

The Father of the Christ Child

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – a consideration of the role of Joseph as the earthly father of the newborn Christ Child
2. aim – to cause us to recognize the parallels of Joseph’s faithfulness and obedience to our own
3. passage – Matthew 1:18-25

b. outline

1. The Biography of Joseph
2. The Obedience of Joseph
3. The Importance of Joseph

c. opening

1. **declare:** the following sermon is based on a true story ... none of the names have been changed!
2. the various characters at the heart of the natal story of Jesus (**all of which I have preached on**):
 - a. the child Jesus – the central character (of course!) – although often overlooked in the “season”
 - b. Mary, his mother – the primary character of the biblical account (particularly in Luke’s rendition)
 1. **primary:** much of the story revolves around her specifically (in anticipation of the birth)
 2. and the one who becomes *nearly* as important as Jesus in much of Christendom over time
 - c. the angels, the shepherds, Herod, and the Magi – all who participated observationally in the story
 1. **i.e.** those who observed and reacted to (and feared) the birth event of the child
 - d. Elizabeth, Zechariah, John (the Baptist), Simeon, and Anna – all who participated tangentially
 1. **i.e.** those who are part of the “larger” storyline, not directly related to the actual birth event
 - e. Joseph – the most overlooked cast member – treated (in many ways) as virtually *unnecessary*
 1. he **never speaks** – the Scriptural references to Joseph *never record* anything he said
 2. he is **not the actual father** of Jesus – since the child was *supernaturally conceived*, Joseph can only be the *adopted* (earthly) father of Jesus
 - a. there is no alternative term in Christendom for *him* vs. *theotokos* (**i.e.** the mother of God)
 3. he only receives revelation **in dreams** – unlike Mary, his *supernatural visitations* by angels are through the less “direct” method of dreams (**i.e.** no angel is *named* in speaking to him)
 4. he **disappears** quickly – the final *historical reference* to him is in **Luke 2:41ff** (when Jesus is left behind at the temple) – he is referenced “in passing” as the father of Jesus in **Matt. 13:55; John 6:42**, but not as being involved in any way in the events of Jesus’ life after **Luke 3:23**
 5. he hails from **Nazareth** – the name used as a *term of derision* (**Matt. 2:23; John 1:46**), that he “passes” to his son by going to live there after their return from Egypt (**see below**)
 - a. true, Mary is also from there (**Luke 1:26**), but the *title* is customarily connected to the father
 6. he is **never called “father”** by Jesus – every *mention of Jesus* to his Father (during his public ministry) is to the First Person of the Trinity (**i.e.** to God the Father, not his adopted father)
3. **thesis: the obedience of Joseph is a critical part of the Incarnation of the Son of God**

I. The Biography of Joseph

Content

a. his biblical biography

1. we *actually* know very little about him (although some *apocryphal* ideas have grown up in time)
2. he was an early First Century Jew from the tribe of Judah, who could trace his lineage from David
 - a. the genealogy of **Matthew 1:1-17** chronicles this lineage from David
 1. three (3) sets of 14 names: from Abraham to David (2000-1010BC), from David to the Babylonian exile (586BC; **i.e.** the Southern Kingdom of Judah), from the exile to Jesus (6-4BC)
 2. a *sovereign* line passing from the patriarchs to “the” king of Israel to the Messiah
 3. **IOW:** a Jewish reckoning of the lineage of *Joseph*, the *assumed* father of Jesus
 - b. **i.e.** the need for him to go to Bethlehem to register demonstrates he was from the line of David
3. he was (probably) in his early 20’s when the events of **Matthew 1** open (**speculation**)
4. he was living in Nazareth (his hometown) prior to the census (**Luke 2:24**; as was Mary; **Luke 1:26**)
5. he was a carpenter (**i.e.** one who worked with wood, stone, masonry, etc.)

- a. he is identified as such by reference (**Matt. 13:55**), and since Jesus is also (**Mark 6:3**), it is *likely* that Jesus learned this trade from his adopted father
- b. there was a major Roman building project near Nazareth in the early part of the First Century, and this may have been a place where Joseph (and his children?) worked
- 6. he dies (possibly) prior to the commencement of Jesus' public ministry
 - a. this would help explain why he is conspicuously absent from that narrative (and absent from Mary's side at the foot of the cross; **John 19:26f**); and why Jesus waits until the age of 30 to appear
 - b. although, it could be that Joseph *rejected* the mission of Jesus, and the biblical writers do not include him (**remember**: even Mary struggled to understand Jesus' mission; **e.g. Matt. 12:46-50**)
 - 1. **IMO**: his character (**in Matt. 1**) suggests a man who *would have* appreciated Jesus' ministry
- b. his relationship to Mary (Matthew 1:18a)**
 - 1. this is the story of the *genesis* (lit. history) of Jesus – the story *clearly* revolves around the child, *but* the other characters and their circumstances are *critical to his existence*
 - a. **i.e.** the Incarnation of the Son of God occurs through the circumstances *of other humans*
 - 2. he is " *betrothed* " to Mary – a legal engagement; a legal agreement to marry, carrying all of the weight of marriage itself, but *prior* to the actual commencement of wedded life together
 - a. they did not live together, they did not "*know*" each other (**i.e.** in the intimate sense; **see 1:25**), and they had not yet been "officially" married through the religious process and celebration
 - b. this betrothal was *probably* arranged by *his* parents (**i.e.** a common First C. approach)
 - c. it is this *legal* reality that reveals the **contradictions/struggles** of Joseph in the rest of the paragraph

