

# A Heart Ready For Christmas

By Mark Jarvinen

## Joseph Accepts Jesus as His Son - Matthew 1:18-25 (NIV)

<sup>18</sup> *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.*

<sup>19</sup> *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.*

<sup>20</sup> *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. <sup>21</sup> 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.”*

<sup>22</sup> *All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: <sup>23</sup> “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).*

<sup>24</sup> *When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. <sup>25</sup> But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.*

As a pastor I encourage faith and seek to help people overcome skepticism. But are there issues in life about which we are to be skeptical? The answer of course is yes. When you receive an email or phone call from someone offering you a deal that sounds too good to be true, **BE SKEPTICAL!** If an agency you've never heard of asks you to provide your social security number, or a bank account number – **BE SKEPTICAL!**

But then, there are those rare moments in life when you hear of something that sounds too good to be true and it actually is true, such as someone winning the lottery with odds of 1 in 250 million, or the Gophers Men's basketball team which hasn't been very good this season, handily defeating the #3 ranked Ohio State Buckeyes this past week.

Every year around Christmas-time, we hear the story of Jesus' birth, and if we're honest, there are certain things in the details of the story that seem hard to believe. Should we be skeptical? The Bible tells us that the birth of Christ was something that was planned even before the world was created – do you believe that? God's Word tells us that the little infant lying in the manger was actually God's Son who had come in the flesh – ***“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14).*** That's a pretty astounding claim if you think about it. Not only that, there's the part about Jesus' mother, Mary, being a virgin when she gave birth to Him. According to the Bible, Mary had never been with a man, and yet she became pregnant with a son. Is it true? Do you believe this, or should we be a little skeptical?

***Here's the truth of it. If you're not ready to believe the impossible, then you're not ready for Christmas.*** The Christmas story and the meaning behind it are both filled with amazing claims, seemingly impossible promises – things that seem too good to be true. Are you ready to believe the impossible? Are you ready for Christmas?

This morning, we're going to look at the birth of Christ from Joseph's point of view. We're going to look at how Joseph, not at

first, but eventually believed the impossible. We're going to see how God blessed Joseph as he believed, and how these blessings can also come to us as we too lay hold of the amazing and seemingly impossible promises of God surrounding the birth of His Son.

## I. Joseph's Problem

Joseph was a carpenter who lived in a very small town called **Nazareth**. Not far from where I grew up in Upper Michigan is an unincorporated community in Ontonagon County called "**Bruce Crossing**," where US Highway 45 (a military highway) and Michigan Highway 28 cross. I always wanted to know who "Bruce" was, but no one seemed to know. The population is listed in Wikipedia as 979. Joseph's hometown of Nazareth, in the region of Galilee, was probably much smaller. There, he was betrothed to a young girl named Mary. Betrothal was like engagement in our culture, but it was "**super-sized**." Betrothal meant that even though a couple couldn't live together until they were actually married, they were nonetheless legally bound to each other by their betrothal. There was an expectation of faithfulness in betrothal. To be found unfaithful during this stage of a relationship was adultery, punishable by death.

Out of the blue, Joseph noticed that Mary was acting strangely. She seemed both agitated and excited. Her behavior fluctuated between hyper-activity and distracted day-dreaming. One day, without warning, she took off to visit Elizabeth, an older relative who was pregnant with her first child. Joseph knew something was up when she stayed for six months. When she finally returned, something else seemed strange to Joseph. Mary looked like she might be pregnant.

Mary was pregnant! She told Joseph the whole story about how an angel had visited her, how God the Holy Spirit had miraculously caused her to conceive, how the child was going to be a boy, how he was supposed to be named “**Jesus,**” and how he was going to be the promised Messiah. The baby was due in 3 months. How do you picture Joseph’s reaction?

