

This day before Christmas 2006, dear friends, do you know that as God so came to Joseph for his help, so He can and will come to your and my help even as you and I rely on Him as Joseph also did? Whatever your problems or predicament, or whatever your sins and shortcomings, whatever your sufferings and questions, with God there is strength and saving help to be found. Maybe you say, "But if only God would send me an angel or speak directly to me in a dream!" But no, the Bible itself teaches us we must not look to that for God being our strength, but we are to go simply and only by the Old and New Testament Scriptures. Don't look for and expect some extra revelation, but go by God's inspired, inerrant, infallible, unchanging, written Word. Jesus says in John 20:31, "...These [Scriptures] are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, ye might have life through His Name." "If they hear not Moses and the prophets" says Jesus in Luke 16:31, "neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead." What peace and relief and salvation and direction Joseph found from God when he himself did not know anymore what to do or which way to go. God is still the same today for all His people, as many as trust and obey Him, in accordance with all His Word.

A clear indication of understanding and receiving the Christian gospel message, and the good news of Jesus' birth and first coming as Saviour is that then like Joseph, by God's grace, you also will live in humble steadfast devotion to God and for His glory. We know Joseph so lived in steadfast devotion in God's ways for he took Mary to be his wife, as he was told, and he followed all the instructions given him in naming Jesus and raising him too together with Mary. The Bible doesn't tell us one word that Joseph spoke, but his life spoke volumes as a humble faithful man of God. What about your life in this regard? Are you living conscious that Jesus is coming again and that then will be the great judgment day and the eternal age to come?

Tomorrow is Christmas Day! Will you celebrate it as a Christian looking to Jesus and following after Him? It is the only way to have a blessed Christmas and happy New Year! Doesn't also Jesus' birth story as told from Joseph's perspective prove this holy gospel? Amen.

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Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee that it may be displayed because of the truth. (Psalm 60:4)



JOSEPH AND JESUS' BIRTH

Tomorrow, if the Lord doesn't return, is a special Monday as it is Christmas Day, 2006. In view of that, I invite you now to think with me about what we read in Matthew 1:18-25 about Jesus' birth.

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS."

Hearing this inspired Word of God, let us look at the event of Jesus' birth this time from the perspective of Joseph's experience, namely, his struggles, his source of help, and his steadfastness.

Surely no one reading this Scripture passage would discount the struggles of Joseph. Here he was betrothed to Mary, which was like a step between what we know as engagement and marriage in our times, and all of a sudden one day before they were married, he is told by Mary that she is pregnant. Joseph knew for sure he was not the father of the child. We are told specifically they never had intimate relations before marriage, and that Joseph also in that regard was a just, or you could say godly, man of integrity. What else now was he to conclude, no matter how much his dear Mary may say otherwise, but that she had a relationship with someone else that he had not been aware of. Joseph is crushed, not just on account of the apparent unfaithfulness, in spite of Mary's insistence to the contrary, but also with what was he to do now, yes also with Mary, a woman whom he loved and didn't desire to break relations with. Oh, how perplexed and

distressed was Joseph, what a struggle he had. Can't you even feel his struggles here as it were?

You can say Joseph's struggle had to do with sin, or what he thought to be sin. We live in a world of sin, and there is so much sin in the relationships of people, even in the foundational and sacred relationship of husband and wife. Joseph in our Scripture passage was struggling with the realities and complexities of sin. Not here primarily with his own sin, but with the sins of others, and the sinfulness of all people. As a just man, a godly person, Joseph also would very much have been aware of his own sins and sinfulness and the whole problem of evil and wrongdoing plagued him, staring him now in the face in this most unexpected and troublesome and disappointing manner. Imagine Joseph trying to sleep facing the problem he had, and turning this way and that, thinking about the way the course of his life went. Trouble and sorrow was facing him, so unexpected, and how now was he to get out of this, what would be the way to go? Joseph couldn't decide. He just didn't know anymore.

