



“For God so loved . . .”

Matt 1:18-25

[based on the sermon preached on 18.12.22 – available on the [church app](#) or at <https://lwac.org.au/sermons>]

KEY IDEAS

1. When Mary was found to be pregnant by the Holy Spirit (with Jesus), Joseph initially did not believe her (or did not know) that the conception was by the Holy Spirit and not another man. As an honourable man, Joseph intended to divorce her quietly so as not to disgrace her.
2. Then Joseph had a dream in which an angel informs him that Mary is telling the truth, the conception is from the Holy Spirit, not another man, and that he should take Mary as his wife and name the child Jesus.
3. This was in fulfillment of a prophecy from Isaiah that said a virgin will be with child, a child who will be called “Immanuel.”
4. Joseph is obedient to the angel, takes Mary to be his wife, but does not have sexual union with her until after the baby is born.

CONNECT

- Has someone ever told you something which sounded too incredible to be true, unbelievable? How did you handle that situation? Or, have you ever had information or an experience which you knew to be true and which you needed to share with someone but you knew they would have a difficult time believing it? Were you reluctant to share even though you knew it was true?

STUDY

Read Matthew 1:18-19

- Mary was not yet married to Joseph, only engaged, but engagement in that day carried the same level of commitment as marriage. It could not be undone by simply “calling it off,” a

divorce was required. However, even though the couple's commitment was at the level of betrothal, they were not yet husband and wife and thus could not engage in sexual relations.

- Doing so would have been considered a serious sin, punishable (for the woman) by stoning to death. So, when Mary becomes pregnant and Joseph knows he had nothing to do with it, it is a very big deal socially and legally, not to mention relationally.
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- Even though Joseph did not believe Mary's explanation (or did not know because she could not bring herself to tell him), Joseph did not want her to be disgraced or even killed, thus the desire for a quiet divorce.
- Have you ever been in a situation where you were telling the truth but no one believed you? Have you ever been in a situation where you had to determine whether someone was telling the truth but it was not easy? Share about these experiences as you are able.

Read Matthew 1:20-21

- Verse 20 indicates that Joseph had a plan. But before he could put the plan (to divorce Mary quietly) into action, God sends an angel to him in a dream. There are two parts to the angel's message. The first part is basically "Mary is telling the truth!" Mary's pregnancy is from the Holy Spirit so Joseph is not to divorce Mary, but is to take her home as his wife right away.
- Have you ever faced a difficult, perhaps an uncomfortable, decision which you wished God would just intervene and answer for you, preferably with a visit from an angel telling you what to do? If you have, what was that decision or predicament? If not, what are examples of decisions about which God's angelic explanation and answer would be really helpful?
- Similarly, have you ever faced a situation or decision where you had a plan to do one thing but something or someone intervened to change your mind and later (or even at the time) you recognized that the intervention came from God? What was that like?
- The second part of the instruction or plan which the angel gives to Joseph is that he is to name the child Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.
- The name Jesus comes to us from Latin, via Greek (Iesous), going back to Hebrew (Yeshua). Regardless of the language, the name literally means "the Lord saves." The angel takes this name one step further when he says that what Jesus will save his people from is their sins.
- Reflect on this for a moment. What does it mean to you that Jesus has saved you from your sins? How would you explain this to someone if they asked?

Read Matthew 1:22-23

- Matthew makes a connection between Mary giving birth to Jesus as a virgin to a prophecy from Isaiah 700 years before, in which Isaiah predicts a young woman who was previously a virgin will give birth to a son during the reign of Ahaz, king of Judah (Isaiah 7:14). Many scholars consider this prophecy to originally be intended for Ahaz. Yet, Matthew recognizes something more in it, something larger, something intended for all humanity.
- The concept of Immanuel - God with us - is one of the most important theological concepts in all of Christianity. That God the Son (the second person of the Trinity) took on humanity, became one of us, so that he could save us, is unprecedented in religious history. No other religion has God becoming human in order to redeem humanity.
- Why do you think God took this unprecedented step? Why did God do this? How would you explain what God has done in the incarnation to someone who asked?
- Is there more to God taking on humanity than just so he could die for us on the cross? What else does God's taking on humanity indicate about creation and its goodness? What about us and our goodness (not moral goodness but in our being, as made in God's image)?

Read Matthew 1:24-25

- When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel commanded: he took Mary home to be his wife, he had no union with her, and when the baby boy was born he gave him the name Jesus.
- Describe something or some situation in which you obeyed what God was telling you to believe or do, even though it may have been difficult.

APPLY

- Though the biblical text does not specifically state it, given what we know of the social and religious conventions of the time, Mary and Joseph would likely have suffered ridicule and scorn for her becoming pregnant before they were married. Think of a time in which you suffered in spite of, or even because of, doing the right thing, doing what God directed you to do. What was that experience like? Did you sense God's presence giving you strength to follow through?
- Which other aspect of this study has struck you the most and why? What are you going to do as a result ?
- Identify one or more truths from this study which speak to and can be applied in your life.

1.

2.

PRAY FOR OUR CHURCH AND FOR ONE ANOTHER

- According to need.