

CHRISTMAS THROUGH THE EYES OF JOSEPH

MATTHEW 1:18-25

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: after His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.

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. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us.”

Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus.

This Christmas season Calvary Chapel has hosted multiple parties - *the ushers, the ladies tea, the college kids, the MS, the HS* - we've had party after party...

We've enjoyed Christmas decor, delicious food, oceans of eggnog, seasonal tunes... Christmas has filled the air. You've

met *merry people* - dressed in *merry colors* - wishing each other a *Merry Christmas*.

I love a good party. It adds to the Christmas joy.

Imagine though, attending one of these Christmas parties. It's in full swing, when a guest enters...

He's an older fellow, a little grey tints his receding hairline... *His jeans and denim jacket - his soft-spoken demeanor - his strong handshake* tell you this is a simple, hardworking, blue-collar kind-a guy.

And when you look into his face you can tell he's having a difficult time with the celebration. He's not into the party like everyone else. You figure a warm welcome will help him feel more at home. You shake hands and introduce yourself... He responds politely, "[And I'm Joseph of Nazareth, nice to meet you, too...](#)"

Imagine, Joseph at our Christmas party!

What if Joseph came to one of our CC Christmas parties? How would he act? I think he'd mingle among us for awhile - he'd see the smiles, hear the laughter, watch the jolly dispositions - then Joseph would start to wonder, "[How did Christmas become so merry?](#)"

I think there'd come a point when he'd have all the festive fun he could stomach. He'd throw up his hands in frustration, and shout out, "[You guys keep saying, 'Merry Christmas...'](#) Well, [that's easy for you to say!](#)"

Don't get me wrong. I'm not implying Joseph was a Scrooge. I'm sure Joseph was a pleasant enough fellow, but

for Joseph Christmas was anything but *a celebration*. Christmas for Joe was full of *trepidation, consternation, deliberation, and lots of dedication*.

I have no doubt, the first Christmas had a much different meaning for Joseph, than Christmas has for folks today. *Christmas through the eyes of Joseph* provide us a unique and challenging perspective...

Before the city of Jacksonville, Florida, renovated the dilapidated Gator Bowl, the old stadium had problems.

In December 1989 the temperature in northern Florida dipped below freezing - a rare occurrence.

The old plumbing in the Gator Bowl had the tendency to freeze. Its 503 toilets had to be continually flushed to keep the pipes from bursting. The city of Jacksonville hired twenty-three workers for the sole purpose of walking around the stadium on the day of that year's Gator Bowl just to manually flush the toilets.

Now, how's that for a real *bowl* game!

On the big day, thousands of fans filed into the stadium in a celebratory mood. This was a bowl - a reward for a successful season - a festive occasion.

For thousands of fans the mood was lighthearted and jubilant, but for the 23 toilet-flushers it was just another day at the office - *far more duty, than party*.

And that helps illustrate the contrast between *Joseph's attitude* toward Christmas and *our attitude*...

If Joseph came to our Christmas party he'd probably act more like a *toilet-flusher* than a *party-goer*.

I'm not saying, Joseph's Christmas was *another day at the office* - but for Joseph I'm sure his first Christmas carried more a sense of *responsibility* than *merriment*.

We usually think of Christmas as a *treat*, but for Joseph, Christmas was a *test*... **It was a test of family. It was a test of faith. And it was a test of fortitude.**

There was a Christmas card that came out a few years ago that featured a happy family opening presents around a beautifully decorated tree.

The inscription on the inside of the card read, **"Make merry, and send gifts to one another."** It's actually a verse from the Bible. It's Revelation 11:10.

The quote is accurate. The problem though is that Revelation 11:10 has nothing to do with Christmas...

Revelation 11 predicts the future. It foresees an evil ruler who rises up and takes over the institutions of the Earth. This dictator is anti-God, and anti-Christ. He mounts a full-scale attack of blasphemy and idolatry.

He leads the world in open rebellion against God.

In response, God sends two witnesses to testify of His truth. This Anti-Christ murders the good guys in the streets of Jerusalem, and we're told in Revelation 11:10, **"Those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, (now recall the Christmas card) make merry, and send gifts to one another."** It's an anti-Christmas held in honor of an anti-Christ. *We use*

gift-giving to celebrate Jesus. One day, folks will give gifts in defiance of Him.

And as with the card's misapplication of Revelation 11:10, we too develop an erroneous view of Christmas.

On the *surface* we see Christmas as a *party*, but through the eyes of Joseph we see it for it really was and is - *a battle*. Good and evil slugged it out.

