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## Joseph & Mary: The King's servants



Part 29 (051225AM)

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In every story of the birth of Jesus there is mention of individuals we know just enough about to be amazed—Zacharias & Elisabeth, Simeon & Anna, Wisemen & Shepherds, and now Joseph & Mary. God has captured with His Holy Word a picture that inspires and challenges us. This season of remembering Christ's Birth, join me in looking again at that familiar story of Joseph and Mary and Baby Jesus. But pause with me in God's Word and extract some powerful truths by observing what the Scriptures reveal and imply about this amazing couple who were walking with the

This Christmas morning, let"s look again through the lens of the Scriptures at the two young people God chose to use--Joseph and Mary. God was able to use them so greatly because they gave Him control of their lives. They became two of the most important people in all the world for the work of salvation.

As you open to this first book of the New Testament we are looking at the incredible spiritual maturity and responsiveness that God can produce in the life of a teenager. How many of you here this morning, are teens? Here is what God can do with a teen that He has all of their heart. Open to Matthew 1:18 onward.

What will we find was the secret? Simply that God had all of their lives! Did they avoid troubles, fears, pains, struggles, anguish and hardships? Nope, but they had God with them all the way through.

How do they respond to some very stressful times? Watch and see!

Look at verses 21 and 23 with me because in those two verses we have presented the *greatest truth* and the *greatest question* you will ever be confronted with. First the greatest truth is about salvation.

Matthew 1:21 And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." 23 "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with

First, the greatest truth of Christianity is -- that the instant of our salvation, when our sins were forgiven instantly by the gracious work of Christ on the cross--we got all of God! The One who saves us is God with us! We have all of God in the person of Christ who dwells in us!

Then comes the greatest question that each of us need to answer this morning-does God have all of me?

It was nearly 2,000 years ago that God spoke to this young, teenaged couple. They had been engaged for marriage since their childhood, by their parents. Mary  $^{\left[1\right]}$  was by all available data from this historic period somewhere between 14 and 16 years of age, and Joseph was most likely between the ages of 18 and 20.

Their lives up to this historic moment had been exemplary, in fact they were chosen by God because He knew He could count on them. Think about how many right choices Joseph had made at such a young age. He was not perfect, but he had chosen to respond properly to the authority around him—from the heart. He actually was an obedient, law abiding man in God's sight!

In verse 19 Joseph was described by God as "just". He was righteous as a young man of conviction. He had chosen the path of holding to his Biblical convictions and practicing self-denial. God knew he was pure, had chosen pure habits, and fled sexual sins. Those choices made him just the man God could use at this historic moment. And Mary was the same. She was a woman of the Word. She lived her faith, and considered herself a bond slave for the Lord.

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God With Us

Part: 2 God In A Manger
Part: 1 The Fullness of
Time: The Day Jesus
Was Born

First, Joseph is such a powerful lesson to all who will look closely. Joseph was willing to be obedient and obscure! Joseph was willing to obey even if he didn't understand what God was doing with his life. Here are the choices God honored in his life.

How can we apply the story of Joseph and Mary to our lives this morning? First some quick lessons from Matthew that outlines the type of choices that please God in the life of a teenagers, or anyone for that matter who really wants to let God in to reign in their life. Why don't you write these down as notes and ask the Lord to help you make these choices also for Him in your life.

- 1. Joseph sought the Lord with his problems (Matthew 1.18-20a)
- 2. Joseph listened to the Lord for His guidance (Matthew 1.20b-23)
- 3. Joseph obeyed the Lord with his actions (Matthew 1.24-25a)
- 4. Joseph honored the Lord by his obedience (Matthew 1.25b)
- 5. Joseph waited on the Lord for His leading (Matthew 2.13-18)
- 6. Joseph followed the Lord's directions for his family (Matthew 2.19-21)
- 7. Joseph led his family in the ways of the Lord (Matthew 2.22-23)

Please read the story with me again in Matthew 1:18-25 as we stand, read, and pray.

