

Introduction

Last year Chad was finishing up his available courses in his major at Central New Mexico, and he researched available colleges with his desired major. He decided to go to Highlands University, and he has been attending there the past semester. After taking some classes there, he found out that he was not getting any feedback from his instructors. Chad wanted more than a grade and a piece of paper; he wanted to learn all he could and become skillful in programming. He told his professors that he wanted more feedback, but that was to no avail. Therefore, he researched other colleges and applied to New Mexico State University, where he was accepted. Sometimes, we make plans, but those plans change when we get more information. That happened with Chad, and that happened with our primary character today, Joseph.

In Luke's account of the Christmas story, Joseph is mentioned, but it is more focused on Mary than Joseph. The genealogies are similar. The genealogy in Luke 3 is Mary's lineage and it goes through David, Abraham, Adam and back to God. In Matthew's genealogy, he gives Joseph's lineage, going all the way back through David back to Abraham. Both genealogies confirm that Jesus' lineage satisfies the Messianic prophecies about being a descendant of David and of Abraham.

In our account today, Joseph is betrothed to Mary. They have not consummated their marriage, but in the Jewish culture, when a woman is betrothed to a man, she belongs to him. But, while they were in this betrothal period, he discovers that she is pregnant. Joseph, being a righteous man, did not want to disgrace her, so he planned to secretly divorce her. When he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and spoke to him about Mary and the child that was in her. The angel said that Mary has conceived the child through the Holy Spirit, not through immorality, and that this child will save His people from their sins. The angel said that all of this is a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. When Joseph awoke from his sleep, he obeyed the angel of the Lord and took Mary as his wife, but he kept her a virgin until she gave birth to Jesus. When he received this additional information, he changed his plans.

(Matt 1:18-25) "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. {19} And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. {20} But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. {21} "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." {22} Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: {23} "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US." {24} And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took *Mary* as his wife, {25} but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus."

Joseph's Participation in Jesus' Birth

1. Joseph's Plan
2. Joseph's Encounter with the Angel
3. Joseph's Change of Plans

1. Joseph's Plan (Matt 1:1, 1:18-19, Matt 1:16, Col 1:19, 2:9)

Our text begins with "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows..." I want to back up to the beginning of Matthew in verse 1, which begins with, "The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of David, the son of Abraham." On the surface there does not seem to be anything particularly unusual about these two verses. One seemingly starts the narrative of Jesus' genealogy, and the other is about his birth. But, there is something very important that we need to see before moving on.

(Matt 1:18) "Now the birth (genesis) of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit."

(Matt 1:1) "The record of the genealogy (genesis) of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham:"

There is one Greek word that is used in both passages that is significant. The Greek word for genealogy in verse 1 is genesis (Strong's G1078), which means origin, birth, generation, or genealogy. The Greek word for birth in Matthew 1:18 is the same word, genesis. The genealogy of Jesus in the verse seventeen verses of this chapter are about Jesus' legal lineage. It gives the genealogical record of Joseph. The Messianic prophecies were clear that the Messiah was going to be a descendant of David and Abraham. This is Jesus' legal authentication of the fulfillment of that requirement.

Genealogy: genesis (Strong's G1078), origin, birth, generation, genealogy

Even though the first section of Matthew 1 gives Joseph's lineage, in verse sixteen we see that "Joseph was the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah." Joseph was the legal father, but not the biological father of Jesus. This is an important point to grasp before moving on. In our text today, God makes it clear that Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus. Jesus was the son of Mary, making Him the Son of Man. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, making Him the Son of God. Jesus was the incarnate God, that is God in the flesh. He is Immanuel, which means God with us.

(Matthew 1:16) "Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah."

We see in Colossians 1:19 that it "was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him." This tells us that Jesus' Father is God, and secondly, that the fullness dwelt in Jesus. That fullness is the fullness of deity. In Colossians 2:9, we read, "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form." Jesus was the Son of Man, and had the legal rights to be the Messianic King. He was the Son of God, meaning He had no sin nature, and was able to redeem us from our sins. Jesus came as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of man, and the record of His birth in our account today is vitally important.

