

CHRISTMAS TIME

"THE TEST OF TIME"

MATTHEW 1:18-25

This Week's Core Competency

Personal God – I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life. Psalm 121:1-2,

*I lift up my eyes to the hills-
where does my help come from?
My help comes from the Lord,
the Maker of heaven and earth.*

The celebration of Christmas is an experience of getting ready. Lights must be hung, trees must be trimmed, and presents must be wrapped. Nothing is instant with Christmas. As soon as the Halloween pumpkins are put away, retailers begin getting us ready for The Big Day. Even for those who procrastinate, there is the holiday dread of scrambling last minute to get the right gifts, the proper holiday food and the perfect Christmas sweater.

The first Christmas for Mary and Joseph was also a time of getting ready. Mary was told by an angel about the coming child. Mary was asked to prepare for nine long months in anticipation of the newborn king.

Joseph, also influenced by an angel, agreed to sign on for God's special assignment. For approximately six months or so, he did the best he could to prepare for arrival of the infant Immanuel. God was involved in and cared about the lives of Mary and Joseph. A large part of this involvement included each of them waiting, trusting and preparing for the unknown.

Following God when it feels like you are going somewhere is exhilarating. Following God when it feels like nothing is happening is exhausting. After the

heavenly announcements and the dream- induced commitments, Mary and Joseph had to face the harsh realities of public misunderstandings, personal ridicule and social rejection. God was still with them and still blessed them, but this did not remove the stark realities of waiting on God to fulfill his plans.

There is no way to romanticize waiting on God. Remaining faithful to God when nothing seems to be happening is perhaps the hardest part of relying upon a personal God. He loves us. He plans to use us. But sometimes his involvement in our lives involves growing us. This growth is often done in quiet and seemingly slow ways. God is asking us to trust him every day. Faith is not "one and done." Faith is faithfulness over and over again.

Many families will set up a Christmas creche or manger scene to commemorate the miraculous birth of Jesus. Some will leave the manger bed empty until Christmas Day in anticipation of his birth. The emptiness of the manger is an appropriate symbol of anticipation for the Christ Child. But Mary and Joseph did not experience an empty manger in their assignment of waiting. Perhaps a better arrangement of the Christmas creche would be to set the Mary and Joseph figurines each alone at separate ends of a mantle or table. Each alone, without any stable, shepherds, mangers or wise men to comfort them would be more true to the biblical account. Each waiting on what God had promised, not sure when "that final day" would come - this is the forgotten side of the Christmas story. On Christmas Day, in a flurry of movement, these two, tested with time, should then and only then be placed in an unfamiliar stable with strange sounds, strange smells and strange visitors.

Being faithful and obedient to God when nothing seems to be happening and no one seems to be watching may be one of the best ways to prepare for Christmas this year and for a life of faith in the year to come.

***Teach us, O Lord, the disciplines of
patience, for to wait is often harder
than to work.***

- Peter Marshall

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God’s word to put yourself in touch with him.

Matthew 1:18-25

18 This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: 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. 19 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.

20 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. 21 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."

22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" - which means, "God with us."

24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25 But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Circle the name "Joseph" throughout the passage.
- * Box the phrases describing Mary in 1:18-19.
- * Box the phrases describing Joseph in 1:18-19.
- * Underline the phrases referencing the Holy Spirit in this passage.
- * Double underline the word "quietly" in v. 19.
- * Put brackets around the phrase "son of David" in v. 20.
- * Double circle the names used for child to be born as found in vs. 21-25.
- * Double underline "to fulfill" showing the purpose of vs. 18-21.
- * Draw a line connecting the words "no union" in v. 25 with the word "virgin" in v. 23.
- * Draw a line from the phrase "he gave him the name" to the similar phrase in v. 21.

day **2**

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. How is the description of Jesus' birth (Matthew 1:18,20) different from the all the births mentioned in Matthew 1:1-17?
2. Why did Joseph want to divorce Mary? Why did he want to do so "quietly" (Matthew 1:19)?
3. What changed Joseph's mind about Mary?
4. Why does the angel refer to Joseph's lineage in Matthew 1:20?
5. According to the angel (Matthew 1:20-21) and the prophet (Matthew 1:22-23), what would this child do?
6. Why was it important for Joseph to name the child (Matthew 1:21,25)?
7. Why is a virgin-born Jesus emphasized in this passage?
8. What was involved in Joseph's obedience to God's command (Matthew 1:24-25)?
9. What is missing from this birth story (Matthew 1:18-25)? Why would the author leave out such details?
10. How does Joseph's example challenge your own walk of faith?

day 3 **EXAMINE** – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Chapters one and two of the Gospel of Matthew form what is often called a "birth narrative" in the life of Jesus Christ. Matthew and Luke each provide a few chapters detailing how Jesus was miraculously born. These birth narratives set the stage for much of what forms the identity of Jesus and the expectations people form about Jesus. Luke's birth narrative focuses on Mary's point of view. Matthew focuses on Joseph's point of view.

