

Joseph and the Virgin Birth

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[0:00] Matthew chapter 1 and verse 18, and we'll read through verse 25. 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 Emmanuel, 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 they gave him the name Jesus.

If you were here for the Sunday school hour, you would have heard the announcement of things that we're rejoicing in as a church body. We rejoice in the little baby girl born to Alan Jill Poole last night, as of then yet unnamed, and we're also rejoicing in the engagement of Caleb Beery and Mary Wessner.

And I don't think that that's too much of an intrusion to put the announcement of that into our worship service here, since this morning we too are considering the birth of a child and also somewhat of an engagement.

[2:00] How important is the virgin birth of Jesus Christ? It is significant that in both accounts of Jesus' birth, both Matthew and Luke, one is to know right up front that Jesus was born of a virgin.

that this was a supernatural, one-of-a-kind birth, with a human mother and no human father.

Now, that fact has important theological ramifications. for Jesus not to share in human depravity, for Him not to be born with a merely human nature that is sinful, so that He could be the perfect sacrifice in the place of His sinful people.

Indeed, one of the slanders against Christianity that the early Christians had to put up with was that the slander of the Jews, that Jesus was an illegitimate child.

A child born out of wedlock, and that this virgin birth business was just a cover-up to hide that. Well, perhaps it's because that was circulating that Matthew, especially, and Luke as well, speak so clearly on this crucial matter of the virgin birth of our Savior.

[3:35] But the way they speak of it is interesting. They don't come at us with theological debate. They don't set out all of its theological ramifications. They just state the facts.

They leave it for the epistles and those later to come and to show the doctrinal importance of this reality. And so they set before us the virgin birth of Jesus in a very factual manner, but also in a way that sets before us the very practical difficulties that it brought upon real people, a real young lady, and a real young man who are engaged to be married.

Luke follows Mary's predicament. Matthew follows Joseph's predicament. So last week we saw Mary before this predicament that God's will for her was to be the virgin mother of Messiah.

That had certain difficulties about it for her life. And we saw her response was one of belief. She believed that what the angel had said would happen, and it was one of submission.

She said, I am the Lord's servant. Let it be to me as you have said. Now this morning we get to see Joseph's response to the conception of Mary and to God's will for him to be the stepfather of Messiah.

[5:08] We'll look at this under five headings. The first is Mary's pregnancy found in verse 18. This is how the birth of Jesus came about. Jesus Christ.

Jesus the Messiah. 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.

Now last week we saw how much different betrothal was than our modern day engagement. The betrothed couple, Mary and Joseph here, had already exchanged legally binding vows before witnesses.

They'd already promised their fidelity to one another such that the law from that point on viewed them as husband and wife. Already they are viewed in the eyes of the law as husband and wife.

Any infidelity during this period of betrothal was considered adultery in God's law.

[6:13] And to break the betrothal therefore required a divorce. You can find that in Deuteronomy. Now during this betrothal period the couple lived apart from each other.

The woman continued to live in her father's house. There was no intimacy, sexual intimacy between them. And the marriage would only be completed when the bridegroom came for his bride and in a public ceremony took her to his own house and from then on lived intimately with her as husband and wife.

Now it was during this betrothal period before they came together that Mary was found to be with child. And oh what a find that must have been.

We're not told how Mary's pregnancy was discovered. The most natural explanation would be that there came a point when it was showing.

She was showing and could hide no longer the fact that she was pregnant. Somehow it was found out. And nor are we told how many found out about her pregnancy.

[7:30] But we remember that she lives in the little town of Nazareth where no one could burp without everyone else in town knowing about it. So we're right to assume that this pregnancy was discovered by the whole town as the word made the rounds.

Mary's pregnant. So all of Nazareth would have been in shock but none more so than poor, poor Joseph.

Because he did not yet know what Mary knew and what Matthew states here. That she was pregnant not by man but by the Holy Spirit.

what the angel had told Mary in advance would happen had now happened just as he had said. She, the virgin had become pregnant.

