



❖ **Joseph's dilemma (1:18-19)**

- > *Now this is how Jesus Christ's birth came about (literally):* A factual approach.
- > *was pledged*
 - The betrothal stage
 - Involved choosing a spouse
 - Chosen customarily by the parents
 - Young men and women often pledged at the age of 12 or 13 years old.
 - Men in Jesus day often were about 18 years of age.
 - Official arrangement stage
 - Formal prenuptial agreement before witnesses a year before the wedding.
 - Now it became publicly official
 - Legally binding.
 - Only terminated through legal divorce.
 - The terms “husband” & “wife” were used.
 - Three types of gifts
 - No sexual relations and living in different (parent's) homes.
 - Sexual unfaithfulness was considered adultery a penalty that was met with stoning (Lev. 20:10; Deut 22:23-24), but by 1st century it was rare.
 - The formal wedding ceremony
 - Wearing wedding clothing, the groom and companions went to bride's home and escorted the bride and bridesmaids back to the groom's home where a wedding supper was held.
 - Parents and friends blessed the couple
 - The father drew up a contract.
 - Soon after the couple withdrew to a special nuptial chamber: there they prayed first then consummated the marriage
 - After which the bloodstained cloth was exhibited as proof of the bride's virginity.
 - The wedding festivities then continued for a week or more.
 - After the couples established their own home, although usually the lived with extended family.
- > Mary was likely around four months pregnant at the time of this passage.
 - She has spent three months with Elizabeth, her “relative”. Returning to Nazareth, she was “found” to be pregnant.
 - It is not yet public knowledge because Joseph can still divorce her privately.
- > *through the Holy Spirit--* supernatural pregnancy caused by God's Spirit.
 - Joseph naturally thinks Mary has committed adultery
 - A righteous man would obtain a certificate of divorce.
 - But he is in a dilemma: divorce for adultery was not optional, it was mandatory.
 - Yet, out of love he is concerned for her reputation.
 - So he chooses to quietly divorce her.
 - This shows the character of Joseph.
 - It is into this sticky situation that the angel appears.

❖ the angelic announcement (1:20-21)

- *an angel appeared to him in a dream*
 - angels are *messengers* from God, only sometimes taking human form.
 - Here, it is a dream, and the angel's form is unclear.
 - They are normally unnamed except Michael (Dan 10:13; Rev 12:7,7) and Gabriel (Dan 8:15-26; 9:20-27; Luke 1:26).
 - Gabriel announces the conception of John the Baptist to Zechariah and the conception of Mary (Luk 1:11-20, 26-38).
 - It is plausible and maybe even likely that the unnamed angel who announced to the shepherds (Luk 2:9) and to Joseph, here, were also Gabriel.
- *in a dream*
 - dreams were not to be trusted or discounted.
 - Dreams can be caused by food, stress, etc.
 - But unusual dreams that have a basis in reality that seem to teach or communicate something and could not have been made up are to be given consideration.
 - It is not the only thing but it must line up with other factors.
 - In this case, it is powerfully unusual for Joseph to contrive a dream that is the opposite of what he is about to do and particularly contrive an angel.
 - Sometimes it is the voice in the dream that is most startling.
 - Dreams should be recorded and given attention when
- *Joseph son of David*
 - Only time “son of David” is used of anyone in Matthew other than Jesus.
 - Joseph of the regal line is to now act kingly in this situation.
- *don't be afraid to take Mary home as your wife*
 - *afraid* of what?
 - Afraid of protecting your own righteousness,
 - Afraid of what others would say: stigma.
 - The fear of man is a snare (Prov 29:25)
- *because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit*
 - It is not until the NT that we begin to see the persons of the Trinity fully distinguished. The Holy Spirit plays a crucial role in the NT age.
- *...give him the name Jesus, because he will save...from their sins*
 - Save—is a big term. Here it is applied to sins, but this is the entry point, not the complete work of the savior. It is not simply atonement but the effects of sin.
 - Jesus—*shall save his people from their sins*.
 - *Laos*—here is broader than Israelites.
 - It is in keeping with the promise to Abraham that he is now fulfilling.

