

A Righteous Man Of Courage

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. *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. *20* 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, *25* and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS (Matthew 1:18-25, NKJV)

Context

Who, What, Where, When, and Why?

Who: the primary character in this portion of Scripture is Joseph, the betrothed of Mary and "foster father" to Jesus. Mary is mentioned in these verses but the angel is never named. The others who are mentioned are Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

What: this is a record of the angel telling Joseph it is okay to marry his betrothed, Mary. The angel also explains the circumstance of Mary's pregnancy. It also records Joseph's response which was favorable. In addition, we are told Joseph did not have marital relations with Mary until after the baby was born. This is important to know since the promise was that the messiah would be born of a virgin.

Where: we are not told where this took place but we assume it was in Nazareth, in the hill country of Galilee. This is a region north of Judea. Nazareth was the hometown of Joseph.

When: we assume Jesus was born sometime in 3 to 2 BC. If he was born in the fall as some scholars suggest, this would've taken place around what we call in January, 3 or 2 BC.

Why: the angel came to Joseph with this information because Joseph was considering ending his relationship with Mary. It was God's will that Jesus be raised by Joseph and Mary. The "why" of Mary's pregnancy is explained. She was pregnant because that which was conceived in her was of the Holy Spirit.

Content

What was the original author concerned with and what did he want his original audience to understand? Furthermore, how would the original audience interpret it?

Matthew needed to provide this information because at the end of the genealogy of Jesus he said *and Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ* (Matthew 1:16). That information created some problems. In the first place,

Matthew's audience needed to know Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary. Moreover, they needed to understand why Joseph was in the picture.

Essentially, Matthew explained how Jesus came to be adopted into the family of Joseph and therefore legally reckoned as a descendant of David. Of course, this is taken in the context of the opening line and genealogy provided by Matthew. Remember, Matthew is telling us Jesus is the son of God. He is saying Jesus encompasses and fulfills all of the promises and expectations of God's people. This too would have been understood but Matthew needed to provide his audience more details.

The Jewish people were familiar with the concept of adoption. Truly, anyone could become a Hebrew by circumcision and adherence to Mosaic ritual. For example, Caleb, a famous member of the tribe of Judah, was actually a Canaanite. Nevertheless he was a true Israelite by virtue of his circumcision and obedience to God's law. As such he had the same access to the covenant blessings as did any Hebrew.

Finally, the reaction to this account would probably have been mixed. The original audience would have understood Matthew's desire to put Mary away. Those who were godly would have understood Joseph's intention to do so without raising a ruckus. Believers would have admired Joseph's courage and submission to Almighty God.

On the other hand, there would have been those who did not believe the origin of Jesus was supernatural and would have considered Joseph a foolish, naïve character.

Consideration

What are the principles found here and how do they apply to the modern Christian?

We make decisions every day about what we will think, what we will say and how we will act. Most of the time that process is simple. If we know the Bible we know what God expects of us and we think, speak and act accordingly.

On the other hand, there are times we encounter situations when the path forward is not as clear. In the example of Joseph, there was nothing wrong with his earlier decision to put Mary away. In fact, that would have been in keeping with God's law. However, the law does not demand a specific action but simply leaves divorce of a betrothed as an option.

The application of the principle discovered in this account of Joseph, requires wisdom. Essentially, we see Joseph determined to follow a lawful action but his mind is changed by the message of the angel. As a result, he chose a path we may define as love.

Each of us will face problems in our relationships. Each of us wants to obey God's Word in the management of our relationships. For example, the Bible is clear we are required to extend forgiveness to those who offend us. To go above and beyond that requirement and act further out of love is an option. This might mean we forgive a family member who has stolen from us and then choose to help them financially. Remember, we must do this with wisdom; we do not want to confirm someone in sin.

To do more than the minimum requirement of God's Word requires wisdom and courage. Wisdom so we stay within scriptural parameters and courage to withstand the negative reactions of those who might disagree with our behavior.

Study Questions

1. *Did the Mosaic Law require Joseph to divorce Mary once he discovered she was pregnant?*
2. *Describe the difference between fulfillment of a prophecy and the "filling up" of a prophecy.*
3. *Is courage a "natural" trait or a gift from God – or both?*

If you would like input on your answers to the study questions you may message me through myFaithBase.com or email me at mfb@davidericwilliams.com