In Matthew's birth narrative, five sections are defined, setting out a number of key aspects of Jesus' life and ministry. First, Jesus' connection to the royal line of David is introduced in his genealogy (Matthew 1:1-17). A Messiah King for Israel would need to authenticate his claim to royal authority through proper pedigree. The remaining four sections of Matthew's birth narrative (Matthew 1:18-2:23) identify Joseph as the main character moving the narrative forward. Three of the four sections show Joseph having a dream, Joseph being directed by an angel in each dream, and Joseph's faithful obedience to God's direction. All four of these sections contain an Old Testament prophecy fulfilled by the events at hand.

In Matthew 1:18-25, we are told the details of how Jesus was miraculously conceived and born. Joseph learned the shocking news of his engaged bride's pregnancy that was in no way connected to him. Joseph's expectation was not for his betrothed to be "found with child." To marry her in this condition would spread the false perception that he had violated the terms of his betrothal through fornication. To remove himself from a pregnant betrothed would be seen as just by the community. A legal divorce in this situation would make it clear to all that he was the "innocent party" in this matter. Joseph was honorable in this dilemma. He could have sought to embarrass Mary and perhaps demand money from her as she was perceived as an unfaithful partner, breaking the engagement contract with alleged infidelity. Instead of making this situation a public spectacle, Joseph resolved to divorce Mary "quietly." He was not going to make her suffer publically or financially. He was not planning to proceed with the marriage because the child was clearly not his.

Joseph was visited three times in dreams in

Matthew's birth narrative. Joseph did not question these dreams nor did he dismiss them as of no consequence. He immediately responded to the challenge of the angel of the Lord in each case. Joseph is to be commended not only as a man of the Law, but also as a man sensitive to the spiritual messages he received from the God he worshiped. The three dreams of Joseph do include visits from an angel. God's messages to Joseph were not easy to understand and perhaps required angelic visitation to assure Joseph that these dreams were from God and were not solutions of his own creation.

In each of the four stories Matthew shared in his birth narrative, he highlighted a prophetic scripture from the Old Testament. These four "fulfillment" quotations from the prophets become a stylistic element in the broader Gospel of Matthew. Sixteen times (1:22; 2:15,17,23; 3:15; 4:14; 5:17; 8:17; 12:17; 13:14,35; 21:4; 23:32; 26:54,56; 27:9) Matthew stated that certain events happened in the life of Jesus as direct fulfillment of ancient prophecy. These fulfillment references authenticated Jesus' claims as Messiah of Israel and connected Jesus to more than just a political agenda. Jesus was sent by God and was revealed to be very God as he was predicted by the prophets.

Matthew 1:22-23 introduced the first of these "fulfillment" quotations by referring to Isaiah 7:14. Matthew quoted the Greek version of the Old Testament (LXX) verbatim with the exception of one word. Isaiah had a singular person (perhaps the mother) naming the child "Immanuel." Matthew stated that "they" will call him the name which means "God with us." Much speculation has been made of the "virgin" mentioned in many English translations. The Hebrew of Isaiah uses a word often translated "young woman." The Greek of the LXX and Matthew's quotation interpreted this reference as a "virgin," an unmarried, chaste girl of marriageable age. Matthew clearly presented Mary as miraculously "with child," not through physical connection to any man (and definitely not Joseph) but with child by or through the Holy Spirit. This conception of Mary's child stood in strong contrast to the genealogical description of male procreation found in Matthew 1:1-17.

Thirty-nine (39) times a male "begets" a son in this genealogy. One would expect Joseph to be the one to do the "begetting" of Jesus. Not so. The narrative section of Jesus' birth surprisingly identifies a source other than a human to be the "genesis" of Jesus. This miraculous turn of events was not an accident. Matthew presents this curious twist of a "virgin with child" as the event alluded to centuries before in Isaiah. Jesus' birth was not a scandalous mistake. Rather, it was the predicted miraculous plan of God.

