools, trying to grasp every word.”
  - c. As a follow-up activity to the story, each child was given three small pieces of cardboard to make a crude manger. Each child was also given a small paper square cut from yellow napkins which the children tore into strips the paper and carefully laid them in the manger for straw. Small squares of flannel from a thrown away nightgown were used for the baby’s blanket. From pieces of tan felt a doll-like baby was made.
  - d. As the children worked on this project, one of the missionaries observed: “All went well until I got to one table where little Misha sat. He looked to be about six years old and had finished his project. As I looked at the little boy’s manger, I was startled to see, **not one but two babies in the manger**. Quickly, I called for the translator to ask the lad why there were two babies in the manger.” The translator noted that Misha very accurately recalled the story that had been told until he came to the part where Mary put Jesus in the manger. Then Misha started to ad-lib. He made up his own ending to the story as he said, “And when Maria laid the baby in the manger, Jesus looked at me and asked me if I had a place to stay. I told him I have no momma and I have no papa, so I don’t have any place to stay. Then Jesus told me I could stay with him. But I told him I couldn’t because I didn’t have a gift to give him like everybody else did. But I wanted to stay with Jesus so much. So, I thought about what I had that maybe I could use for a gift. I thought maybe if I kept him warm, that would be a good gift. So I asked Jesus, ‘If I keep you warm, will that be a good enough gift?’ And Jesus told me, ‘If you keep me warm, that will be the best gift anybody ever gave me.’ So I got into the manger, and then Jesus looked at me and he told me I could stay with him – for always.” As little Misha finished his story, his eyes brimmed full of tears that splashed down his little cheeks. Putting his hand over his face, his head dropped to the table and his shoulders shook as he sobbed and sobbed. The little orphan had found someone who would never abandon or abuse him, someone who would stay with him – FOR ALWAYS!”

#### **D. Questions/Thoughts for Reflection**

1. How often do we follow the letter of the law and ignore an opportunity to show God’s love and grace?
  - a. Often we follow the letter of the law when it is in our best interest and seek grace otherwise.
  - b. The heart of God’s law calls us to seek the best interest of others—even those who have sinned.
  - c. Often there are consequences for sin, but we should be ready to love and to forgive.
  - d. Choosing the way of love/grace/forgiveness toward outcasts and sinners has the potential of tarnishing our standing as “righteous” in the eyes of self-righteous humans. But in the eyes of God, it shows that we understand when we share His love/grace/forgiveness with those who desperately need it.
2. God’s ways and plans are not always our ways and plans.
  - a. God often moves in unexpected and unusual ways to accomplish His purpose.
  - b. We must listen to God’s voice and look for His fingerprints so that we don’t miss what He is doing.
3. Our response, when we face difficult or unusual circumstances today, should be like that of Joseph.
  - a. Do not be afraid.
  - b. Know that God’s Holy Spirit is at work for good in the midst of whatever is happening around us.
    - 1) God may have some hard things for us to hear about our need for His forgiveness and about our need to show His love and grace to those whom we judge and even hate.
    - 2) By the letter of the law we all deserve death and Hell, but God shows us the heart of the law with His love, grace, and forgiveness. We must live out the heart of His law of love to others.
  - c. Finally, remember that Jesus is your Savior and that He is always present with you—for always!