The sword of a madman, King Herod, and the Bethlehem blood of innocent babies, was for Joseph, as much a part of Christmas as the appearance of the star, the angels, and the arrival of the shepherds.

God made Joseph responsible for dealing with the harsh realities of a wicked, jealous, bloodthirsty world.

Through Joseph, God navigated the infant King around angry tyrants, to predetermined rendezvous with strange admirers, even on to precautionary exiles.

Mary knew the *mystery and marvel of Christmas*. Joseph knew the *conflict and combat of Christmas*.

Don't get upset with Joseph if he doesn't understand why we're wishing each other "**a Merry Christmas.**"

He saw Christmas stripped of its cheesy idealism. Joseph held to a harsher, more realistic perspective.

If Christmas through the eyes of Mary makes us *giddy* - from Joseph's perspective Christmas forces us to be *gritty*. You could say, "**Mary danced with God. But it was Joseph who got her to the dance on time.**"

Joseph added a **practicality** to Mary's **spirituality**.

Mary *praised God*. You recall that she wrote the famous "*Magnificat*." Well, Joseph *served God*. He swallowed his pride, and signed *the birth certificate*.

Viewing Christmas through the eyes of Joseph will add some *consternation* to your *celebration*...

Joseph's perspective may not be as pleasant to consider as Mary's, *but it's every bit as profitable for us if our desire is to serve the Lord in a difficult world*.

Remember, for Joseph, Christmas was a test.

In fact, when we examine our text in Matthew we notice that number one on Joseph's Christmas assessment was **a test of his fidelity to his family**.

The depth of his devotion to his bride-to-be, and her unusual circumstances, was severely put to the test!

Today, the formation of a marriage occurs in two stages: *engagement* followed by *a marriage ceremony*.

But in Hebrew culture it was a three-stage process.

The parents saw to the engagement. Marriages for children were sometimes arranged as early as infancy.

Then when the couple came of age they entered into what the Hebrews called the "*kiddushin*" or "*betrothal*."

The *kiddushin* usually lasted a year. It was a binding relationship. It took a bill of divorcement to end this arrangement. Legally the couple was considered married, but

during this time they lived under separate roofs, and were forbidden to engage in sexual intimacy.

At the conclusion of the year a "nissuin," or [Hebrew wedding](#), took place. And it was quite an event...

Jewish weddings sometimes last a whole week. At the conclusion of the ceremony the couple entered the bridal chamber and consummated their marriage.

Yet it was during their *kiddushin*, or betrothal period, that Joseph discovered Mary was pregnant. *Can you think of a greater test of a man's love for a woman?*

On the one hand, he imagined a wicked tryst with another man - *but this wasn't the Mary Joseph knew and loved!...* On the other hand, how could he believe the preposterous story she'd told of a miracle birth?

Joseph didn't know what to think. *His heart was broken. His plans were ruined. His pride was bruised.*

The Bible tells us Joseph was a craftsman by trade. His partners were *a level and a builder's square*. The carpenter's motto is "[measure twice, cut once...](#)"

You can be sure, Joseph *measured* his next move.

Joseph couldn't just ignore what had happened, yet he still loved this young maiden. The Law allowed him to have her stoned, but Joseph opted to send Mary away privately. She could start over in another village.

It was then an angel visited Joseph in a dream.

His words are in verse 20, “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. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”

Verse 24 tells us how Joe reacted. “Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel... commanded him, and took to him his wife, and did not know her (that is, have sexual relations) till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And He called His name Jesus.”

With angelic confirmation of his own, Joseph ordered *the nissuin*, and the couple married - but the text is careful to inform us that Mary remained a virgin until after Jesus was born. With the wedding, a hurdle was crossed, and a commitment sealed, but the lives of Joseph and Mary would never be back to normal...

Josh Martinez was a 13 year-old who lived in Little Rock, Arkansas. Josh's mom had cancer. She was undergoing chemotherapy. As a result she lost her hair.

Josh loved his mom, and wanted her to know it, so he shaved off his blond locks as a symbol of solidarity.

Josh's haircut was a wonderful gesture of love and support, but the kids at his school didn't see it that way.

Some of the kids accused Josh of being a skinhead. One day a group of thugs jumped him and beat him up.

His mother, wearing her blond wig, told a reporter, “It was out of love for me that he shaved his head. It's tragic that someone would have to take a beating for a haircut.” And of

all people, Joseph knew exactly how Josh Martinez felt. For Joseph took *a beating* for showing his love and loyalty to his betrothed Mary.