But now others were finding out that she was pregnant without knowing the Holy Spirit's role in the pregnancy. And this was all part of that painful cost to Mary of what it would mean to her life to submit to God's will for her.

[8:48] And nothing I think would have been more painful than knowing the difficulty and the turmoil that it put Joseph through. So after announcing Mary's pregnancy Matthew turns the spotlight onto Joseph and it remains there for the rest of his account.

We find that this pregnancy not only created drama for Mary but for Joseph as well. So we come secondly to Joseph's perplexity. Where was he when he first learned of it?

Was he at work? Was he at home? Where was he when all time seemed to stand still and the wind was knocked out of him at this news?

when he found out that Mary was pregnant he did what every other man on the planet would have done.

He assumed that she had been intimate with another man. He assumed she had been intimate with another man.

[9:55] Now that's the only way pregnancies had ever ever ever happened in human history through the relations of a man and a woman and he knew he wasn't the man so who was he?

And now his mind is spinning and he's thinking she went away for three months to visit her relative Elizabeth. Was it someone there? Questions swirling in his mind tormenting him all day long at night his bed became a torture rack on which he tossed how long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?

Those could have been the words of Joseph. He never knew his heart was capable of such pain. The deepest betrayal from one so close to him is Mary.

She had publicly vowed her fidelity to me. how could she break her vow? And why? Why does it have to happen this way?

Why couldn't have we had what we dreamed of that happy little family in Nazareth? This is spoiled it all. Now perhaps you're asking why didn't Mary tell him what the angel had told her?

[11:21] Well I'm not sure. but it seems that she didn't. I mean how could she expect him to believe what it took an angel from God's presence to convince her of?

Of something that had never happened before in the history of mankind. If she did tell him he clearly did not believe her but I doubt that she did. So Joseph is left wrestling with his wrong assumption and he's now in a dilemma of what to do.

What shall I do now? Mary's pregnant. If you were his pastor and you only knew what he knew that Mary was pregnant how would have you counseled Joseph?

Well verse 19 tells us what Joseph decided 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 tells us he is a righteous man wrestling with his options and Joseph's righteousness is seen in two ways in verse 19.

[12:34] What should he do? Well he clearly could do nothing he could not do nothing as much as a part of him may have wanted to do nothing he loved Mary but what she had done or what he thought she had done was a grievous sin in Israel the mosaic law of God viewed her sin as adultery punishable by stoning Deuteronomy 22 23 and though at this time it seems that that stoning had fallen out of practice now under the Romans yet the seriousness of her wickedness before God was no less because of that God did not put the death penalty on every sin in Israel but he did on adultery he knew God's hatred of this sin and he couldn't overlook it so though he loved her he decided to break the betrothal he would not lower

God's righteous standards for marriage by marrying an adulteress because as a righteous man he hated what God hated he hated adultery and he would not promote such wickedness in Israel he would have no part he would not be a sharer in her sin or make light of it and that dear ones was his righteousness his righteousness Matthew tells us now that might sound strange on the ears of our immoral generation that puts up with anything and winks at adultery as no big deal but if so that only shows how far we have fallen from God's moral standards Joseph decided to break the betrothal because he was a righteous man so we find that his righteousness is seen in the first place in his firmness to maintain

God's holy standards he's a disciplined man he's governed by holy principles not by the emotions of the moment man what about you what about your home what governs how things operate in your home are you firm in upholding the righteous standards of God's law regardless of what other people are doing what other fathers are doing does your family know that you mean what you say do they know that your discipline is consistent over the home our culture is soft where Joseph was firm he stood for moral principle this is a day of moral marshmallows where men are soft men are carried by their emotions rather than by God's law and so men become pushovers and disciplined is scorned as being judgmental

Joseph you shouldn't judge Mary who are you to judge Mary and so God's law is set aside oh may God make us men more like Joseph in this passage whose righteousness is seen in moral fiber and backbone to stand and to take a stand for righteousness for what God says is right and wrong and to do so first of all in our own lives because if we are not standing for righteousness personally then our conscience will not allow us to stand up for righteousness in our homes in our families in our church in our communities but that's not the only way Joseph's righteousness was seen in this verse verse 17 goes on to say verse 19 goes on to say that his righteousness is also seen in his gentleness his kindness his mercy now basically