**Joseph had three options:**

- 1) According to **Deuteronomy 22**, a betrothed woman who was unfaithful was treated under the law the same way a married woman was treated who had committed adultery. If the betrothed husband chose to press charges, she was to be stoned to death in front of her father’s house.
- 2) A betrothed husband could dismiss the woman quietly, by filling out some paper work and thus, avoid a public scandal, in essence saving her life, and getting on with his life as a member of the community in good standing.
- 3) A betrothed husband could marry the woman quickly before anyone noticed that she was pregnant. This course of action was risky, however, since if Joseph had noticed that Mary was pregnant, it was likely that others had also noticed.

This was a no-win situation for Mary and Joseph. Regardless of which option Joseph chose, this couple would be seen in a bad light publicly. Joseph’s standing in the community as a righteous man and Mary’s perceived adultery would make life extremely uncomfortable for both of them.

## II. Joseph's Character

Put yourself in Joseph's shoes. Would you have believed Mary's story? Think about what he was supposed to believe: a virgin birth? The Holy Spirit causing her to conceive? This child was to be the long awaited Messiah? How would you react? Well, the text tells us that Joseph wasn't buying her story – at least not right away.

Yet, the text shows us something about Joseph's character. **Joseph was a man of integrity who wanted to do the right thing, not just the acceptable thing.** He wasn't interested in protecting his own public image at the expense of the young woman he had grown to love. All he really wanted was to settle down with young Mary and grow a family. He wanted a traditional family with traditional values, but Mary's condition seemed to change all that. Joseph weighed his options and chose **option #2**. He couldn't circumvent the law, but neither could he subject Mary to the harsh letter of the law. Joseph was a man of mercy and compassion. **Verse 19** says, ***"... he did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly."***

## III. Joseph's Choice

But even so, Joseph resisted believing the impossible. But then one night, we are told that an angel from God appeared to Joseph in a dream, and said to him,

***"... 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" (Mt. 1:20-21).***

Boy, did Joseph ever need this word from God! Joseph awoke from his dream ready to change. This word spoken by the angel in his dream created faith in this carpenter's previously broken heart. The angel told Joseph the same thing that had been told to Mary. Joseph now knew he could trust Mary. She had been faithful, not only to him, but also to God. Moreover, on a much grander scale, Joseph now knew that God was faithful to His promise of a Messiah to Israel. God's Word to His people, that had seemed so long in coming, so impossible, could now be trusted by 2 witnesses, Mary & Joseph.

There was no such thing as ultra-sound back then, but Mary and Joseph both knew that the baby would be a son. They didn't have to think twice about baby-names. God had already picked it out – His name would be Jesus. And listen to the explanation the angel gave for why Joseph should name his son, Jesus – “Yeshua” in Hebrew, ... ***because he will save his people from their sins.***” This baby, who would be born just three months after the angel appearance in Joseph's dream, would save the world from sin. Matthew adds something very interesting at this point. The whole idea of a virgin giving birth to a son, and that son being the Son of God, was not a new idea. It had been talked about hundreds of years earlier in Isaiah's prophecy, ***“the virgin will be with child, and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means, ‘God with us.’”*** People would look at Jesus one day and say, ***“this is not just a man, this is God, who is with us, who has fulfilled prophecy, and has come to us in human flesh to become a perfect sacrifice for our sins, when He would later die on the cross.”***

Joseph believed the impossible. He was now ready for Christmas. His faith was demonstrated by his obedience as we learn in vv. 24-25:

***“When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.”***

## **Conclusion**

Joseph was someone who believed the impossible. To this day, everyone remembers at Christmas-time - ***“That’s Joseph – a believer in God’s impossible promises.”*** In many ways that’s us too. Every Christmas God says to us – ***“I promise you that through my Son, who fully identified with humanity by being born on Christmas, I will forgive you for all the sins you have ever committed in your life.”*** He also promises ***“that the moment you die, I’m going to take your eternal soul to be with me forever in heaven.”*** Do we believe these promises? These promises flow out of God’s love. To believe them is at the heart of Christianity. The essence of our faith is believing what seems impossible. Let me personalize this. **Do you believe this?** May God give you the same heart that he gave to Joseph – a heart that believed things that at first blush seemed impossible – too good to be true, and yet they were. When God gives you that heart, you’re ready for Christmas. **A-men.**