How can we apply the story of Joseph and Mary to our lives this morning? Go back to those seven quick lessons from Matthew about Joseph. Here are some actions that pleased God.

**Joseph sought the Lord with his problems** (Matthew 1.18). *Matthew 1:18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. NKJV* 

Can you imagine how painful that event was in Joseph's life? Everything since his birth had revolved around his family name, his future marriage and the children he would have to continue his tribal identity within Israel. Now in a moment life was in a complete uproar. Everything that was important in his life and the life of his entire extended family, everything lasting in his community, everything about his future—it all had come crashing down.

He was hurt, betrayed, crushed, disillusioned, and ready to quit it all.

Are you ready to start growing spiritually? Then it is time to take that first step and seek the Lord's help when you have troubles and problems. Are you seeking Him?

In the World of the Bible, betrothal signified more than our modern engagement. The marriage was almost always arranged by the families of the bride and groom, often without consulting them.

Look at the wording of Matthew's account. To us who live in a western culture it all sounds quite confusing. Matthew 1 records that Joseph is *betrothed* to Mary in 1:18; then he is planning to *divorce* her in 1:19; and then in a few more words she is called his *wife by the angel in 1:20*. But the relationships represent normal Jewish marriage

procedure, in which there were three steps. There was the engagement. The engagement was often made when the couple were only children. It was usually made through the parents, or through a professional match-maker. And it was often made without the couple involved ever having seen each other. Marriage was held to be far too serious a step to be left to the dictates of the human heart. There was the betrothal. The betrothal was what we might call the ratification of the engagement into which the couple had previously entered. At this point the engagement, entered into by the parents or the match-maker, could be broken if the girl was unwilling to go on with it. But once the betrothal was entered into, it was absolutely binding. It lasted for one year. During that year the couple were known as man and wife, although they had not the rights of man and wife. It could not be terminated in any other way than by divorce. In the Jewish law we frequently find what is to us a curious phrase. A girl whose fiancée had died during the year of betrothal is called "a virgin who is a widow". It was at this stage that Joseph and Mary were. They were betrothed, and if Joseph wished to end the betrothal, he could do so in no other way than by divorce; and in that year of betrothal Mary was legally known as his wife. The third stage was the marriage proper, which took place at the end of the year of betrothal. If we remember the normal Jewish wedding customs, then the relationships in this passage are perfectly usual and perfectly clear.

Joseph was compassionate. Matthew 1:19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just [man,] and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. (NKJV) he planned to put away Mary privately.

"The penalty for adultery under Old Testament law was death by stoning, and this penalty applied to infidelity during betrothal as well (Deut 22:23–24). In New Testament times, Joseph would have merely been required to divorce Mary and expose her to shame; the death penalty was rarely if ever executed for this offense. (Betrothals were so binding that if a woman's fiancé died, she was considered a widow; betrothals could otherwise be terminated only by divorce.) But a woman with a child, divorced for such infidelity, would be hard pressed ever to find another husband, leaving her without means of support if her parents died". [4]

Joseph listened to the Lord for His guidance. JOSEPH WAS SENSITIVE. Matthew

1:20-23 But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins." 22 So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: 23 "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us." 24 Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, (NKJV)

And just where do we hear the voice of God? Right here in His Book. He wants to talk to you every time you will slow down, pull off the highway of life, raise your antenna and let him speak. We found out when we rented a convertible once that no matter how badly we wanted to feel the warmth of the sun shining on our faces and feel the breeze blowing by us—the top of the convertible would not budge until the car was stopped and the parking brake engaged. God says 'be still' to know that I am God. Stop and listen to Him each day. Pull over, pull the brake and let Him shine into your life! Are you listening to Him?

Joseph obeyed the Lord with his actions (Matthew 1.24). 24 Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, (NKJV) It is not what you say it is what you do. James said 'but be ye doers of the Word' and not merely hearers. Take one truth from the Word and consciously do it out of love for God. Then another, and then another. That is what a godly walk is made of! Are you obeying Him?