Joseph's options were two he could number one enter an accusation of adultery against her in a court of law and drag her through a public trial that would expose her to public disgrace as an adulteress or he could secondly give her a bill of divorce and quietly break the betrothal without a trial he chose the latter we're told not wanting to expose her to public disgrace he had in mind to divorce her quietly and that too was because he was a righteous man do you see it here's firmness tempered with tenderness there's no nasty spirit of revenge here is there how could she do this to me and bring shame down upon my head when I am innocent I'll see to it that when I'm done with her she'll be branded forever as an adulteress no there's none of that spirit which fills divorce courts of our land rather we find this gentleness in

[18:09] Joseph so men this masculine picture of righteousness is firmness tempered with gentleness and oh what a holy combination how rare is this righteousness what we see more often is one or the other isn't it firmness or gentleness lacking the other so we're husbands and fathers who are gentle but we're morally soft and we're pushovers and we don't take a stand for

righteousness and don't discipline the home as we ought and we compromise with evil and we're unwilling to take unpopular stands on biblical principle oh we're so gentle and we're so nice but where's the firmness of righteousness or we're firm but not gentle we're so firm and inflexible that we don't know what it is to love mercy and our family suffers because of it we're harsh we're bitter we're a bull in a china shop and brothers that's the best we can do that is the best that human nature in man can do to either be firm or to be gentle but it is the grace of God in Jesus

Christ that weds those two together and enables us to be both firm and gentle and we see it here in Joseph so beautifully a father who will take a firm uncompromising stand for righteousness though nobody else's dad in the whole school takes that stand and yet does it with such tenderness and affection that the child knows that he's watching out for his or her good there is a kindness and a sternness in God that we are to consider and it's seen here in Joseph we see it in Moses he was firm and uncompromising with Pharaoh and Pharaoh says well just who's going to be going he says we're all going and all of our herds are going and Pharaoh says no you guys go ahead and go but leave your animals and you remember Moses' firm response not a hoof will be left behind now that's firm that's unyielding no compromise there and yet he is called the meekest man on earth this Moses this firm man we see his meekness praying praying for these these people who want to kill him these people who want to go back to Egypt out in the desert firm gentle Moses we see it best in Mary's son the Lord Jesus Christ none more firm than him in not giving an inch to the devil's temptations in Matthew chapter 4 he didn't give an inch did he not giving an inch when dealing with the Pharisees who had perverted the gospel the good news firm Jesus and yet he can be so gentle with an immoral Samaritan woman in John chapter 4 as to speak to her with kindness and to offer her the living waters that only he could offer none more tender and welcoming the little children and gathering them into his arms none more patient and dealing with his disciples who were so often needing to be rebuked as those of little faith so gentle as to not break a bruised reed so gentle as to not snuff out a smoldering wick this is our

Jesus the righteous one and his righteousness is seen in the wedded characteristics of firmness and gentleness men there's something for all of us to learn from Joseph in his combination of firmness and gentleness it is the fruit of the spirit it's the only way that we men will produce such a combination a beautiful mix such as is found in the Savior and is here reflected in Joseph so Joseph determines to break the betrothal because he's firm but to do it quietly because he's gentle! but even that mild course must have tore the heart out of Joseph to have to do this when seems there was a part of him that still loved Mary and would have so much enjoyed just taking her to himself and we don't know how long he was left in this predicament with his foldy assumption of Mary's guilt but we know this he was just about to reject both mother and Christ child and in the nick of time God came to him with the needed information that critical information that he needed and so this brings us to the angels proclamation in the third place verse 20 says 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 [24:10] Holy Spirit Joseph your assumption though understandable is wrong from the start Mary is not an adulteress Mary has not defiled herself she has kept herself pure she is a virgin for what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit not man so don't be afraid to take Mary home as your wife now that word from the angel is a command as verse 24 will tell us this is God's will for Joseph he is to scrap his earlier plan he is not to break his betrothal to Mary but he is to go the next step and marry her and to bring her into his home God does not want Mary raising her son alone now can you imagine