II. The Obedience of Joseph

Content

a. his difficulty with Mary (Matthew 1:18b-19)

- 1. he "discovers" that Mary is pregnant
 - a. **remember**: Mary *agrees* to this conception at the visit of Gabriel (**Luke 1:26-38**)
 - b. **question**: how was it that Joseph "*found*" Mary to be pregnant? **answer**: (most likely) she **told him** – not wanting to wait until it "showed," she *probably* told him (and Elizabeth; **Luke 1:41-43**)
 - 1. note the phrasing "*she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit*" – not just "*with child*"
- 2. he "wrestles" with the reality of a pregnant fiancée
 - a. he may have *tried to believe* Mary's story, although no such precedent had ever existed
 - b. he may have felt a deep sense of *betrayal* – a "*righteous*" man wanting a righteous woman
 - c. he may have felt an amount of *sympathy* for Mary's story, but he knew the public wouldn't
 - d. so, he decides to take the "high road" – he decides to "*divorce her quietly*"
 - 1. the only way "out" of the betrothal was through a divorce – a legal proceeding whereby the original engagement would be reversed (**i.e.** the "infidelity" would be the justification, any dowry would be returned, etc.) – a "*quiet*" divorce is where the details are kept out of the public eye

b. his revelation through the angel (Matthew 1:20-23)

- 1. **note**: the Lord allows him to go through this thought process for a season before intervening
 - a. it reads "*as he considered these things*" – implying time for him to consider a course of action
 - b. **principle**: **although the Lord allows us to make plans and plot our course, we always need to be prepared to modify our plans when he reveals a better way**
- 2. the frightening nature of this situation
 - a. note that the angel specifically says "*do not fear to take Mary as your wife*"
 - b. **fear #1**: the public humiliation that would now come upon *him* (**i.e.** as the "father" of this child)
 - 1. the angel **confirms** that the child has been conceived supernaturally, and (by implication) the scorn he would feel from others would be *offset* by the knowledge of the circumstances
 - c. **fear #2**: the *nature* of the child that would now become *his to raise*
 - 1. if this child is the *supernatural* work of the Spirit of God, then what *kind* of child is he to take and raise (**i.e.** would he possess the *ability* to raise a child of such magnitude)?
 - a. **note**: it is *unlikely* that Joseph fully grasps that the child in Mary is actually *God himself*
 - b. the fullest extent of the revelation of the Incarnation is probably not in view here – but, clearly the child is unique (just by virtue of his conception)
 - c. the angel saying "*she will bear a son*" raises his responsibility to care for a male child
 - d. **fear #3**: the *mission* of this child and its implications upon Joseph and his future
 - 1. if (?) Joseph grasped that this "*Jesus*," who would "*save his people from their sins*" implied that the child was the long-awaited *Messiah of Israel*, what does that mean for his own future?

2. **IOW:** the fear of Mary being a harlot is *far outweighed* by the fear of what the future would hold if he were to embrace this woman and her *supernatural* child as his own

c. his obedience after the revelation (Matthew 1:24-25)

1. Matthew clearly states that the words of the angel are a *command* to be obeyed (not a suggestion)
2. Matthew makes it sound as though Joseph *immediately* obeyed the command (when he “*woke*”)
3. Matthew shows that Joseph did *everything* that the angel had said (he married her, he kept her a virgin until after Jesus was born, and he named the child Jesus)

III. The Importance of Joseph

Content

a. the importance of Joseph to the natal story of Jesus

1. **thesis: the obedience of Joseph is a critical part of the Incarnation, and an excellent reminder to us of the sovereign choice by God of this man to be the adopted father of his own Son**
2. it is *obvious* that God the Father **sovereignly chose** this man – after all, in choosing Mary to be the mother, it is must also be true that he chose Joseph by extension (**i.e.** since they were engaged)
3. but, even in choosing this man, he allowed Joseph to struggle through the situation *in order to demonstrate that he was worthy to be included in the event* (**i.e.** to show his righteousness)
 - a. as God did with so many others (**e.g.** Noah, Abraham, David), **and often does with us**
4. and, this is a picture of God *lovingly* granting the *mercy* needed to do the right thing (**i.e.** he did not leave Joseph to “figure it out on his own” – he gave him revelation and insight, **as he does with us**)
5. so, this story is a picture of a *Father* carefully delegating the responsibility of *his own Son* to a faithful man (**i.e.** to guide Jesus during his *private ministry*, his upbringing and preparation)
 - a. is it *possible* that God takes Joseph in death just before the public ministry of Jesus so that Jesus would now be under *his* guidance for this appointed effort?
6. **Joseph is not an overlooked, mute, temporary, unimportant member of the natal cast, but an integral part of the sovereign plan of God to bring his own Son into his own creation**