



Title: Christmas Courage
Theme: The Courage of Joseph

“This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.’ All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel’ --which means, ‘God with us.’ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave Him the name Jesus.” (Matthew 1:18-24)

There are many miracles connected with the birth of Christ

There are many miracles connected with the birth of Christ. The best way of overcoming the world's view of Christmas is to have a Biblical understanding of the miraculous events that took place at the first Christmas. I remember the first Christmas after becoming a Christian, the holiday season became so exciting to me because the Holy Spirit illuminated within me what Christmas was really about.

I have found personally the best way for me to maintain and restore joy for the Christmas season is to meditate upon what the Word of God says about the lives of those who were so closely involved in the earthly life of Jesus Christ.

Just what is found in Joseph's life that made him such a valuable person in the gospel of Jesus Christ? Can these character traits be found in the children of God today?

I would propose to you that the Biblical account of the life of Joseph holds truths that the Holy Spirit of Christ wants you to grasp this Christmas season. Many have Biblical revelation or understanding of the life of Joseph. However, Christians who live a life expressing that the birth of Christ is an event worth celebrating take time to invite the Holy Spirit to illuminate Biblical truth into their hearts.

Lord takes ordinary men and makes useful vessels of them

The first truth worth grasping is that the Lord takes ordinary men and makes useful vessels of them. Joseph was a man doing ordinary common work and to my knowledge he held no place of what men of this world would call authority or worldly fame. Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus had the character that should be found in all Christian fathers, yet very little is said of him in Christian writings.

What is revealed to us in Scripture about Joseph is that he was poor and he observed the Word of God expressing a heart that is willing to seek out and do the will of God. Luke 2:21-27 says, "On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise Him, He was named Jesus, the name the angel had given Him before he had been conceived. When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord'), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: 'a pair of doves or two young pigeons.'" (Luke 2:21-14) The Bible says Joseph and Mary, "brought in the child Jesus to do for Him what the custom of the Law required..." (Luke 2:27) Joseph as head of his family knew what was written in the Book of Leviticus chapter 12 and made the offering required for a woman who was poor financially. (Who's Who in the Bible; The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia)

This is a great encouragement to all Christians. Most Christians are not going to be famous, have a place of authority nor be rich in the world's eyes. They can, however, become very important in proclaiming the good news of the gospel of Christ as long as they are willing to seek the will of the Lord through the written Word of God and obey what the Holy Spirit of Christ calls them to do. The Holy Spirit gives this exhortation through the writings of the Apostle Peter, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9) It has been very well said, "God takes ordinary people and does extraordinary things through them."

Live as Joseph, a moral upright life

It takes a courageous man to die to self, seek out the Lord's will and pray through to completion of God's plan for him. It also takes courage to live as Joseph, a moral upright life. Our text says, "This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly."

Matthew 1:24 -25 tells us that Joseph did what the angel of the Lord commanded him to do and he did not have sex with his wife until after Mary gave birth to Jesus Christ. (Matthew 1:18-19, 35)

The first truth worth grasping in these passages of Scripture is that Joseph was a righteous man. "Righteous" (dikaios) in this passage of Scripture means to be merciful, kind and tender. The application is that Joseph was not a man given to passionate vengeance, rather he had a right relationship with God. Joseph lived in accordance with God's compelling standard. (The Expositors Bible Commentary; Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament; The Completer Word Study of the New Testament)

In his natural man Joseph's response in regard to being engaged to a woman of God who told him she was now pregnant would have been shock, thinking his bride to be pure having a heart only for him. He would have had deep sorrow. His dreams of marriage to a Godly woman, surrender to purity of the Lord and raising children in God's perfect will now chattered. In his natural man there would have been anger. Joseph very well could have felt betrayed. No one would have blamed him if he would have laid the full blunt of the written law upon Mary and done all he could to save face in the community. Not only was she subject to accusations of giving in to sin, but Joseph as well. In the natural it takes two to bring about pregnancy.

To our western ways of thinking the engagement relationship is bewildering in this passage of Scripture. To the Jews the marriage relationship was far too serious a step in a person's life to let marriage be dictated by the human heart.

According to William Barclay there were three major steps to the Jewish marriage procedure. Here are two of them, 1.) the engagement was often made through the parents, or through a professional match-maker. 2.) The betrothal stage and by this stage the woman involved could break off the engagement if she chose not to go through with the marriage. It is in this stage the marriage becomes binding and it lasted one year. They were referred to as man and wife, although consummation of the marriage is not permitted until the marriage ceremony is over.

It was during the betrothal stage when Joseph learned of Mary being with child. According to Deuteronomy 24:1, Joseph, from what he could see in the present circumstance before his dream, had every Biblical right to write a certificate of divorce.