Joseph's relief and joy having received this information this was the only obstacle that stood in his way of taking Mary into his home and marrying her following through on the betrothal and completing and consummating the marriage it was just this one big thing she was pregnant and I didn't do it and at last that one obstacle has just been removed in an instant with one word from God through the angel and at last he's brought up to speed then with what Mary knows what the angel had told her that the child is conceived by the Holy Spirit now think about this God surely would have saved Joseph a whole lot of grief and pain if he had given him that information just a little bit earlier like before he knew that Mary was pregnant like the angel told Mary before she got pregnant if God would have just done that for Joseph think of the grief and pain that it would have saved him and yet though God could have done so he chose!

not to have done so what does that teach us? it teaches us that God's goal for our life is not to save us from all grief and pain that's not his number one goal for you for me oh he must not suffer grief and pain he had brought the news to Joseph before he heard of Mary's pregnancy but instead he waits he waits he intentionally orders the events of our lives so that our faith is tried so we feel our helplessness our need of him and we trust in him alone for our dependence he even allowed Joseph to continue on under a faulty assumption before God finally came and delivered him from it and so in John 11 we find Jesus doing the same Mary and Martha send word come Lord come the one you love is sick Lazarus is sick and what does

Jesus do he doesn't drop what he's doing and run back to Bethany he intentionally stayed where he was two more days until Lazarus was dead and only then does he come think of the grief and pain he to save Mary and Martha if he had come right away why not because God had a better plan more glory would come to God by Jesus raising Lazarus!

[28:00] then raising him up off of his sick bed so he intentionally waits God gets more glory and Mary and Martha's faith get more tested and that's what they needed and that's what you and I need and that's why we don't always get the full all the information we need in life to make decisions that's why we're left to grapple with the perplexity of Joseph what should I do there's something more important going on here more important than getting the next step of guidance from God is to trust him without it Isaiah 50 and verse 10 let him who walks in the darkness some of you this morning are walking in this darkness let him who walks in the dark who has no light trust in the name of the Lord his God Joseph I know that more information would lift you out of your perplexity but

I'm leaving you in it that you might learn to trust me oh but now the information comes and Joseph's heart is relieved and the word is so Joseph don't be afraid to take Mary home as your wife why would he be afraid of that well even though the big obstacle is removed she's pregnant by the Holy Spirit she's not an adulteress yet you know there are other things that would make this a scary proposition it can be scary to obey the will of God just ask Mary she had to wrestle with that before she came I don't mean to say finally in the sense of a drawn out thing but before she came to say I am your servant let it be to me according to your word she knew that would cost her to say so and so it would be costly to

Joseph to now submit to God's will for him each step of faith looks foolish in the eyes of a world without faith each step of righteousness that we take look stupid to an unrighteous world why do you live that way why are you up early on Sunday morning going off to church and not getting back till noon and going off again in the evening what's wrong with you don't be afraid don't be afraid to take Mary home as your wife what might happen if I obey God trust him with the response to that to Mary Mary meant that

Joseph would have to share in the social stigma that attached to her and her son but that itself you see would shield Mary and the child from some of the blows that they would have endured alone the popular notion was that Joseph was the father of Jesus you find that in Luke 3 verse 23 that Jesus was Joseph's son so it was thought and it's not hard to understand why it would have been thought so the story on the street was Joseph and Mary were not pure during their betrothal and Jesus is the product of their sexual union Joseph don't be afraid whatever it means don't be afraid to take her home notice he calls Joseph the son of David Joseph son of David don't be afraid to take her home you see he needed to marry

Mary in order for Jesus to have a legitimate claim to the throne of David that legitimate claim to the throne of David would come when Joseph a son of David would marry Mary and thereby adopt Jesus as his step son and through the father Jesus would have a legitimate claim to the throne of David to be the Messiah king that David's line was prophesied to produce well that wasn't all of the angels proclamation before the invention of ultrasound machines Joseph is told the sex of the child she will give birth to a son verse 21 and you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins Jesus mission on earth will be reflected by the name that I want you to give him the name is