Joseph took Mary to be his wife because *he loved her* and *he trusted God*, but don't think for a minute other people saw his actions in that light. Joseph's marriage to Mary, and the birth of Jesus, carried social consequences far worse than a shaved head...

In ancient Israel few sins brought greater shame than infidelity and illegitimacy. For the rest of his life Joseph would father a boy *everyone else knew* was not really his son - and he'd remain faithful to a woman everyone else thought had been unfaithful to him.

Joseph loved the mother and child, but don't think it was an easy decision to embrace them as his family.

Joseph made a difficult commitment. He chose to be dad and husband, though his reputation took a beating.

Realize, Christmas is **a family holiday** not because we Americans have made it such. No, when God sent His Son into the world He entrusted Him to the care of a family - *not a tribe, or a community, or an institution, or a commune, or a kibbutz, or a nanny, or a school, or to trained professionals in a child development center.*

God gave His only Son to a family comprised of one man and one woman committed to each other for life.

Evidently, God felt a family could do the best job in rearing His Son. God dignified and honored the nuclear family when

He sent Jesus into the world. **Christmas is as much a celebration of family as it is of faith.**

That's why this Christmas I want to challenge us all to focus on our families! And I'm not talking about trying to buy everyone's affection with cheap gifts.

Now that Christmas is over so is the gift-giving, but Joseph gave ***himself*** to his family, and we should too.

He sacrificed his dignity, his pride, his reputation - by embracing *a disgraced mother and a stigmatized son.*

Joseph even left his home in Bethlehem to take the child and mother to Egypt to escape the jealousy of King Herod. *Who mowed his lawn while he was away?*

Who tended to his pet projects?

Who used his membership at the fitness center?

*Who was running his carpenter's shop in Nazareth while he was away caring for his family? **You mean Joseph put his family before his business?** O yes!*

In a small town in Florida there is a woman who runs a shelter for unwanted boys. She's poor, but kind. Her approach is *small-budget*, but *big-hearted*. This woman really loves the boys that are placed in her care.

Once, a prospective couple came to the home to interview a child they were wanting to adopt.

The potential mother asked the boy, *"do you have a bicycle?"* He said, *"no ma'am."* She continued, *"do you have your own set of roller blades?"* "no ma'am."

She kept on, "*do you have a baseball bat?... or your own bb gun?... on and on she went.*" Finally the little guy stopped her, "I'm sorry ma'am, but if that's all you're going to give me, I'd rather stay here!" Joseph gave his family the best he could - *he gave himself!*

It reminds me of an army chaplain who returned home from the war just in time for Christmas. He'd been overseas two years, and hadn't seen his family.

His bus pulled in after midnight on Christmas Eve.

Rather than wake the kids, dad and mom planned a surprise for Christmas morning. All the gifts were stacked up by the hearth, and the father huddled among them. His wife draped a white sheet over him so that he blended in. Their children couldn't see dad.

As the kids started opening their presents suddenly the white sheet began to rustle, and the dad rose up from among the packages. *The kids went bonkers.*

Moms and dads, what would it mean to your family, if this Christmas you gave them more of yourself?

Sacrificed a little more time, and attention - set aside your pursuits to be with them - *what would it look like to say to them you care, and you enjoy their company?*

O my, maybe *your spouse* is an embarrassment. *She's* a bit uncouth, or *He* can be inappropriate...

Perhaps *your child* has shamed or humiliated you...

Joseph dealt with both scenarios. He bore a shame caused by his family; yet he didn't stop loving them.

Joseph became a major player in the Christmas story only after he realized *he was not what mattered*.

Christmas for Joseph was not about *his* happiness or *merriment*, but about *a special mother* and *a mysterious child*. Joseph became a hero because he sensed that two **other** lives were at stake, and more important than his. A spouse and a child were hanging in the balance - dependent on him and his protection.

If you're a spouse, and if you're a parent - Joseph should remind you that *it's no longer just about you!*

George Mason was a bank president who's whole life revolved around his business. He lived alone. He had no time for family - even turned down his brother's invitation to Christmas dinner. On Christmas Eve he was locking up his bank when he walked into the vault to get some extra cash. The huge door swung shut, and George Mason was locked inside his own vault.

At first he felt a sense of panic, until he found the safety air hole. Since George had declined all Christmas invitations, no one would think it strange that he was missing. There was nothing else he could do except sit back and wait out the next forty-eight hours.

George Mason spent Christmas Eve and Christmas Day surrounded by what he loved most - *his money*.

