

Mary and Joseph

Matthew 1:18-25 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

Conception and Birth of Jesus

¹⁸ 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.

Introduction

Starting today, for the next four Sundays, I am going to do a sermon series on Christmas characters who witnessed Christ’s birth firsthand. They are Mary and Joseph, angels, shepherds, and the magi. Today, Mary and Joseph.

The Almighty God in Heaven loves to work with the ordinary folks here on earth: that means, with people like you and me. He has been, He is, and He will be working with His children for His Kingdom. However, He doesn’t just work with anyone. For instance, He never works with those who don’t obey Him. Neither does He with those who have no interest in the Kingdom of God. Rather, He always calls and works with those who are willing, humble, and courageous, because such people respond to God’s call with love and enthusiasm. Each time they do, the Kingdom of God advances.

In today’s story, we see Mary and Joseph who worked with God for the greatest miracle of all: the supernatural birth of Jesus. The baby born with no help whatsoever from the human father.

I see two outstanding qualities in the characters of Mary and Joseph. Willingness and humility. Let’s check them out.

Content

A. **Willingness:** In the case of birth of the Messiah, three parties were involved: Mary, the Holy Spirit, and Joseph. For the miracle part, that is, to have Mary conceive a child without the human father, the Holy Spirit was in charge. For the rest of the human part, God invited Mary and Joseph to stay on their commitments to marriage.

What made this young couple so special that they were chosen by God? In human qualifications, they had nothing to show off. They were not rich. They were not from a royal family. They were not nobles, either. Joseph was a carpenter. Mary was a country girl. They couldn't be any more ordinary than that. Ordinary just like you and me. Yet, in their hearts, God saw something special that only He can see: the willingness to carry out God's will. Ordinary for sure yet quite willing. At any cost. **Willing to do God's will.** No matter what.

Background information on today's story. Mary and Joseph both lived in a small town called Nazareth (with less than 500 people at the time of Jesus' birth). As you can imagine, everyone in town knew everyone else's business. Very likely their engagement was arranged by two families who were known for their piety to their townsfolk. As part of engagement terms, Mary and Joseph had to stay celibate until the day of the wedding. Having a sexual relationship before the wedding (biblical expression: for a man to **know** a woman) was forbidden and unthinkable back in those days. But all of a sudden, one day, Mary broke the news to Joseph her fiancé that she got pregnant by the power of God.

Consider Mary for a while: She was in her teens by the time she was engaged to Joseph. When she was visited by Gabriel the angel of God (Luke 1:26 ff), and as she listened to this astonishing news that she would give birth to a son, in a flash of a moment, her mind must have run through all the ramifications of her pregnancy without Joseph's involvement. For instance, *would Joseph believe my story? What about the humiliation, the potential gossip and harassment from townsfolk for the rest of my life?* E.g., In fact, her fear came true later. When Jesus was a grown-up man, there was an incident in His hometown that people took offense at Jesus and called Him 'the son of Mary' (derogatory term for illegitimate child) (Mark 6:3). Normally, people would call Jesus 'the son of Joseph' (John 6:42, Luke 4:22). Mary had to endure such abuse at times from people. Yet, she was willing to work for God's Kingdom.

As far as Joseph was concerned, he had to deal with something else. Did you know that God sent Gabriel to Mary first, not to Joseph, to reveal His plan for humanity? The first time Joseph heard about it was from Mary. Listening to her account on the conception with

no male involvement was astonishing enough, yet, understanding such a “miracle” that was happening to his fiancée was something else! No wonder he was confused.

Joseph had to make up his mind whether he would accept and believe Mary’s explanation or not. He had to give Mary his final answer, too. It was difficult. After many thoughts and prayers, he decided not to believe her story and cancel their engagement. However, as a righteous and kind man, Joseph didn’t want to disgrace Mary in public (back in those days, people would stone the woman to death for adultery). So, he was thinking about ways to let her go secretly (v. 19).

That’s when God sent His angel to Joseph in his dream. *The child in her is of the Holy Spirit*, the angel said. *Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife* (v. 20). After this encounter with the angel, Joseph the righteous fully submitted himself to God’s will and took Mary as his wife (v. 24). He lived up to his reputation of being *righteous* (v. 19): the meaning of being *righteous* is to keep God’s commandments. Like Mary, he too was willing to withstand the criticism and gossip that he wasn’t innocent in his purity and broke the tradition of not *knowing* the bride before the wedding.

Bottom line: God chooses, calls, and works with those who are willing to obey His will. E.g., Abraham. Joseph. Esther. Paul. The list goes on. God’s way hasn’t changed. It is still true in the 21st century. He is searching for His children who are willing to obey and work with Him. Will you be the one?

B. Humility: the second characteristic of Mary and Joseph is humility, because they both said “YES” to God’s call. Think of Mary, for instance. She was truly humble before the Lord. Her humility was not the antonym of pride or arrogance, nor the opposite of “showing scorn for inferiors” (Webster). It was much more than just thinking little of self or saying that she was nothing (D. Wilkerson).

Humility in God’s eyes goes far beyond a human virtue. This is what I mean by humility. It is the courage to accept God’s will no matter what. Humility is strength in control. Humility is anchored in God’s power not our own. Humility is the courage that springs forth from the obedient heart. Humility means to say “YES” to God’s plan and let it run through in our lives no matter how difficult our lives may turn out to be. It is the courage to embrace whatever God’s plan is for us. That’s humility.

Think of some people in your life whom you may consider humble. They may appear humble in human eyes, yet they can be arrogant in the sight of God, especially when they stubbornly refuse to listen to Him and accept His will. I have seen some of them. I was one of them. E.g., When God said to Moses “Go down to Egypt,” Moses at first said, “I am not

eloquent enough. Send someone else” (Exodus 4:12-13). That’s not humility. That’s arrogance. When God said to Isaiah the prophet, “Whom shall I send?” Isaiah cried out, “Here I am, send me” (Isaiah 6:8). That’s humility.

Once Mary and Joseph found out what God’s plan was for them, they totally abandoned themselves to God’s will even if it might destroy their marriage; even if it might bring total humiliation, rejection, and even mockery from the townsfolk. Here’s what I mean by that. After Gabriel’s visit with her, Mary said, “So be it!” (Luke 1:38). That’s humility.

Conclusion

Today, God is still looking for His children to work with. He is searching for those who are willing, humble, and courageous. Do you hear Him calling, “Work with Me, My child?” “Don’t look for great things. Don’t say that you are not Mary or Joseph,” says God. “I work with ordinary folks to touch the lives of people.” Are you listening? Are you ready to say “Yes, Lord. Here I am. So be it?” I pray we all are. Let us pray.