

## CALLED BEFORE BIRTH

Bible Background – MATTHEW 1:18-25

Printed Text – MATTHEW 1:18-25

### The Birth of Jesus the Messiah

<sup>18</sup> This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement<sup>[a]</sup> quietly.

<sup>20</sup> As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

<sup>21</sup> And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus,<sup>[b]</sup> for he will save his people from their sins.”

<sup>22</sup> All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet:

<sup>23</sup> “Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’”

<sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife.

<sup>25</sup> But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.

-----New Living Translation

### Lesson Introduction

The events leading up to the birth of Jesus form a very familiar narrative to most of us. We revisit the details every year around this time and surely we know it well. However, do we stop to think of the very human responses that this narrative evoked? No one at the time of Jesus’ birth had heard of occurrences such as these. Nonetheless, the betrothed couple, Mary and Joseph, consistently responded with obedience to the news brought to them by God’s angel, Gabriel. As we study today’s passage of scripture, let our response be one of rejoicing that the birth of Jesus fulfilled God’s promise to be with His people, and to live with greater awareness of God’s abiding presence.

#### Background:

The book of Matthew is called the Jewish Gospel because its intended audience is Jewish. It is rooted in Old Testament prophecy related to the coming King through the lineage of King David. The first chapter of Matthew, presents Jesus’ royal lineage, describing His kingly line and rightful place as heir to David’s throne. His legal inheritance comes through the line of Solomon through Joseph, Jesus’ earthly father (Luke 3:23; 4:22). Jesus’ lineage proves that He has the right to be called the King of the Jews. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

## December 13, 2020 – Study Guide 2

which gives Him the right to be called the Son of God (Matthew 1:18-25). He is fully God and fully human; He is the Living Word who came down from heaven, clothed in human flesh, and dwelled among people (John 1:1-4; Luke 1:26-35; 2:1-7). His virgin birth fulfilled the prophetic utterances of Isaiah (Isaiah 7:14). The sinless and divine nature of Jesus makes Him the only man capable of shedding divine blood on the Cross and becoming the final atonement for our sin.

-----*Precepts for Living*, the UMI Annual Commentary 2020-2021, p. 181

### Divine Conception

**Matthew 1:18-19:** Speaking to an intended Jewish audience, Matthew is well aware of the problem in Jewish law that is presented by Mary's pregnancy prior to her wedding to Joseph. So serious was the matter, that Jewish law required a public divorce because of Mary's implied unfaithfulness. But Matthew also makes it clear that the Messiah was not merely a human being, but of a divine nature, conceived by the Holy Spirit while Mary was still a virgin. We are also given a glimpse into Joseph's character. His concern was still for Mary, opting for a quiet divorce that would fulfill the law, but spare Mary some of the public disgrace as well as the possibility of being killed according to Jewish law for her infidelity. For although there had yet to be a wedding, Jewish law stated that they were already legally bound as husband and wife.

◆ *What do Joseph's actions say about him?*

### Divine Correction

**Matthew 1:20-23:** Joseph appears to be a religious man, needing to follow the law in this situation, but also a man of compassion, not wishing to hurt Mary further. But he also thought carefully about their situation with no small amount of confusion. In his time of meditation, God sent a heavenly messenger to clarify things for him. The angel addressed him by name and identified his ancestry as in the lineage of King David, implying the covenant promise God made concerning David's perpetual throne.

The angel stated that the child who would be born to Mary would be a Son of divine origin and that he should be given the name, Jesus, a form of the name Joshua (Heb. *Yehoshua*) which means "Yahweh is salvation. Living in a time of great Roman oppression, Joseph would have understood the concept of salvation as deliverance and protection. Many Jews were in expectation of a Messiah who would set them free politically from Roman domination. However, we know now that God's purpose for Him was spiritual freedom from the domination of sin.

Finally, the angel explains to Joseph that all that was happening was prophesied by Isaiah (7:14) and that the child born of a virgin would be called Emmanuel, God with us. God clarifies these events by pointing back to Scripture showing that our belief in God is not wishful thinking, but faith, grounded in prophetic insight that comes directly from God.

◆ *What does it tell us about God to know that Jesus fulfilled so many prophecies?*

### **From Divine Clarity to Human Obedience**

**Matthew 1:24-25:** Once God clarifies the events to Joseph, and reveals that all of these unusual events were part of His doings, Joseph immediately acted out of obedient. He did exactly what he was commanded to do. He married Mary according to God's dictate, and named to baby Jesus. Mary and Joseph were clearly the kind of individuals and couple who would place God's will above everything else. They both chose to be obedient to God and to serve Him over the traditions and ways established by human beings.