But he soon discovered that all the bank's money couldn't ease his loneliness, and convey a warmth.

By the time the bank reopened and George was rescued from the vault his attitude had changed.

He wrote these words and hung them in his office so he would never forget the lesson he'd learned, "To love people - to be indispensable, somewhere; that is the purpose of life. That is the secret of happiness."

This was no doubt Joseph's attitude, "to love people, to be indispensable somewhere." This prompted him to pack up his whole life - as well as a pregnant woman - put it all on a burro and travel to Bethlehem.

Christmas through the eyes of Joseph is all about accepting responsibility for people you love, and committing yourself to them for the long haul, *even when it's not convenient*. Christmas is about giving yourself away - it's about belonging to others.

But Christmas through the eyes of Joseph was not only a *test of family*, it was also **a test of faith**. *Should* Joseph believe? *Could* he believe? *Would* he believe?

All he had to go on was ***the Word*** and ***a word***...

The Word was Isaiah 7:14. The prophet predicted, "Behold, a virgin shall be with Child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel." Joseph knew this name "*Immanuel*" - it meant, "God with us!"

And ***A word***... An angel appeared and told him, "For that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit..."

The Word and *a word* kept bouncing around in his heart - would that be enough for Joseph to believe?

Did you hear about the elephant who was enjoying a swim in the river? He was playing and splashing and spewing water everywhere, having a *trunk-load* of fun, when all of a sudden a mouse appeared on the beach.

This little mouse was in great distress, and started yelling at the elephant to get out of the water.

The elephant didn't want to end his swim, but the mouse kept screaming. Finally, the elephant realized if he wanted any peace and quiet he was going to have to get out of the river and see what the mouse wanted.

The huge pachyderm lumbered up on the bank and towered over the little mouse. He said, "*Now, what do you want?*" The mouse replied, "*Ah, that's okay, I just wanted to see if you were wearing my bathing suit.*"

Actually, its easier to imagine a huge elephant in a mouse's bathing suit than it is to comprehend how the infinite God could wrapped himself in flesh, blood, and bone, and become the tiniest and weakest of humans.

Listen to one author's description of the mystery, "*The omnipotent made Himself breakable. He who had been spirit became pierce-able. He who was larger than the universe became an embryo. He who sustains the world with a word chose to be dependent upon the nourishment of a young girl. God became a fetus.*"

Do I understand it? No way. But do I believe it? For sure! Its a sad, shallow, self-obsessed person who believes only what they can grasp with their own mind.

Do you really understand how a simple acorn can fall to the ground, and in time, become a giant oak?

Explain the mystery of DNA? Or how the brain turns chemistry into thoughts? Or the development of language? So much in the physical realm is a mystery.

Now try to comprehend the spiritual realm! *How can you reduce to terms the unrestricted, unbounded power of God? Try to dissect the intricacies of God's triune nature? Or the wisdom that spawned our salvation? Or the logic behind God's love? Impossible.*

The real question Joseph had to answer was not, *"do you believe a virgin can conceive?"* or *"can the divine become human?"* - it was rather, *"are you going to limit the power and potentials of an Almighty God?"*

In a sense, it wasn't much to go on - *the Word and a word* - but in another sense it's all any of us need to go on. For it's **a word from God and the Word of God.**

Christmas through Joseph's eyes was a test of faith.

Christmas challenges us - do we know where our logic ends, and God's omniscience begins? Do we recognize our limits, and God's limitlessness? Do we see our resources as finite, and God's as infinite?

For Joseph, Christmas was a time to stop *figuring how*, and *formulating why* - and settle his soul to trust.

Christmas is about believing in God's promises - being astonished at His power - trusting in His grace...

From Joseph's perspective Christmas was a test. **A test of family, a test of faith, and finally, a test of fortitude.** *How strong was Joseph's commitment?*

In verse 24 we're told, **"Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the Angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife..."** And this would not be the last time God would arouse Joseph from a deep sleep, out of a concern for his wife and the child...

It happened again in Matthew 2. After Jesus had been born the angel appeared a second time to Joseph, and told him to flee the madness of King Herod - pack up and take his young family to Egypt.

And I'm sure that was just the beginning...

All fathers get aroused from their sleep from time to time out of a concern for their families... A creak in the night, **"okay honey, I'll check it..."** The baby cries, **"okay honey, I'll go get him..."** A car squeals its tires - **"okay, I better check that out, it's past the boy's curfew."**

Getting aroused from sleep is a rite of parenthood.