This initial birth story in Matthew surprisingly contains minimal details. We are not told when Mary conceived. We are given no details about how she miraculously conceived. Nor are we told where Jesus was born, when he was born or any details of his actual birth. These details were not the focus of Matthew. He was focused with who Jesus was in his birth and how God had arranged such details. Jesus was not of man, yet through Joseph's adoption and naming, he was legally a "son of David." Jesus came as Messiah, but not just a political leader, but one who came to save from sins. He came as "God with us." Matthew's first story about Jesus made clear the miraculous origin and divine purposes of Jesus the Christ.

Joseph was an unlikely hero in three of the

four Matthew birth narratives. He was presented as unselfish and obedient. He took on the perceived shame of a conception which was not culturally permitted. He risked rejection and ridicule by marrying a girl pregnant before the planned consummation of the marriage. He agreed to take on the parental obligations of a child technically not his own. He even named the child a name not of his own choosing. Matthew mentioned the additional detail of Joseph remaining celibate for the duration of Mary's pregnancy. Joseph's humility, obedience and self-control are all admirable. Joseph must have been a man of great faith to have set his own desires aside to see the "desire of nations" come into his home and grow up to change the world. Joseph's quick response to the commands of his God, show a connection and fellowship with a God who is asking much of him. God rewarded Joseph with much protection in the face of many threats to his and his new family's life.

God often works in ways beyond our understanding. We should look to God for his direction daily in our lives. We should strive to be obedient to him even if we are afraid or unsure how he will supply. Waiting on God may just be the time he is most personal to us.

The Message of the Passage

Jesus was miraculously born Messiah and counted a son of David through his legal connection to Joseph. Joseph obeyed God by marrying an unconventional bride and naming an unconventional child. All this was fulfilled as prophesied, announcing Jesus to be "God with us" and proclaiming his ministry of salvation.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on 3 *living questions* to apply what you have learned this week.

• **Journal your answers to the following *living questions*:**

–How is God making himself known to you?

–How does God want to change you?

–How is God calling you to change your world?

notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

- v. 18 **pledged** Or "betrothed" in other versions. "Following courtship and the completion of the marriage contract, the marriage was considered established: the woman had passed from her father's authority to that of her husband. But about a year typically passed before the woman moved from her parents' house to her husband's house. During that time, although the marriage was not yet consummated, the woman was 'wife' and she could become a widow or be punished for adultery. Thus betrothal was the legal equivalent of marriage" (W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew* 1-7, 199).
- v. 18 **through the Holy Spirit** Perhaps best understood as "through the power or influence of the Holy Spirit." "However we interpret the story of the miraculous conception, it is most important that we not lapse into paganism by taking it as presenting Jesus as a demigod, half human by virtue of birth from a human mother, half god since begotten by a god. Matthew's environment was full of such stories. Zeus and other Olympians were credited with the procreation of numerous progeny through union with mortal women. Matthew and his Christian readers would surely have been angered by the suggestion that Mary's conception through the agency of the Holy Spirit placed her son in the same category. This is a Jewish, not a pagan, story and must be interpreted as such" (Douglas Hare, *Matthew*, 11).
- v. 19 **quietly** "Joseph could have profited by divorcing Mary publicly. By taking her to court, Joseph could have impounded her dowry—the total assets she brought into the marriage and perhaps recouped the bride price if he had paid one at betrothal. By simply providing her a certificate of divorce in front of two or three witnesses, he would forfeit this economic reimbursement—simply to minimize her public dishonor. Even though Jewish tradition ruled that a wife could lose her dowry for infidelity or for as little as scolding her husband, in normal divorces where the wife was not charged she kept her dowry. Joseph would have to enlist the help of a village scribe or elders to get the money, and this would increase Mary's public shame (Craig Keener, *Matthew*, 62).
- v. 20 **son of David** "The angel addresses Joseph as 'Son of David,' the only time in Matthew's Gospel that the expression is used of anyone other than Jesus. The title ties Joseph and these incidents to the preceding genealogy (1: 1). The regal line will now be tested as Joseph is called to play a significant role in the arrival of the Davidic Messiah" (Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, 76).
- v. 21 **Jesus** "The name Jesus fits the predicted mission of Jesus. It is a Greek form of the biblical name Joshua (*Yehosua*). The word sometimes shortened to *Yesua*, was a common name among Jews. It was popularly related to the Hebrew verb 'save' and understood to mean 'Yahweh saves.' In the NT, Moses' successor Joshua is viewed as a type of Christ (Heb. 3-4). By naming Mary's son, Joseph will be accepting legal paternity. By naming him Jesus, Joseph will be making a statement about Jesus' redemptive mission: 'He will save his people from their sins'" (David L. Turner, *Matthew*, 67).
- v. 23 **virgin** Quoted from Isaiah 7:14. The Greek word in Matthew is *parthenos*, clearly a reference to an unmarried, chaste young woman. The Hebrew of Isaiah uses a less precise word for a female, *alma*, often translated simply as "young woman." Some have challenged the virgin birth of Jesus based upon the use of "young woman" in Isaiah. Matthew clearly has an unmarried chaste young woman, a virgin, in mind as he quotes the prophecy of Isaiah. The use of *alma* in Isaiah does not negate the predictive force of the prophecy or Matthew's emphasis on a virgin born Jesus. "It [*alma*] is not used elsewhere in connection with childbirth (or even marriage), so that its use in Isaiah 7:14 is remarkable, when 'issa' ('woman', 'wife') would have been the normal term. It was perhaps this indication that Isaiah was thinking of a birth outside the normal pattern of child birth within marriage which led the LXX to use *parthenos*. It is a reasonable, if not a necessary translation. ... It is also clear from the wider context that the prophet's thought is, as often in Old Testament prophecy, not confined to that primary reference. The reintroduction of 'Immanuel' in Isaiah 8:8, 10, and the recurrent theme of a child to be born as deliverer (9:6-7; 11:1ff.), indicate that 7:14 is to be seen as preparing the way for a developing Messianic theme in this section of Isaiah. Clearly the LXX translators, with their striking use of *parthenos*, understood it to refer to more than an ordinary birth, and the choice of 'alma' in the Hebrew as well as the symbolic name 'Immanuel' suggest that they were right" (R.T. France, *Matthew*, 84).
- v. 23 **Immanuel** "If Immanuel in Isaiah is a messianic figure whose titles include 'Mighty God,' there is reason to think that 'Immanuel' refers to Jesus himself, that he is 'God with us.' Matthew's use of the preposition 'with' at the end of 1:23 favors this. ... No greater blessing can be conceived than for God to dwell with his people (Isa 60:18- 20; Eze 48:35; Rev 21:23). Jesus is the one called 'God with us' (the designation evokes Jn 1:14, 18). As if that were not enough, Jesus promises just before his ascension to be with us to the end of the age (28:20; cf. 18:20), when he will return to share his messianic banquet with his people (25:10)" (D.A. Carson, *Matthew*, 80).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

This week we were focusing on that moment when God steps in and speaks up and your life changes direction. As I read our text today, I can almost feel the tension Joseph must have experienced. His life had just been turned upside down by an unexpected situation. The future he thought he had suddenly looked uncertain. He likely wrestled with God asking "why" and "what's next." He probably stared into the dark sky for long moments replaying this turn of events in his mind over and over. Eventually, he fell into a fitful sleep and then God showed up. In the way only God can, He sent peace and confirmation to Joseph's heart. He assured him this was all a part of His plan. Even if it didn't make sense, He was in it. I've been there. Sometimes in the twists and turns of life, I lose sight of the mission God has placed me on. I worry and wonder and wish. Then, as real as the angel in Joseph's dream, the Lord speaks to my heart. Most often He uses His Word to do so. Parent, in your busyness, don't neglect His Word. It's so easy to either not open it or read it and walk away wondering what you read. For all of life's unexpected bumps and for daily guidance and inspiration, you need it. I'm praying that you and your family will have many moments to delight in His Word this holiday season!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Heb 4:14-16

1. Who did God choose Mary to be?
2. What changed Joseph's mind in verse 20?
3. What does Immanuel mean?

What Do You Think

1. How do you think Mary felt about being pregnant with God's Son?
2. How do you think Joseph felt after the angel visited Him?
3. How does it make you feel to know that "God is with us"?

What R U Going To Do

Do you know someone who is experiencing a new direction in life right now? A sick loved one, a move, a new baby? Make that person a Christmas card or ornament. Remind him or her that God is with us.

Core Comp

Personal God - I believe God cares about everything in my life.

Memory Verse

Ecclesiastes 3:11 - He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed *Scrolls* _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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