Also evident in these two verses is that Joseph committed to executing the will of God for the remainder of his days. God's purpose became his mission to walk according to the revelation that God revealed to him through the angel messenger. As divinely instructed, they abstained from sexual relations until after the birth of Jesus. He conducted himself in his relationship with Mary, his wife, so that there could be no questioning the divine nature of the Child. He was not and could not have been Jesus' biological father. He accepted Mary as his wife and prepared and provided a home for the Savior.

### **Conclusion**

Joseph's example shows us that divine clarification should lead to the practical application of God's Word. God reveals things to us so that we might act in accordance to the movement of Holy Spirit. Discernments are not given to us so that we can hoard them for self-promotion, but to create within ourselves a motivation to action. God can use us to reveal His divine will, just as He did with Joseph. But we need to listen and be willing to act on the His Word.

### **Sources:**

Banks, M. (Ed.). (2020). Love For One Another. *Precepts for Living*, 23(Winter Quarter), 177-187. The Urban Ministries, Inc. Annual Commentary 2020-2021.  
*Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation, Carol Stream, Illinois.

December 13, 2020 – Study Guide 2

## This Sunday is the third Sunday of the Advent Season – Joy (or Peace)



The season of Advent lasts for four Sundays leading up to Christmas. At that time, the new Christian year begins with the twelve-day celebration of Christmastide, which lasts from Christmas Eve until Epiphany on January 6. Advent begins on Sunday that falls between November 27th and December 3rd each year) **Advent 2020 begins on Sunday, November 29th, and ends on Thursday, December 24.**

**The Advent Wreath** consists of four Advent candles with the white Christ Candle in the center. One candle is lit each Sunday before Christmas and the Christ Candle is lit on Christmas Day—First Hope, then Peace, Joy and Love.

### Advent Week 3 - Prayer for Joy

This third week of Advent, let us remember that the good news of Jesus' birth has the power to bring us great joy this Christmas season. Our joy isn't dependent on what is going on in our life, in our world, or the people that we are with. It doesn't depend on the gifts we give or the gifts we find under the tree. No earthly thing can ever give us complete joy. Our joy comes from you. That joy that flooded the hearts of the shepherds, the angels, the wise men, the hosts of heaven, and Mary and Joseph is the joy that still has the power to overwhelm our hearts with rejoicing.

Father, you offer that same joy to us now if we know you and recognize Jesus as our Savior and Lord. You gave us a reason to celebrate when you gave us the unspeakable gift of Jesus Christ. You came to dwell among us. You went to Calvary's cross for us. You overcame death and rose from the dead for us. You forgive our sins and give us eternal life when we believe in you.

Our joy doesn't come from our jobs, our family, our relationships, our finances, or our success. Our joy doesn't come from what we have on earth or who we are with. Our joy is a gift. It is the gift that you gave us that first Christmas in Jesus Christ. Our joy is encompassed in our Savior, King Jesus. Flood our heart with joy this Advent season as we reflect on the good news of Jesus' birth. In Jesus' precious name we pray. Amen.

Hope Bollinger

December 13, 2020 – Study Guide 2

**Lesson for Next Week – December 20, 2020 – Study Guide 3**

## **A REGAL RESPONSE TO HOLY LIGHT**

Bible Background ♦ MATTHEW 2:7-15

Printed Text ♦ MATTHEW 2:7-15

Devotional Reading ♦ EXODUS 1:8-12

### **Daily Bible Readings**

#### **MONDAY**

Midwives Frustrate Pharaoh's Decree  
(Exodus 1:15-22)

#### **TUESDAY**

God Answers Solomon's Dream  
(1 Kings 3:5-14)

#### **WEDNESDAY**

Insight into the Meaning of Dreams  
(Daniel 1:8-17)

#### **THURSDAY**

In Christ No Divisions Allowed  
(Galatians 3:25-29)

#### **FRIDAY**

Gracious Ruler to Come From Bethlehem  
(Micah 5:1-5)

#### **SATURDAY**

Successful Return from Egypt  
(Matthew 2:19-23)

#### **SUNDAY**

Safe in the Midst of Danger  
(Matthew 2:7-15)