

Talks – Christmas Joseph – myfishbites.com

Joseph – ‘Foster-father’ of Jesus

There are many talks about Mary and about Jesus at Christmas – and rightly so! But we don't often hear about a very unsung hero of the faith – Joseph, husband of Mary and ‘foster-father’ of Jesus.

A Scenario

In this imaginary story, you are a guy. You have just met the woman of your dreams. She is everything that you have prayed for – to you she's Godly, beautiful, funny, caring, loving, smells great and just completes you – she's your perfect soul-mate... OK, so you've been going out for some time and really got to know each other. You've got to know each other's families and you've even gone to great effort to prepare an incredibly romantic proposal to be married. She's agreed and you are beginning to plan your life ahead together. You have great hopes and dreams, laugh and talk to the early hours about the things you want to do together and even about the family you're hoping for. You both love God and so there's no sex until marriage!

You share everything and talk about everything. But one day you go round to her place and she's gone a bit quiet. You ask her what's going on and you see tears in her eyes. She asks you to sit down and you start to fear the worst! She holds your hands, looks into your eyes and tells you she's pregnant...

What would you do? How would you feel?

OK, so then what if she told you that an angel had appeared to her and told her that God was going to make her pregnant? How would you react?

OK, so now what if she told you that she was pregnant with the Son of God?

The Bible

We don't read a huge amount about Joseph in the Bible, but here is some of what the Bible tells us:

Matthew 1.18-25 – 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. 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.

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. 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.”

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

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.

Luke 2.4-7, 16 – So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

So (the shepherds) hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

Luke 2.21-24, 39-40 – On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived. When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord", and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons")

When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

Foyle

There's a programme often shown on ITV3 called 'Foyle's War' about a police detective in Britain during World War Two. Foyle is a really good man – he is honest and caring, he is honourable and always does the right thing. He stands for truth and justice, even when it costs him. He's a very noble kind of character and unlike many people around today who think only of themselves.

Direct Link – Foyle's War (The Final Series, Official Trailer, checked May 2019) – https://youtu.be/RYv6HL_v72w

In some ways, Foyle reminds of Joseph to some extent (well, except Joseph was real !!)

Joseph's Honour

One of the key things about Joseph is that he was honourable, he had integrity. This means he did the right thing and was who he said he was. Sometimes people seem to be something but their behaviour shows they're not really who they say they are. Joseph was who he said he was and this is what the Bible calls 'character'. It's something that God loves and works into our lives as we follow him.

In Matthew 1 we read that Joseph was pledged to be married to Mary but 'before they came together she was found to be pregnant.' So Joseph (in accordance with the Old Testament Law) didn't sleep with Mary before they were married. Sometimes when people get close and even know they're going to be married, they may be tempted to do this. But Joseph and Mary did the right thing. This is what God asks of us too in different ways, even when it's tough. We should do what God says not what we want.

When Joseph found that Mary was pregnant, we don't read about how he felt. But he must have felt absolutely gutted and so hurt inside. He knew Mary and I'm sure they would have talked (we don't really know so have to guess). Can you imagine the conversation as Mary told Joseph the news – or however he found out?! If you've ever broken up with someone, you'll know the kind of pain Joseph must have felt. He knew that Mary was a good woman but wouldn't have been able to understand how it had all happened. She may have tried to explain, but of course nothing like this had ever happened (nothing like it since) so Joseph would have had to deal with all kinds of emotions and confusion.

But once again, Joseph didn't make a big fuss about everything. He was 'faithful to the law' but didn't want to expose her to public disgrace so he decided the best thing would be to go through with the marriage and then divorce her quietly. So he considered this. He was looking for a good compromise that didn't bring disgrace on Mary and yet helped him obey God as well. What a good guy – he could have had Mary disgraced or worse, yet he chose to do the right and Godly thing. (Imagine how Mary must have been feeling, knowing she'd done nothing wrong yet it must have looked like she had on a human level. She knew she'd also lose her husband to be, too).

Joseph could have walked away and he probably felt like it. He could have rejected his belief in God and maybe he struggled with this (we don't really know). But what we do know is that he did keep his faith in God and was prepared to keep listening to God. We should also do the same when we see a big mess around us that we don't understand. We must trust that God is faithful, never leaves us and can turn around seemingly impossible situations. Gabriel the angel told Mary that nothing is too hard for God (Luke 1.37). Abraham and Sarah saw that nothing was too hard for God later in the Bible (Genesis 18.14). This is the truth and we often have to hold on to what God says and not what we see or think or feel.

As Joseph was considering his course of action with Mary, an angel appeared to him. Which angel was it? We don't know, but it was possibly Gabriel who had already been sent to Elizabeth (mother of John the Baptist) and Mary (mother of Jesus). The angel spoke to Joseph and passed on what had been really going on. He told Joseph that the 'father' was the Holy Spirit and that he shouldn't be afraid to take Mary as his wife. Joseph found out that this baby would be the Promised Saviour of Israel and would fulfill the Old Testament words from the prophet Isaiah. The baby was to be called Jesus.

We don't know how Joseph felt, what he said or anything. We have to guess that! He was probably a bit overwhelmed, like his fiancé Mary! But what we do know is that he 'did what the Angel of the Lord had told him.' What an awesome testimony and we should all have a similar prayer for everything in our lives – we should be people who do what the Lord tells us to do. We find out this mainly from God's Word, but God will also speak in other creative ways at times, always confirming and never going against what the Bible says.

Joseph married Mary and they called the baby 'Jesus'. He also didn't consummate the marriage until after Jesus was born. Now without being crude, this was another amazing thing that Joseph did. For many couples, the honeymoon night is a very special moment as it will be the first time they will be intimate with each other. But Joseph waited, with great honour and Godliness. He did what was right although in time Mary and Joseph had other children. We know that Jesus had other brothers – James, Joses, Judas and Simon (Mark 6.3 and Matthew 13.55). Matthew 13.56 seems to suggest he may also have had sisters.

Whatever, we know that Joseph waited, showing great courage and perseverance in obeying everything that God had commanded. He would have been subject to serious shame and finger pointing from people. He even had to travel to the place of his birth, Bethlehem, to register under a census with Mary, a pregnant woman who he was only pledged to be married to (Luke 2). Yet God chose the things this world considers weak and foolish to shame the 'wise'. Joseph went with God's plan. He loved his wife and his son Jesus. He did what God called him too. He obeyed everything that was written in the Law.

As Jesus grew up, we read that Mary and Joseph did everything that the Law commanded them to. He would have also had to deal with all the situations that having Jesus as his 'adopted-son' would have brought up. But he faithfully carried on, working to support and care for his family as a carpenter, and training Jesus in the family business too.

End Thoughts

What kind of man or woman does God want you to be? He wants you to be who he's called and made you to be. You are unique and God will help you discover who you are, what you enjoy and free you to be all he made you to be as you continue to follow him and his Word (John 8.31-32). But he wants you to be like Joseph, to be like Mary. Let your life story be that you 'did what the Lord commanded'. There is no greater thing that you can ever do than be who God made you to be and do what God tells you to do. The way to discover this is to stay close to God, stay faithful to the Bible and be open to however God wants to use you! It should be the adventure of a lifetime.

Prayer from Psalm 1

Thank you Lord that your Word says that I am blessed if I do not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers. I am blessed because I will make my delight in the law of the Lord, and will think about your Word day and night. As I do this, you have promised I will be like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever I do prospers. For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous. Amen