On this Sunday before Christmas may I ask each of you, 'Do you own up to struggles in life, many sins and miseries even, and are you one who cries to God in your needs? Could it be you too are at present struggling in different ways with problems in life? Are those problems also on account of the realities of sin, perhaps due to your own sins and sinfulness, or maybe more due to the sins and sinfulness of others? Are there good things in your life that seem to have gone all wrong? Have happy dream times turned into unhappy and most disappointing times for you? Do you lament your present situation and wonder how you got there? Do you despair for the future, not knowing what to do, which way to go?' Christmas holiday time with lots of shopping and eating and drinking and partying doesn't remove the problems of life and often those problems are then known and felt even more keenly and painfully.

Yet the real tidings of Jesus' birth which we remember also especially tomorrow is that Jesus came to be Saviour of sinners, and to be a refuge and help for us in all our needs. Trusting Him in all our needs, especially also our greatest of needs with our sin and guilt, what a refuge is found with Him! Here also I come to our second main point, where we see from our Scripture passage how it tells not only Joseph's struggles, but also Joseph's source of help in his time of need! As Joseph knew not what to do and so as we may presume, called on his God, "*while he thought on these things*", the text says in verse 20, "*Behold!*" that is, just stop and hear what happened! See how God responded in Joseph's time of need. It's so amazing and so wonderful. We are told God wonderfully comes to Joseph in a dream and an angel of the Lord tells him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife, for her pregnancy is not from any man, but miraculously from God the Holy Spirit! Mary had been telling him the truth, for the angel says: "*that which is*

conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost [Spirit]", 'and the Child she will bring forth is the long promised Saviour, the Messiah, the one Who is come to save His people from their sins, and the name you are to give Him is "Jesus".'

Now wasn't this most wonderful news for Joseph? The angel's message from God certainly solved his difficult problem about what to do with Mary for now he could freely take her as his dear and faithful bride after all! On top of that, and more precious even, was the message that the Child conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb would be and is the long promised Christ child, the Messiah of God! At last the promises of God would be fulfilled, and the great Son of David and Redeemer King was about to be born, and the Child in Mary's womb was Him, Jesus Christ the Lord. Oh, now there could be and would be hope of complete salvation from all sin and that for all the nations of the earth. To add to this all, notice how the angel goes on and gives a Scriptural basis to the events taking place in Mary's life, quoting from the book of Isaiah and stating what was happening to Mary was a fulfillment of the prophet's word in Isaiah 7:14, "*Behold a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name, Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.*" So Joseph, you see also with this quotation from the Old Testament Scripture, wasn't left to base his new strength and hope on his dream, or even on the angel's words, but finally on the ground of Old Testament Holy Bible itself. What reasons for confidence he thus had in all that had been revealed to him, and how everything fit too exactly with the things Mary had been saying.

Do you see and hear it with me - did God ever come to Joseph's help in his time of need! And Joseph as a just and godly man surely knew his greatest need was not just to get out of his present dilemma but to have a Savior to deliver him from all his sins and sinfulness. Now such a Saviour would be born, and by none other than his bride to be! With Jesus' birth Emmanuel is come, God with us, through the gracious and glorious Person and work of Jesus as Saviour of sinners. Oh, how God provided for Joseph giving him instructions also in his care for Mary and his upbringing of Jesus, beginning with giving him that name, "Jesus".

God's help to Joseph here should make us think of Paul's words about God in Ephesians 3, where the Apostle states, "[He] *is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we could ask or think...!*" Or what about the angel's words to Mary in Luke 1:37, "*For with God nothing shall be impossible!*" Or Paul's words found in Philippians 4, "*But my God shall supply all your need, according to His riches in glory, by Christ Jesus!*" Didn't Joseph experience that in a powerful way here in our text passage? While earlier from the text we could feel as it were Joseph's struggles, can you also feel, as it were, Joseph's strength and jubilation with the Source and supply of help he found in and with the Lord?