(Col 1:19) "For it was the *Father's* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him,"

(Col 2:9) "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,"

Next, we see that Joseph is betrothed to Mary. In the Jewish culture there was a betrothal period, which usually lasted up to a year, and the marriage itself. The betrothal is called the kiddushin, and the second stage is called the hupah (“chuppah”). Jesus and Mary were legally married, and were in the first stage, the betrothal or kiddushin. Their marriage had not been consummated by the wedding ceremony and they had not come together sexually. Mary was still a virgin.

(Matt 1:18) “Now the birth (genesis) of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.”

There is a problem however. We see that before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. All Joseph knows is that his bride is pregnant and he did not impregnate her. This is a scandalous situation. In verse nineteen, we read that Jesus was a righteous man. He was an innocent man. He was a principled man that obeyed the law. We see his obedience in other passages. In Luke 2:21-22, Joseph had Jesus circumcised according to the Law. When the days of purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord.

(Luke 2:21-22) “And when eight days had passed, before His circumcision, His name was *then* called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb. {22} And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord.”

In Luke 2:41, we find that Joseph and Mary went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. There were three main feasts that the Jews celebrated and this was the main feast. So, we see that Joseph was a righteous man, who was obedient to the law.

(Luke 2:41) “Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover.”

We know from Mark 6:3 that Jesus had four brothers and some sisters. We don't know how many sisters, only that He had more than one. That means that Joseph had at least seven children to raise and support. He did that working as a carpenter. Joseph was a hard-working, law abiding, righteous man.

(Mark 6:3) “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?” And they took offense at Him.”

Joseph had an excellent reputation, and this was a scandalous situation that would tarnish his reputation if he goes ahead with this wedding. So, he planned on divorcing her. The text says, “to send her away secretly.” The Greek word is *apoluo* (Strong's G630), which means to send away. It is the same word used in Mark 10:2, where the Pharisees asked Jesus if it was lawful for a man to divorce (*apoluo*) his wife. Since Joseph was betrothed to Mary, he was legally married, and it would require a legal separation or divorce to back out of the marriage. Joseph, being a righteous man, full of grace and compassion, did not want to disgrace or shame her, so he planned to divorce her secretly. That was Joseph's plan to deal with the situation he found himself in.

(Matt 1:19) “And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly.”

2. Joseph's Encounter with the Angel (Matt 1:20-23)

But when Joseph had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. Joseph had probably heard that Mary was pregnant and he was laying in bed praying, meditating, contemplating, and fretting over what had to be done. He probably decided that the best way to resolve this was to send her away secretly, and he fell asleep after getting his plan finalized in his mind. He was probably stressed and worn out over the situation, and fell asleep. We read, "but when he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream." So, he had gone off to sleep after considering this.

(Matt 1:20) "But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit."

This is not the only time that an angel of the Lord appears to Joseph. In Matthew 2:13, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him to take the Child and His mother to Egypt to flee from Herod. Notice that it was the Child and His mother, rather than "your" child. Then, after Herod had died, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him that it was okay to return to Israel.

(Matt 2:13) "Now when they had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord *appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him."

(Matt 2:19) "But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord *appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said,"

God speaks to us in many different ways. He sent an angel to Daniel to give him a message. The word angel, *aggelos*, means a messenger, so this is one of their many roles. I cannot recall of getting a message from an angel in a dream, but God does speak to some people that way. I did have an encounter with the Lord in my bedroom at night in Atlanta after I retired from golf to plant a church. The Lord appeared to me and told me to put my ear to His post. I knew what He meant. I was to be His voluntary bond-servant. But, I never had an angel appear in a dream.

In Proverbs 16 there are three verses on making plans. In Proverbs 16:1, we see that man has the responsibility of making plans, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. To me, I believe we make our plans and we need to pray about those plans. I believe we need the Lord's counsel. I believe that we need to allow God to speak into our plans and direct us. I believe that Joseph made this plan, and spoke to the Lord about this plan and then fell to sleep. In Proverbs 16:9, we see that "the mind of a man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps." Joseph made his plans, spoke to the Lord, and the answer was coming through this angel, and the Lord is directing Joseph's steps. It is a wonderful picture and application of what Solomon wrote about.

(Pr 16:1) "The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD."