Joseph honored the Lord by his obedience (Matthew 1.25b). Matthew 1:25

25 and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus. NKJV It is a choice we make to honor the Lord by honoring His Word, by obeying what He says and what those He has placed over us in life say! Are you doing that in your family and in your job? Are you honoring Him?

Joseph waited on the Lord for His leading. Matthew 2:13-18 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him." 14 When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, 15 and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called My Son."16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. 17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: 18 "A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping [for] her children, Refusing to be comforted, Because they are no more." (NKIV)

Joseph was a leader in Caring. He was a protector of his family: he made decisions for the future of his family going to Egypt.

Nothing is worst than leaving the Lord out of anything we do. God's leading must be waited for. We can't rush Him, we can't guess what He wants—He wants to make our path straight if we will just wait upon the Lord. Are you waiting for Him?

Joseph followed the Lord's directions for his family (Matthew 2.19-23). Matthew 2:19-23 Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 20 saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child's life are dead." 21 Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. 23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene." NKJV

God has laid down the plan, we are just to obey and follow it. Do you know what God's directions are for you as a son? As a daughter? As a mother? As a father? Are you following His directions? We remember Joseph because of these few words. They started with him being righteous. He was a man you could count on to do the little things God delights in. Are you going in the way of the Lord? That simple and well know verse sums it all up: Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

JOSEPH FOLLOW GOD'S WORD FOR RAISING CHILDREN. Luke 2:27-33 So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, 28 he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: 29 "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word; 30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation 31 Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, 32 A light to [bring] revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel." 33 And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. (NKJV)

JOSEPH LED HIS FAMILY IN WORSHIP. Luke 2:41 His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. (NKJV) He was a worshiper, he took them to the feast Joseph was a leader in godliness. He was a Maintainer: Proverbs 22:28 Do not remove the ancient landmark Which your fathers have set.

Let's meet this incredible woman. Of all the writers of Scripture it is Luke who highlights Mary. Twelve of the 20 verses that name her are in Luke and one is in Acts so 65% of all that we have comes to us through Luke. So we need to turn to Luke 1. We will find out the qualities God admires in a woman. He picked her out of the entire world for this special assignment!

There is an old Christian tradition[5], dating at least to Byzantine times that Mary was born in Zippori. Israeli guide, Yossi Ashkenazi, stated that evidence from Talmudic sources confirms this, and that Mary's father was the headmaster of Zippori's Jewish school (Yeshiva). The Gospel accounts indicate that the Lord Jesus was often called "Rabbi" by His disciples and other people. The term Rabbi was not used loosely in Israel; it was only attributed to someone who had received the rigorous training in the Law of Moses provided by a Yeshiva.

The small town of Nazareth was large enough to have its own synagogue, but it was certainly not large enough to have a rabbinic Yeshia. So it is reasonable to speculate that Jesus studied at the Yeshiva in Zippori where His own maternal grandfather was the headmaster. This conclusion helps us to fill in some of the gaps in the silent years of our Lord's life.

- There are very few New Testament verses about Mary. It is likely that she was a native of Nazareth and that she came from a relatively poor family.
- Her actual name was Miryam. In English this Hebrew name is usually rendered by the spelling "Miriam" in the Old Testament and "Mary" in the New Testament.
   From Matthew 27:56, Mark 15:40, and John 19:25 we learn she had a sister named
- From Matthew 27:56, Mark 15:40, and John 19:25 we learn she had a sister named Salome, the mother of James and John (who therefore were Jesus' cousins).
   From Luke 3 we receive her Davidic lineage. If, as many believe, the Eli (or Heli)
- From Luke 3 we receive her Davidic lineage. If, as many believe, the Eli (or Heli), of Luke 3:23 was Joseph's father-in-law (Matthew gives Joseph's father as Jacob, 1:16), then Eli was Mary's father.
- We know that Elizabeth, the wife of Zacharias, was Mary's "relative" (Luke 1:36), probably her cousin. Those are the only relatives, besides her husband and children, of whom the New Testament speaks.

