

Unit I: The Beginning of a Call Called to Participate in a Promise

DEVOTIONAL READING: Isaiah 42:1-9

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 1:18-25

PRINT PASSAGE: Matthew 1:18-25

KEY VERSES: Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

(Matthew 1:20b-21, KJV)

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“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.”

(Matthew 1:20b-21, NIV)

LESSON AIMS

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Remember the story of the angel's announcement to Joseph of Jesus' birth.
- Rejoice that the birth of Jesus fulfilled God's promise to be with His people.
- Live with greater awareness of God's abiding presence.

*Key Terms

Angel (verse 20)—Greek: *aggelos* (ang'-el-os): a messenger of God.

Christ (verse 18)—Greek: *Christos* (khris-tos'): the Anointed One, “Messiah” (NIV), Christ.

Espoused (verse 18)—Greek: *mnésteuó* (mnace-tyoo'-o): betrothed; “pledged to be married” (NIV).

Prophet (verse 22)—Greek: *prophētēs* (prof-ay'-tace): a prophet (an interpreter or forth-teller of the divine will).

Righteous (verse 19, NASB)—Greek: *dikaíos* (dik'-ah-yos): correct; righteous; by implication innocent; “just” (KJV); “faithful to the law” (NIV).

Save (verse 21)—Greek: *sózó* (sode'-zo): to save, deliver.

Sins (verse 21)—Greek: *hamartia* (ham-ar-tee'-ah): sinful deeds; failures.

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to Page 2)

Life Happens

Jeremy recently travelled to Spain for a work conference. Years ago, he felt impressed in prayer to step out



Overview

This week's lesson takes a close look at the birth of Jesus. God's great promise to send a Savior into the world—a promise made centuries before Jesus' birth—finally became a reality. Today's Scriptures, focusing on the birth of Jesus, are among the most popular Bible passages of all time. They are read and repeated all over the world during the Christmas season. While the story is familiar, this exposition will provide a fresh but familiar discussion of today's text. Matthew's gospel was written to a Jewish audience. After Matthew sets forth the genealogy of Jesus, he begins focusing on the circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth.

in greater faith at work. Specifically, Jeremy felt led to pursue tasks that were outside of his comfort zone, such as planning employee engagement events, organizing volunteer opportunities, and mentoring colleagues in his division. Jeremy was becoming the "one to watch," and the corporate team wanted him to be their representative.

After his time in Spain, Jeremy learned that he was being appointed to a national board for arts and culture in the museum space. Jeremy was unaware that the assignment was even a possibility for him. However, the leadership team took notice of Jeremy's dynamic leadership skills and were convinced that he would make a great addition to the board. Jeremy was surprised by the opportunity but realized that God was expanding his influence. His willingness to follow God's lead and move beyond his comfort zone had opened new doors for him.

Questions

1. Please share an experience of how God has revealed His promises to you. Were you surprised by the outcome? Were you patient in the waiting process?
2. In what ways do you honor and thank God for His immeasurable blessings?

COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Joseph: A Righteous Man

(Matthew 1:18-19)

KJV

18 Now the birth of Jesus *Christ* was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was *espoused* to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

19 Then Joseph her husband, being a *just* man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.

NIV

18 This is how the birth of Jesus the *Messiah* came about: His mother Mary was *pledged to be married* to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.

19 Because Joseph her husband was *faithful to the law*, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

During his betrothal period with Mary, Joseph discovered that his bride-to-be was pregnant (**verse 18**). The betrothal period usually began ten or twelve months prior to the marriage. In Joseph's day, a pregnancy during the betrothal period was severely condemned as clear evidence of sexual sin. Joseph had not had sexual relations with Mary and knew he was not the father of Mary's baby. He also knew that the betrothal period was so sacred that Jewish Law in place at that time meant that Mary would be found guilty of adultery or fornication. Death

by stoning was the punishment for such crimes (see Deuteronomy 22:23-24). Joseph had a dilemma with two choices: he could leave Mary or stay with her. Within the Law, Joseph could have divorced Mary and left her to bear the punishment of what appeared to be sin (but was not). But Joseph loved Mary and was determined to protect her. Wanting to avoid a public scandal, Joseph, who was merciful and righteous, deliberated quietly within himself concerning what he should do. Although Joseph was a just man and one who was faithful to the Law, he desired to show mercy to Mary (**verse 19a**). Reasoning within himself, Joseph initially reached a practical decision to quietly release Mary from her betrothal (**verse 19b**). Joseph could have legally demanded the full weight of the Law as judgment upon Mary, but he was merciful. This story speaks well of Joseph's temperament and character. Likewise, God could have demanded the full weight of judgment upon us, but, instead, He sent His Son, Jesus, to save us (see Matthew 1:21).

 **What Do You Think?** Have you ever regretted having spoken or acted on a situation (based on appearances that turned out to be false) before praying and thinking it through? Give one example.

