

Joseph

December 25, 2011

Whether it is the scene from a Nativity or children's Sunday School play, there is one character standing in the background ever so quietly. We see the three wisemen and a group of shepherds kneeling in front of the glowing Baby Jesus. Of course, we see Jesus' mama Mary, even the barn animals have holy faces. Oh, let's not forget those tiny angels above the very clean stable which is absolutely untrue, but only in the movies and the Nativity sets.

That quiet character is Joseph – the earthly daddy of the Creator of the universe. Throughout the four Gospels, Joseph was mentioned in only four chapters. It seems that he was not important in the birth of Jesus. We know that he had nothing to do with the conception of Jesus. But contrary to our idea regarding the role of Joseph in the birth and childhood of Jesus our Savior, he was very important and he did his part very faithfully.

Let's check out a few things about Joseph.

A. JOSEPH'S OCCUPATION

Matthew 13:55 Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas?

When a couple of guys meet each other for the first time, within 15 minutes, they find out what the other guy does for living. That is how normal guys' conversation starts. So if we asked Joseph for his occupation, he would reply, "I am a carpenter." It probably was his family's business from his ancestors to his daddy, and he was.

B. JOSEPH'S CHARACTER

Matthew 1:19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.

According to this text, we see that Joseph was a just man and a compassionate man. He was deeply in love with Mary whom he was betrothed to.

In Jewish culture, this betrothal covenant was made about a year before the consummation of the marriage. It was during the one-year period of betrothal that Mary was found to be pregnant.

V19 refers to breaking an engagement by divorce. Remember that the ancient Israel's betrothal was binding in their culture, and one needed a divorce to break an engagement. Even though they were not formally married, Joseph was still considered Mary's husband by engagement.

C. JOSEPH'S GENEALOGY

I am not going to bore you by reading the names of the ancestors of Joseph that were mentioned in Matthew chapter 1.

However, we must pay attention in a few important areas of this genealogy. Genealogies were very important to the first-century Jews. Genealogy proves that person was indeed an Israelite. Besides, Christ's genealogy is crucial to historic Christianity. Matthew traced the lineage of Christ Jesus back to Abraham to show that He was a Jew, but also back through David to inform the readers that Jesus is qualified to rule on the throne of David and fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies.

At the same time, Matthew was careful to point out that Joseph was not the father of Jesus.

As many of you already know that there is another genealogy of Jesus in the third chapter of the Book of Luke. The one in Luke is from Mary's side that covers all the way up to Adam instead of stopping at Abraham.

In other words, the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew is for Jesus' legal right for being a Jew; the genealogy of Jesus in Luke is for Jesus' biological right for being a human. But together they show us the regal right of Jesus as a King of the Jews.

By the way, no Jew today has his legal genealogy. All the records were destroyed in A.D. 70 when the temple was ruined by the Roman soldiers. Jesus Christ is the only Jew alive today who can prove His rights to the throne of David.

D. JOSEPH'S MISSION

Matthew 1:20-21 But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

Joseph's mission, should he choose to accept, is to take Mary as his wife and to raise the Baby Jesus who is God. It sounds simple enough.

But Joseph is facing three major dilemmas in his life at this point:

1) The dilemma that comes from accepting the social blame and shame of their fornication

Joseph and Mary were living in a small town Nazareth where everyone knew just about everyone's business. If you lived there, they probably knew how many spoons you had in the kitchen drawer.

Remember that they were living in the time when fornication was forbidden by the law of God. Fornicators would pay hefty prices for their sins.

But this wasn't as bad as the second dilemma.

2) The dilemma that would bring a certain death to Mary whom he loves

If Joseph claimed that he was not the father of the Baby, according to Deuteronomy 22:23-24, his family members, relatives, neighbors, and others in town would take Mary to the outside of their town and stone her to death as an adulteress. They are going to assume that Mary had sex with someone else other than Joseph and got herself pregnant.

If he chooses to take her to be his wife with someone's baby in her womb, he will be a laughing stock of Israel and the juiciest gossip of the century.

It took great faith for Joseph to believe God's message in the dream. His love for God and for Mary made him willing to "bear reproach" for Christ.

3) The dilemma that he was supposed to raise the Son of God who created him

Luke 2:4-7 Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the

house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. 6 So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. 7 And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Have you ever felt that you are inadequate to do a certain thing you are told to do, because you have absolutely no clue what to do? Joseph was a case in point.

Unfortunately for Joseph, Baby Jesus didn't come with an instruction manual from heaven like all the other babies don't. I remember when my daughter Michelle was born. I had no idea how to be a daddy to this beautiful baby. Actually, I didn't even know how to hold her. My wife Karen had to show me how.

As our worship pastor Al sang "Joseph's Song," I am sure that millions of thoughts were racing through Joseph's heart while he was holding Baby Jesus in that dimly lit stable.

Put yourself in Joseph's sandals to raise the Son of God who created the universe with a simple sentence? When you look at those tiny fingers that once flung stars into the universe, would you not feel so inadequate? What would you teach the Baby who withholds the divine infinite wisdom? Are you not the one who should sit at His feet to learn from Him? The Creator who is sleeping in your arms now has to be nursed, changed, taught, and protected by you. What an incredible moment with the Savior!

E. WHAT MADE JOSEPH SO OBEDIENT?

What made Joseph so obedient to the Lord in spite of his obvious dilemmas in his life? Is it because he was born in the family line of king David? Or is it because he somehow knew that millions of people in the future would read this story about him? I think not.

But I do believe that Joseph had a simple faith in God through the message of the angel. No argument, no fuss, no whatsoever. You might say, "Hey, if I had a visit by an angel, I would do the same." Really? How about this? You and I have the very Word of God, the Bible, which is better than the words from any angel. Whenever we pray to God as born again Christians, He is all ears. Moreover, we have the very God Himself in our hearts where He resides everyday and wherever we go. Should we not obey Him as He teaches us through His Word?

Even the Son of God Jesus was obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Philippians 2:5-11 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. 9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

A British Christian apologist, C.S. Lewis once said, "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Your will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Your will be done.' If we continually choose our own way, He will eventually allow us to suffer the consequences."

When God speaks to us by His Word, there's only one acceptable response. That's obedience. We don't weigh the options, we don't examine the alternatives, and we don't negotiate the terms. We simply do what God tells us to do and leave the rest with Him. Faith is believing in spite of evidence, it's obeying in spite of consequence.

A simple obedience like Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus, always brings further truth from the Lord. Why should our Lord give us any more revelations or more insights when we are not even willing to do what He tells us in the first place? He tells us to follow His instructions through the Word of God one step at a time.

F. APPLICATION

Obedience and faith in God are, in a way, the same. Faith requires actions of obedience and obedience needs a starting point of faith in God.