What was it about Mary that God saw He could use? What kind of person can God trust with great responsibility? Here are just the main points that Luke points out to us in his record of Christ's birth.

- 1. Mary CHOSE TO listened to God. (Luke 1:26-28). Luke 1:26-28 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" NKJV
- 2. Mary CHOSE TO humble herself before God said yes to God's Grace. (Luke 1:29) Luke 1:29 But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. NKJV Who me? No airs, no pride, just a humble troubled heart that anyone would even say such a thing. She knew her own heart, certainly God would to! She was Saved by God. (Luke 1:30 lit. 'discovered grace of God ') Mary joined the countless multitude who are heirs of life eternal by God's grace. Her study of the Word led her to the open arms of "God my Savior".
- 3. Mary CHOSE TO surrender to God's will (Luke 1:31-33) Luke 1:31-33 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. 32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. 33 And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." NKJV To produce within her body tiny hands that would some day touch lepers with a healing touch, to form a mouth within her womb that would speak the very Word of God, to feel the kick of feet that would walk the roads of Israel and spread the Gospel. What an incredible ministry opportunity.
- 4. Mary CHOSE TO experience God (Luke 1:34-37) Luke 1:34-37 Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" 35 And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. 36 Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. 37 For with God nothing will be impossible." NKJV She wouldn't even consider anything immoral. Instead she was surrounded by the Shekinah as God the Son entered her womb. God doing the impossible is what our life for Him is all about.
- 5. Mary CHOSE TO serve God joyfully (Luke 1:38-45) Luke 1:38-45 Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. 39 Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, 40 and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. 41 And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! 43 But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. 45 Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord." NKJV She was a Slave of God. Luke 1:38 "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her. (NIV) Wow, what a submissive and godly attitude. I'll say yes Lord yes to your will and to your way! All I am all I have all I'll ever be . . . And off she goes to be a blessing, starting with her cousin who hadn't told her the big news yet!
- 6. Mary CHOSE TO immerse herself in the Scriptures. (Luke 1:46-55) Luke 1:46-55 And Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. 48 For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. 49 For He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy is His name. 50 And His mercy is on those who fear Him From generation to generation. 51 He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. 52 He has put down the mighty from their thrones, And exalted the lowly. 53 He has filled the hungry with good things, And the rich He has sent away empty. 54 He has helped His servant Israel, In remembrance of His mercy, 55 As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and to his seed forever." NKJV

She Sought God. Have you paused to ask yourself how she did it? For starters, chew on this - In a world where Mary lived: every drop of water was carried home by

women from springs or wells in clay pots. Every ounce of flour was ground with a stone mill. Every loaf of bread was baked in an oven with a wood fire burning to heat it. Every dish was hand washed (remember that well, the pot, the walk . . .)

All this to say that, time was at a premium, what's new right? But also, women were not at a premium. Jesus was the first to elevate women to their proper place. In Mary's time they were close to being furniture. So her knowledge of the Scriptures must have come from either her dad who Luke tells us was named Heli (Luke 3:23 traces Mary back to Adam to show Jesus was Savior of the world. Matthew 1 traces Joseph back to Abraham to show Jesus was the Messiah of the Jews.)

Maybe Heli encouraged his daughter by exposing her deeply to the Scriptures. What a wonderful pursuit for any dad. Whatever the means Mary SOUGHT GOD! Mary was a woman about whom all we know in a practical way is that she learned her manners from the Word of God. Sounds like a good idea. If we were to look over her shoulder as she read from the scrolls and listened to God's truth we might learn what made her tick!

So, the greatest truth of Christianity is--that the instant of our salvation, when our sins were forgiven instantly by the gracious work of Christ on the cross--we got all of God! The One who saves us is God with us! We have all of God in the person of Christ who dwells in us!

Then comes the greatest question that each of us need to answer this morning-does  $\operatorname{God}$  have all of  $\operatorname{me}$ ?

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