[33:14] Jesus it means the Lord saves and he should be given that name because he will save we mentioned it last week that many Jewish mothers named their sons Jesus in the hope of God sending Messiah to save their nation from oppressive rule of other nations but the angel says his mission is far more important than that he will save his people from their sins their sins and that's a far worse bondage than any political bondage that can be upon Israel under Rome under Greece

under Babylon under Syria he will save his people from their sins sin enslaves sin destroys sin ruins sin leaves men broken and ruined in life and then ushers them into damnation at death the whole world is in this condition the universal condition of all mankind for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God and the whole world is a prisoner of sin and man is helpless to conquer it and there is a power of sin within that man can no more shed than his own skin and yet

Mary's son will have the power to save his people from their sins! Mark he will save his people from their sins what stubborn sin are you wrestling with brother or sister bring it to this savior he saves from sins not just its curse and penalty but from its pollution and power just one sin is enough to damn us forever but this is a savior who saves from our sins plural now how would he accomplish this how would this little child do this the rest of the bible is not silent on that point he's not told here but you know what is said of him that the Lord has laid on him the sins the iniquities of us all and so just as the worshipper laid his hands on the sacrificial animal and confessed their sins!

as if to picture transference of my sins onto this lamb and then that lamb's throat was slit and he was made a sacrifice a substitute in my place that's how Jesus would save his people from their sins God would make him who knew no sin to become sin for us that in him we sinners might become the righteousness of God Christ died for sins!

That's how it would! Christ died for sins once for all the righteous for the unrighteous to bring us to God no wonder this was no ordinary conception this is no ordinary son this is the savior who can save from sin none but God Isaiah 43 11 I even I am the Lord and apart from me there is no savior this child Joseph must be called Jesus because he is the savior he is God there's enough information here for Joseph to know that this son to be born of Mary is messiah Joseph the son of God and God's will for him is to take her home and to marry her and to raise her son Jesus in his home well next Matthew breaks into he doesn't show us right away Joseph's response to this assignment he breaks into the account and tells us in the fourth place of its prophecy 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

Emmanuel which means God with us one of the things that marks Matthew's gospel is that he's quick to point out the messianic prophecies that are fulfilled in Jesus Christ and so we'll find often in the gospel of Matthew this took place to fulfill what the prophet said and so on this is the first of those that long list of messianic promises fulfilled in Jesus there's dozens of them to follow in the book both Matthew and Luke point to this verse in Isaiah 7 and verse 14 and tell us in essence that Mary is this promised virgin and her son Jesus is this promised Emmanuel God planned it God announced it and now God is bringing it to pass now

[38 : 40] Jesus was his everyday name if you saw this young boy in Nazareth and wanted him to listen to you'd say Jesus Jesus it's what everyone called him that was his everyday name and that name pointed to what he would do he would save his people from their sins but Emmanuel is his messianic title and it points not so much to what he would do but who he is he is God with us now there were many Emmanuel running around in Palestine in that day and they celebrated the reality that God is with us but this name belongs to Jesus in a way that it belongs to none other because in him we literally have God with us veiled in flesh the Godhead see hail the incarnate deity pleased with men as man with men to dwell

Jesus our Emmanuel our God with us Matthew would have his readers know that the one in Mary's womb is God as well as man and so with that cleared up Matthew quickly takes us back to Nazareth just as Joseph is waking up from his dream and tells us lastly of Joseph's performance verse 24 when Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife no loitering no delay no argument no postponement to obey tomorrow is to sin today he did what the angel had commanded him to do he gives prompt obedience to the Lord the Lord command why because that's what a righteous man does he obeys

God even when it's scary he obeys his commandments even when it costs him to do so he obeys God even when he can't understand what might happen to him if he does and he does not lean on his own understanding but he trusts and he obeys and here's the third mark of Joseph's righteousness we saw that he was firm we saw he was gentle and we now see that he's obedient that's what it means to be a righteous man to obey Righteousness has to do with obeying God's commands have you obeyed the gospel?