Joseph could have been angry because it was customary for the groom to give a marriage present to the bride's family. This gift to the family was a form of compensation and sealed a covenant between the two families. The gift could have been in the form of money or service or any other consideration that was agreeable to all the parties involved. (The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia; Genesis 34:12; Exodus 22:16; 1 Samuel 18:25; Genesis 29; Joshua 15:16) They had a deal, Biblically a covenant that was to last until death do they part and up to Matthew 1:18-19, it appeared to Joseph that Mary had broke that covenant.

At this time in history we have two people called of God to play a very important part of the Christmas story, and they are both being tested in their faith in God. Mary had been told ahead of time that she would be with child by the power of the Holy Spirit and what to name the child. (Luke 1:31)

For some reason Joseph felt it was a necessity to divorce Mary and I am not going to go off into man made fantasies. I am going to stick with the Biblical fact that God's character had a powerful effect on Joseph enabling him to handle this difficult time in his life by showing mercy, kindness and tenderness to Mary and her family.

Joseph knew the consequence of being accused of adultery and he most likely knew how the world of his day handled those accused of it. Those accused and convicted were met with public disgrace. In Joseph's day in Egypt the punishment was cutting of the nose, in Persia the punishment was cutting of the nose and ears and in Judea the punishment could have meant being stoned to death. In Joseph's day most often a certificate of divorce stated the reason for the divorce. This great man of God most certainly had the mercy of God overriding fleshly desires and worldly influences. Our text clearly says, Joseph, being a righteous man, a man expressing the mercy of God through his life did not want Mary to be exposed to public disgrace.

Not only did Joseph have the courage to live out the mercy of God, he had the courage to subdue the flesh so he could protect Mary's purity until the Child was born, thus, bringing us the surety of the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ. I purposely repeat what the Bible says, Joseph, "...did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home to be his wife.

But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son and he gave Him the name Jesus." (Matthew 1:24-25) I am fully persuaded that Joseph had the Godly character he had because he was a man of the Word of God.

Hearing the angel quote what the Prophet Isaiah said 700 years before in his dream, "The virgin will be with Child and will give birth to a Son and they will call His Name 'Immanuel' meaning God with us" (Matthew 1:22-23) was more than enough to give Joseph the courage he needed to subdue the flesh and trust in his God. This gave him strength to fulfill his part as the head of the house, enabling him to protect his wife from any impurities that could keep her from fulfilling her part of the Christmas story.

Christians with the courage of Joseph will make themselves available and aware of what the written Word of God says. Knowing God's Word and being open and sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading will make them a very important part of proclaiming Jesus as the Savior of the world, not only at Christmas time but in every part of their lives.

Too much time can be spent on the term “an angel of the Lord” in Matthew 1:20. Some say it was an angel, others say it was a manifestation of God. The high and safe road is to rejoice in God’s gracious intervention to communicate privately with those who are sold out to His will. All Christians can take courage. The Lord is always ready and able to intercede in their lives in the most difficult time of life. He has a great plan for using Christians and allowing them to be a very important part of proclaiming the truths of Christmas.

Courage to live a life of righteousness opens the door to receive revelation from God

Joseph had the courage to live a life of righteousness, expressing compassion, mercy and tenderness to the person he loved. His courage to live a life of righteousness opened the door for him to receive revelation from God.

Our text says, “But after he had considered [divorcing Mary quietly,] an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph... do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a Son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus...’” (Matthew 1:20-21)

What we have here is divine revelation from God to his obedient servant who was enabled to die to himself for the sake of others. There are two key aspects to revelation from God that is worth grasping here. One is God’s self-revelation found in the entire Word of God. The second is the ways and means through which the Lord discloses Himself, His will and His purpose to His people. (The New International Dictionary of the Bible)

At this time in history Jesus’ birth needed another immediate intervention from God to get a person ordained for this life changing event on the right track. It is very possible that Joseph prayerfully thought on the issue of Mary being with child in the stillness of the night. It was very likely while he was alone in prayer with the Lord, being totally dependent on God and having a heart prepared for obedience, Joseph fell asleep. During this sleep the Lord gave Joseph just what he needed most in a very difficult time in life for him. (A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory; The Preacher’s Outline & Sermon Bible; Thru the Bible)

In this special revelation God had four purposes. 1.) To give assurance to Joseph. When the angel spoke, “Joseph, son of David” (Matthew 1:20) this quickened Joseph’s attention and alerted his spiritual heart to the importance of the message about to be spoken to him. This brought an awareness that he was about to receive a divine call.

2.) The purpose of this revelation from God in a dream was to give Joseph explanation. Being a righteous man and knowing what God’s word says about adultery, Joseph must have agonized over this for a few days. I believe it is probable that Mary told Joseph the whole story of the angel Gabriel’s visit.

Put yourself in Joseph's place. Your fiancée, Mary, comes to you and says, "I have some really good news, but depending upon your faith, it could sound like bad news. I am pregnant even though you and I have not had sexual relations yet. However, an angel came to me and said, '...Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus.'" (Luke 1:30-31)

If you are a really spiritual man and if you do not want to see your fiancée burst into tears and have to hear, "You, don't trust me and there needs to be trust in a relationship" you had better say, "I will take this matter to the Lord in prayer." We know that Joseph took this very serious life changing situation to heartfelt prayer.