❖ the prophesied immanuel (1:22-23)

- Only time in Scripture an angel quotes Scripture.
- Matthew is primary synoptic Gospel writer who uses the phrase: *this took place to fulfill*, to show how Jesus fulfills the *Torah*. The Gospel of John does this a little.
 - *Matthew*: 2:5-6, 15, 17-18, 23; 4:14-16; 8:17; 11:10; 12:17-21; 13:14-15, 35; 21:4-5; 26:31, 56; 27:9-10
 - *John*: 12:38-39; 13:18; 19:24, 28, 36-37.
 - Fulfill is used three ways:
 - Sometimes it indicates that an event in Jesus' life is completing predictive prophesy (e.g. 1:22-23).
 - Or it can mean that Jesus' life and teaching bring the entire O.T. to it's full meaning (e.g. 5:17-20).
 - Or it can indicate how Jesus' life and ministry has a analogical or typological correspondence to Israel's history (e.g. (2:15, 17-18).

- Here Isaiah 7:14 is fulfilled
 - *Is. 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. 15 He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right. 16 But before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste. 17 The LORD will bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah—he will bring the king of Assyria.”*
 - This was a prophesy given during Ahaz’ reign, king of Judah (734 BC).
 - Pekah, king of Israel, and Rezin, king of Aram (Syria) had formed an alliance to invade Judah and replace Ahaz with a puppet king, the son of Tabeel (Isa 7:6).
 - Isaiah tells Ahaz that God will not let this happen, reassuring Ahaz that would maintain his promise regarding a descendant of David would sit on his throne forever (2 Sam 7:11-17) Isa 7:13-17).
 - In order to confirm Isaiah’s word this a sign is promised: *a virgin will give birth and call him Immanuel.*
 - There are two Hebrew words for virgin:
 - Greek (LXX) translators of Isaiah 7:14 rendered the Hebrew term ‘*almah* with the Greek word *parthenos*, which always means a sexually mature, unmarried virgin. (the exception is Gen 34:4 regarding Dinah after she has been violated the term is still used).
 - Three views emerge:
- *Immanuel*
 - Here is some profound Christology. Matthew concludes his gospel with the same concept: “I will be with you always” (28:20).
 - Lev 26:12: *I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.*
 - Many N.T. passages emphasize Jesus’ incarnation (John 1:14, 18; 8:58; Col 1:15-19; Heb 1:1-3; Phil 2: 5-11).

❖ Joseph’s godly obedience (1:24-25)

- Joseph awakes, is obedient and makes formal wedding plans.
 - Luke focuses on Mary’s remarkable obedience while Matthew emphasizes Joseph’s faithfulness.
 - He takes Mary home to live (perhaps with extended family).
 -
- *had no union* (lit. *he was not knowing her*). This was a common way to describe intercourse both in Hebrew and Greek. Sexual abstinence during pregnancy was widely observed in 1st century Judaism. Here it is to assure us of the virgin birth.
 - *Until-* There is no hint of perpetual virginity.
 - Mary bore many children (Mat 12:46; 13:55).
- Everyone has a reaction to “God with us.”
 - His initiating action causes a reaction.
 - Without God with us there is no authentic you & me with us (image of God).

❖ thinking it through

- Joseph had made the wrong judgment regarding Mary, until the angel spoke to him. Mary had obviously told Joseph but he didn’t believe her. Have you ever judged someone based on how God relates to you, rather than truly hearing their story?
- The virgin birth is profound. It is something to be cherished. Have you thought much about this? Have you doubted? Do you believe?

- *God with us*—present tense. No phrase better describes Jesus work in our lives. Do you believe he is always with you? How does that affect what you do and how you do it? How does that encourage you in the dark times?
- Joseph's obedience is remarkable. Are you ready to be obedient to whom you know Christ to be? Are you ready to become obedient to the Lord in a specific area where you have been disobedient?
- Get alone and read this passage quietly, then pray and meditate and see what God says to you.