(Pr 16:9) "The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps."

The first thing that the angel tells Joseph is that he is a son of David. God was speaking to Joseph about his lineage, and that is significant because of what the angel is going to tell him later. Second, the angel tells him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife. He has just planned to send her away, and the Lord tells him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife. Then the angel tells him why he should not be afraid to take her as his wife. He said the "Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." Joseph is not only a righteous man; he is a man of faith. There has never been another pregnancy in the world that we know of that was conceived by the Holy Spirit. This was a miracle that he is being asked to believe and act upon.

(Matt 1:20) "But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit."

The angel told him that Mary was still a virgin. Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit; it was a supernatural miracle from God the Father. Mary had not been immoral. This was not a scandal. This was God's plan that He had prophesied through Isaiah, that the Messiah would be born through a virgin. The virgin birth is an essential doctrine of the church. The early church fathers included the virgin birth in the Apostle's Creed.

(Apostle's Creed) I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit **and born of the virgin Mary**. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

The third thing that the angel said was that Mary was going to bear a Son, and that Joseph was to call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. The name Jesus is from the Hebrew word, Jehoshuah (Strong's H3091), which means the Lord is salvation. It is the Messiah, who will come from the lineage of David, that would be born of a virgin and would come to save us from our sins. The angel is telling Joseph that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that He would save His people from their sins.

(Matt 1:21) "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

Finally, we find that this birth of Christ through a virgin was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 7:14. Isaiah prophesied, "behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel." Immanuel means God with us. This child inside of Mary was conceived by God, and was the Messiah. Joseph now understands why he should not be afraid to take Mary as his wife. This was an exciting fulfillment of the long-expected Messiah, and he was part of God's plan.

(Matt 1:22-23) "Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: {23} 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which translated means, 'God with us.'"

(Isaiah 7:14) "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel."

3. Joseph's Change of Plans (Matt 1:24-25)

After Joseph heard all of this from the angel in his dream he woke up. He had a choice to make. He had made a plan to secretly divorce his wife because she was pregnant, and not by him. Was he going to believe the angel of the Lord and take Mary as his wife, or was he going to reject the word of the Lord and stay with "his" plan. When Joseph awoke from his sleep, he chose to obey. Matthew records that he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife.

(Matt 1:24) "And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took *Mary* as "his wife,"

Matthew also states that Joseph kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son. Joseph also obeyed the angel in naming the child, Jesus.

(Matt 1:25) "but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus."

Conclusion and Applications

This morning you have seen Joseph's participation in the birth of Christ. When he first heard that Mary was pregnant, his initial response was to send her away secretly. That was his plan of action. But, the Lord sent an angel to enlighten Joseph, to give him understanding about Mary's pregnancy and the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy of the Messiah's birth through a virgin. Joseph heard the truth, and he responded in obedience. He made the choice to believe.

All of us have that choice when we hear the gospel message that the Messiah came through a virgin, lived a sinless life, and died for our sins, and was raised from the dead. Are we going to believe that Jesus is the Messiah? Are we going to receive Jesus as our Messiah? Are we going to set aside our plans and receive God's plan for our lives? That was Joseph's choice and that is our choice.

What about you? Do you believe the Scriptures? Do you believe that God sent His son to save us from our sins? Do you believe that He was born of a virgin, just as Isaiah prophesied? Do you believe that He is the Messiah that came to set us free from our sins? Have you received Jesus as Lord of your life? If you would like to receive Christ this morning, you can do that this morning. Join with me in praying.

Jesus, I believe that you were born of a virgin, and that You are the Messiah. I believe that you came to take away my sins by dying on the cross. I believe that you were raised from the dead. I ask you to come into my life and take away my sins. I confess you as my Lord this morning. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Introduction (Matt 1:18-25)

1. Joseph's Plan (Matt 1:1, 1:18-19, Matt 1:16, Col 1:19, 2:9, Luke 2:21-22, 2:41, Mark 6:3, Matt 1:19)

2. Joseph's Encounter with the Angel (Matt 1:20-23, 2:13, Pr 16:1, 16:9, Is 7:14)

3. Joseph's Change of Plans (Matt 1:24-25)

Conclusion and Applications