3.) This revelation from God to Joseph was to reveal the destiny of the child born of a virgin, Mary, the woman pledged to him for lifetime marriage. The Lord revealed to Joseph that the Son to be born to them would save people from their sins and that He would be God in the flesh among them. (Matthew 1:21, 23)

4.) This revelation from God to Joseph was for comfort and guidance. He told Joseph, "...do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit... [You are] to give Him the name Jesus.

Think of the comfort that must have come to him as the Lord revealed to him that Biblical prophecy was being fulfilled. Mary was telling the truth and God had a plan for them.

Christians, as they are serving the Lord in a heart after God, will at times face situations that seem impossible to determine the Lord's will. It is in those times they must have the courage of Joseph, die to self, seek the whole counsel of God's Word and pray through expecting God to answer. He will give His revelation to them and it will bring comfort, explanation, and direction. Instead of calling a friend, Christians are better off calling upon the Lord's intervention.

Christians who have the courage of Joseph in life's tough circumstances have the same revelation about the Lord as the psalmist who wrote, "'Because he loves Me' says the Lord, 'I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my Name. He will call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him, with long life will I satisfy him and show my salvation.'"

Let the situation that you are in right now establish courage in the Lord and prepare you to be a very special part in the Christmas story that should be proclaimed today.

Courageously protect your family

Joseph was an ordinary man who had the courage to live righteously and whose lifestyle enabled him receive revelation from God and courageously protect his family. Listen carefully as I take time to read from the book of Matthew some select passages from chapter two.

“When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. ‘Get up,’ he said, ‘take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill Him.’

So he got up, took the child and His mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘Out of Egypt I called my son.’ When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: ‘A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.’ After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ‘Get up, take the child and His mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.’ So he got up, took the child and His mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: ‘He will be called a Nazarene.’” (Matthew 2:13-23)

Having heard from the wise men that they were seeking the one who had been born to be king of the Jews, Herod commanded that all boys under the age of two be killed. An angel of the Lord commanded Joseph to take Jesus and his mother down into Egypt and then later back to northern Israel. This meant months of dangerous travel over hostile terrain. Knowing the Lord sent them and was with them gave Joseph the courage he needed to get accomplish his commission from the Lord.

Truths worth clinging to for today are, 1.) We do not need courage when things are going smooth and we are drinking in the blessings of God. However, when the enemy comes in like a flood courage in God’s protective hand is needed.

Joseph had no idea in his early days that his tranquil life would be thrown into a time requiring him to choose life according to God’s righteousness, obey the desires of the sinful flesh, or follow the expectations of those in the world around him.

2.) Courage is born in the Christian's heart by seeking the Lord in prayerful reading of God's Word and trusting in Him to reveal His truths. David learned courage to fight the Lord's battles by observing what God was doing around him, from seeing what God had done for him and the nation he ruled and from the Scriptures. This enabled David to receive revelation from God, to fight Goliath and to have confidence to fight the Lord's battles. Joseph had cultivated his own relationship with the Lord, thus he was ready to fulfill his part in the Christmas story as should all Christians.

3.) Children need dads who are courageously living for the Lord Jesus, not those who can buy the most numerous or most expensive toys. Fathers who seek the Lord and know that the children they are raising have been created for God's glory. They are maintaining a relationship with the Lord in order to understand what direction the Lord wants them take in raising the children God has given them.

4.) Wives need courageous husbands who love their wives as Christ loved the church and are willing to protect their wives from anything that would get in the way of their accomplishing God's special call on their lives.

Because we live on this side of Christmas, Christians want to rush to the end of the story where everything turns out okay just like it did for Joseph and Mary. When Christians just focus on the announcement of the birth of Christ on that first Christmas they miss out on the work that God wants to do in their lives. The Lord wants to prepare born again Christians to courageously live out their part of proclaiming the good news of the birth of Christ.

Very little is said about Joseph in Christian writings and in Scripture, however what is said about him the Holy Spirit wants to place deep within your spiritual heart. Joseph was a "righteous man." The Hebrew word for "righteous man" (*tsaddiys*) means that a man is known for his uncompromising obedience to the Torah, the law of Moses. The application for today is that Christians need to live uncompromising to the whole counsel of the written Word of God.

The Apostle Paul teaches in chapter five of the Book of Galatians that we can live in the Spirit's power. The fruit of the Spirit always triumphs over uncontrolled human emotion including anger and over the world's view thus enabling Christians to express supernatural love just as Joseph did to Mary.

Choose this Christmas season to live courageously for the cause of Christ and His kingdom so you can enjoy special revelations from the Lord as He speaks to your heart through the written Word as revealed by the Holy Spirit. Let us Pray!