God with Us

(Matthew 1:20-23)

KJV

20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the *angel* of the LORD appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall *save* his people from their *sins*.

22 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the *prophet*, saying,

23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

NIV

20 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.

21 "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*."


22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the *prophet*:

23 "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

What happened to Mary was so important to God's eternal plan of salvation that God miraculously intervened to give Joseph the full details of Mary's situation. In a dream, an angel told Joseph not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife (**verse 20a**). Everything Joseph had been taught about the Law was being challenged by this angel, who told him to go ahead and take Mary as his wife. In other words, Joseph is being told to forsake whatever he has been taught and participate in something bigger than himself, and bigger than what he could see or sense. God reached out to calm Joseph's fear that the woman he loved would be publicly shamed and possibly killed. Matthew gives the details of Mary's conception by the Holy Spirit (**verse 20b**). The message from the angel clarified to Joseph that no man had been involved with Mary's pregnancy; God Himself was the baby's father. In the dream,

Joseph understood that Mary would give birth to a son, and that he was to name the son Jesus, because His mission would be to save people from their sins (**verse 21**). The name *Jesus* means “Yahweh saves.” Furthermore, Joseph was told that the birth itself would fulfill the words of the prophet Isaiah (**verse 22**). The prophecy predicted that a virgin would conceive and give birth to a son and He would be called Immanuel, which means “God with us” (**verse 23**).

It is important for believers to appreciate the deeper meanings of the names associated with Jesus. The name *Messiah* derives from the Hebrew word *mashiach*, meaning “anointed one” or “chosen one.” Jesus is Immanuel, God with us! Whatever Joseph may have thought or felt about the revelation, the main point is that Joseph believed God and did as he was directed.

 **What Do You Think?** Discuss a specific time when you felt God’s presence. How comforting was it to sense that God was with you? Do you feel assured that He is still with you? Explain.

The Holy Space

(Matthew 1:24-25)

KJV

24 Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:


25 And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.

NIV

24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.

25 But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

When Joseph woke up, he did not argue with God. Joseph might have reasoned with God, but he simply obeyed (**verse 24**). Joseph did not have sexual relations with Mary until she gave birth to Jesus (**verse 25a**). Joseph understood that since Mary was impregnated by the Holy Spirit, her womb would also be considered a holy space. This reasoning would align with the mentioning in Leviticus 15:18 of the ritual uncleanness that temporarily follows sexual relations between a husband and a wife. Joseph did not wish to “defile” that holy space. While Isaiah 7 offers a prophecy about the birth of the Messiah, it did not indicate the means or methods by which the Savior would come. The prophetic text shares that a virgin would conceive and give birth to a Son. This did happen and the name of this Son would be Jesus (**verse 25b**). The conception was miraculous indeed; however, the Jews were not expecting a miraculous conception. Therefore, Joseph (and Mary, in Luke’s account) were so surprised. They both were caught off guard with the news. Joseph would have seen the unfortunate timing of Mary’s pregnancy announcement (as an unmarried woman). But Paul, in contrast, affirms Mary’s pregnancy as an example of God’s perfect timing. When the time was right, Paul wrote, God indeed sent His Son—born of a woman, born under the Law—to redeem those under the Law, that we might receive adoption as sons and daughters of God (see Galatians 4:4-5).

 **What Do You Think?** Has God ever told you to do something that seemed strange or unusual—something people would surely misunderstand? Did you obey and do as you were told? Explain.

Your Life

Especially during trying times, we sometimes forget that God is with us. God never promised us a life filled with comfort, but God sent His Son, Jesus—Immanuel—to be with us. This is good news! It is certainly worth celebrating, not just during the Christmas season but throughout the year.

Your World!

Christmas is often celebrated by many as a time of giving of presents, but this totally misses the point. The point of Jesus' birth was to save people from their sins. This Christmas season, pray for an opportunity to share that Jesus is truly the reason for the season.



Closing Prayer

Dear Lord, during this Christmas season, we celebrate Your abiding presence in our lives through Your Son, Jesus. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY , December 14	"Midwives Frustrate Pharaoh's Decree"	(Exodus 1:15-22)
TUESDAY , December 15	"God Answers Solomon's Dream"	(1 Kings 3:5-14)
WEDNESDAY , December 16	"Insight into the Meaning of Dreams"	(Daniel 1:8-17)
THURSDAY , December 17	"In Christ, No Divisions Allowed"	(Galatians 3:25-29)
FRIDAY , December 18	"The Gracious Ruler to Come from Bethlehem"	(Micah 5:1-5)
SATURDAY , December 19	"A Successful Return from Egypt"	(Matthew 2:19-23)
SUNDAY , December 20	"Safe in the Midst of Danger"	(Matthew 2:7-15)

NOTES