Have you obeyed all that the Lord Jesus tells us to do? That's what it means that Joseph was a righteous man oh if not stop what you're doing and don't rebel another moment against him submit

to him obey him is there some command you know you should obey that you're not don't delay wake up and do what God commands verse 25 ends the story by saying but he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son and he gave him the name Jesus we're not told why he had no union with her until her son was born it was perfectly normal and expected in Israel that when he brought his bride from their betrothal period he brought her into the home that they would live intimately together from that point on but not here he had no union with her until Jesus was born perhaps it was just a sense of awe at the holy child that was within her but when he was born Joseph gave him the name Jesus just as he had been commanded and there we see it again righteousness is obeying commandments he's obeying again and that same pattern follows on into chapter two when an angel appears to Joseph in the night and verses 13 and following tells him get up and flee to Egypt and stay there until I tell you because Herod's going to try to kill him it says so he got up took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt none of this can it wait till morning oh you want me to get up and go I'm gone that's righteousness in action 19 and 20 they're in Egypt and now it tells him get up take the child and his mother and go to the land of [43:39] Israel go back home for those who were trying to take the child's life or dead do I even need to read it so he got up took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel so prompt obedience was not a sporadic phenomenon in this man's life it's rather a pattern that we see in Joseph's life he's like the man the righteous man in Psalm 1 he takes his directions from God and so when the word from God says get up and go he's off that's what it means to be a righteous man and in that he's one with Mary isn't he how can two walk together unless they be agreed I don't know a lot about Mary and a lot about Joseph and how well they were matched but I know this they were very well matched because they both obeyed

God that was the marching orders for their life Mary your will my will for you is that you be the mother of Messiah I'm your servant! stepfather of Messiah he got up and took her into his home and named the boy Jesus and that child Jesus is the one who as he came into the world said here I am I delight to do your will your law is within my heart he is the righteous one par excellence so we have this picture of Joseph found in chapter two protecting his wife right through the dangers protecting the boy Jesus and we go further in the gospels accounts and we find that Joseph is still alive when Jesus is twelve and they go up to

Jerusalem and Jesus gets lost and then there's this sudden disappearance of Joseph from the pages! of scripture and the most natural explanation for it is that he died and that's why we find Mary alone from that point on presumably he died young but who here will argue with the fact that his life was a full meaningful life he was faithful to do what God put him here to do to be the faithful protector of his wife Mary and of their boy Jesus and later the children that God gave them and to do so with firmness to uphold the law of God in his house and yet to do so with gentleness folks that's the home that God says I want my son being raised in this is the home and so he's found protecting!

and guiding! and upholding and disciplining according to God's standards trusting God and promptly obeying him whatever God told him to do and then he died he died better to die young and righteous than to live to an old age and to die in your sin!

suffer suffer anything for the Savior how much more should we living on this side of the cross whom Jesus has died to save us from our sins how much more should we present our bodies as living sacrifices to do and to suffer anything for Jesus knowing we're not our own but we've been bought with a price and so Joseph just fades off the stage but Jesus remains because the gospel is not about Joseph and Mary it's about the Lord Jesus Christ the eternal son of God that his father sent into the world that whoever should believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life do you know him are you serving him offer yourself up again to him this morning what do you need to be living a righteous life as Joseph it's all found in this Jesus for the fullness of the deity dwells in him and it's in him that we are complete so come to him for firmness and gentleness and obedience let's pray holy spirit how kind of you to have inspired this account in

[48:49] Matthew with an eye! even to us with all of our fears and all of our love of self and love of our own way so that we have set before us this predicament of Joseph and yet we see what by the grace of God can be that we can be delivered from our own sinful way we can be saved from our sins through the Lord Jesus Christ and we can find grace in him to be faithful even unto death to be firm when we need to be firm and to be gentle when we need to be gentle to have that mixture found that is the mix of the spirit of Christ teach us Lord and to be found with these words that were

found in our Savior's mouth that it is my delight to do your will your laws within my heart write that law deeper upon us we pray and bring glory to your son in whose name we ask amen