The question was, **"would Joseph stick with it for the long haul?"** We get a clue in verse 25, **"Joseph did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son."**

Understand what this meant practically... Joseph took a cold shower on his wedding night! That's a tough way to start a marriage, and that was just the beginning. For the next nine months Joseph took cold showers in obedience to the command of God!

He had all the duties and responsibilities of marriage, yet he was forbidden one of its chiefest pleasures.

Joseph made the startling discovery, *as all new spouses and parents do*, that the commitment he'd just made were going to greatly complicate his life. But he embraced the changes, and stuck with his obligations.

Eight days after the child was born, Joseph and Mary took the boy to the Jewish Temple to have Him circumcised, and to declare His name before God.

And again, Joseph followed orders to the T.

He resisted the urge to go with "Joey, Jr." - *you know he was tempted*. And he obeyed God. He named his son, "Jesus" - *as the Angel of the Lord had instructed*.

In Joseph's first three years of marriage - He pushed his way through busy city streets, and clear out cow patties in a stable so his wife would have a place to deliver a baby... He abandon his carpentry business, left his hometown, became an outcast and an outlaw.

He moved three times. He struggled to understand Egyptian, and find work in a foreign country.

Christmas through the eyes of Joseph was a test of fortitude, courage, stick-to-it-ness, and toughness.

The English word "reliable" is a compound word. "Liable" means "responsible." The suffix "Re" means "over and over again." *Here's a picture of Joseph...*

Joseph never tired of his responsibilities. He honored his commitment to his family, *over and over and over again*. In the end, this man Joseph proved **reliable**.

Joseph wasn't a flashy fellow - or charming, or charismatic, or articulate, or witty - yet God found a man *who listened to heaven - then did as he was told*.

And he did it over and over and over again. And in God's eyes that made *Joseph... no ordinary Joe*.

Joseph was *obedient to God and faithful to his wife and family...* In today's world, that's extraordinary!

It's interesting, after Jesus turned twelve years-old we read nothing else of Joseph. Most Bible scholars believe Joseph died before Jesus began his ministry.

Did he come down with a fever?

Did he die of a heart attack?

It's not like Joseph was under any undue stress or pressure - all he had to do was protect and nurture the Son of God! It's true, Joseph carried a heavy burden.

Joseph from Nazareth, didn't live a very long life, *but can you imagine a more fulfilling and significant life?*

Talk about a contribution! The "**earthly father of God**" might just be the grandest gig in the Christmas story.

God chose *this man*, Joseph, for the most important mission *any man* has ever been assigned. Apparently, God is pleased with a person **endeared to family, engaged by faith, and energized with fortitude**.

Author Max Lucado has a chapter on Joseph in his book, "*God Came Near.*" The chapter is entitled, "*Limb-climber or Branch-sitter.*" He concludes that Joseph was not a branch-sitter. He wasn't content to stay close to the trunk. He valued obedience over convenience.

What mattered to Joseph was what mattered to God.

When God called this man to climb out on the end of a shaky, flimsy limb - *he was willing to go, no questions asked.* Over the years, when the winds blew and the leaves fell Joseph stayed out on the end of that limb.

Joseph was faithful. Again, the memorial to Joseph's life are the words in verse 24, "*He did as the Angel of the Lord commanded him...*" He followed orders.

This Christmas we should all add some *examination* to our *celebration...* What about you, do you hang out next to the trunk of the tree? Do you play it safe, or are you willing to go out on a limb... *to serve the Lord, to love your family, to stay true to your commitments?*

Are you a **branch-sitter** or a **limb-climber**?

When you see Christmas through the eyes of Joseph you see another side of worship. Mary's love was *emotional*. Joseph's love was *practical*. Joseph had a "*Git-R-Done kind of love.*" His love for God and family were *rooted in responsibility, and expressed in deeds.*

As we've noted, Joseph wasn't particularly talented or gifted. In one sense he was *very, very ordinary.*

But when *convinced of the truth* and *called on by God*, he stepped out. This is what a Joseph does. He steps up and climbs higher, rather than play it safe!

Now you know why Joseph would be puzzled if he dropped in on our party, and heard our greeting, "*Merry Christmas.*" Christmas through the eyes of Joseph was a test - a test ***of family, of faith, and of fortitude.***

And the good news is that the grades are still out on us - *our testing isn't over.* There's still time for you and me to *look at Christmas through the eyes of Joseph!*

It's not complicated... just listen to heaven, then do what God says do! That'll make you *no ordinary Joe!*