

Lessons from the Nativity Story: Joseph

Not many people see life unfold exactly as they had planned. There are so many variables in life. Life includes other people and what they will choose. Life includes variation of passions and desires at different stages of life.

But even if things are just perfect, and things are going as planned, sometimes things happen.....

One of my favorite sayings *"Mama always said life was like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get."* How true!

But how comforting is it to know that whatever you face, God is in control. And if you have placed your hope and trust in Jesus, He is with you and will never leave you!

Today I'm starting a series called "Lessons from the Nativity Story". This first one looks at Joseph and the difficulties that he had to face.

Matthew 1:18-25 (HCSB)

18 The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way: After His mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, it was discovered before they came together that she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit. 19 So her husband Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly.

20 But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is by the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to name Him Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins."

22 Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

23 See, the virgin will become pregnant

and give birth to a son,

and they will name Him Immanuel,

which is translated "God is with us."

24 When Joseph got up from sleeping, he did as the Lord's angel had commanded him.

He married her 25 but did not know her intimately until she gave birth to a son. And he named Him Jesus.

Imagine being Joseph.....his life really got flipped upside down here in just a short time. This was a man who was known as a righteous man. A man of character and integrity.

He is engaged to this young woman, Mary. Now this Jewish engagement was serious, much more than today's American engagements. They were already considered husband and wife legally

even though no physical union had taken place. This engagement was as legally binding then as a marriage is today. It could be broken only by death or divorce.

For Joseph, life was good. Engaged to Mary, working on wedding details, just waiting for that day. He was righteous, he was a godly man, marrying a godly woman. I'm sure they were excited about their future together and about what God was going to do in their lives!

They probably had their own plans for their lives that they were excited about. But God had His own plans.....

How many of you have had your own plans, life is good, going the way you want it to.....and all of the sudden, something unexpected happens, you hit a speed bump, maybe it's more severe and you even feel like you wrecked the car, you aren't even on the same path anymore.....

Do you ever consider that this is part of the plan to get you on the path that God wants you on? We really need to understand that God's plan is always what is best for us....always. If you are where God has brought you or allowed for you, you are in the best place you can be at that point, something good will come of it.

God is good and only wants good for you.....even if it doesn't make sense to you! We declare these scriptures to other people all the time:

Jeremiah 29:11 (NKJV)

11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Ephesians 2:10 (NKJV)

10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

These are great for other people.....but do you believe them for your own life? Do you believe that God has great plans for your life? I do.....and those plans will almost certainly include surprises and the unexpected!

For Joseph, it was the interruption of his perfect engagement. It was interrupted by a surprise all right and certainly something unexpected. His "wife" is pregnant.....and it's not HIS! He knows this because they have not been intimate.

Picture Joseph getting the news.....Mary nervously says: "Hey honey, funny story.....before you get upset, just hear me out, listen to the whole story.....I'm pregnant.....God is the Father."

I imagine Joseph responding with something like “Don’t be bringing God into this, now who is the baby’s father?.....What am I supposed to do with you?”

God really messed up Joseph’s plans. Just think of a man getting close to his wedding night.....and now he can’t consummate the marriage for about 10-11 months? I guarantee that was NOT a part of Joseph’s plans!

But it was God’s.....

Ecclesiastes 3:1-2 (HCSB)

1 There is an occasion for everything,
and a time for every activity under heaven:
2 a time to give birth and a time to die;
a time to plant and a time to uproot

When we are so busy trying to live our lives and meet our own goals and milestones in life.....sometimes we forget that there is a plan that is much greater than our own. There is a purpose that is greater than ourselves. God’s will.....will be done.

Daniel 4:34-35 (HCSB)

34 And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever:
For His dominion is an everlasting dominion,
And His kingdom is from generation to generation.
35 All the inhabitants of the earth are counted as nothing,
and He does what He wants with the army of heaven
and the inhabitants of the earth.
There is no one who can hold back His hand
or say to Him, “What have You done?”

We really don’t have a right to question the workings of God. It is best, it is for your ultimate good, it is right, and yes so is the timing.....It’s ok to desire understanding, just don’t question God’s motive or reasoning.

God does what He does because He knows more of the plan and the pieces. His ways are truly higher than yours, His thoughts are truly higher than yours. This is why we must trust Him.

Joseph was in a position where he was now engaged to a woman who is pregnant and the baby isn’t his. This was a serious issue for Joseph. The law stated in Deuteronomy 22 that if a man found his wife to not be a virgin on his wedding night, he could bring her to her father’s house and the men of the city would stone her to death. They did this to make a public example out of her.

Imagine Joseph's perfect world crashing down as he gets this news. But Joseph was a just man, he obviously loved Mary and didn't want an example made out of her so he planned to put her away quietly, he was going to divorce her.

But God had other plans.

As Joseph is thinking about divorcing Mary, probably even realizing that eventually she will still begin to show and people will know she is pregnant and not married and may very well still get the same punishment as a result. He's thinking about all of this.....and God sends an angel in a dream!

This angel confirms that the child is of the Holy Spirit!

PAUSE - There are people that don't believe in God moving in strange ways.....THIS was strange! If you don't believe in miracles, you can't believe in a virgin birth. If you don't believe in a virgin birth, you don't believe in the birth of Jesus and if you don't believe in Jesus then you can't be saved!

Our God is a miracle working God. He does things that are strange to us. He does things that are unexpected and unorthodox. If you don't believe in God moving in ways that are unnatural, then I'm not certain you believe in the true living God who is supernatural!

Joseph's plans have been derailed by the plans of God. But once he realizes this....they are God's plans. He simply trusts God. He remains obedient. He marries Mary and raises her Son as his own.

Not just any Son, but the Son of God! He knows this up front, the angel told him. What you've got to remember is that Joseph, and Mary for that matter, were just ordinary people.....why would God choose them?

1 Corinthians 1:26-31 (HCSB)

26 Brothers, consider your calling: Not many are wise from a human perspective, not many powerful, not many of noble birth. 27 Instead, God has chosen what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen what is weak in the world to shame the strong. 28 God has chosen what is insignificant and despised in the world—what is viewed as nothing—to bring to nothing what is viewed as something, 29 so that no one can boast in His presence. 30 But it is from Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who became God-given wisdom for us—our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, 31 in order that, as it is written: The one who boasts must boast in the Lord.

Joseph was just a guy. A guy who loved God. A guy to served God. But just a guy.....

But God had a plan.....

God's plan couldn't have been comfortable for Joseph, and it certainly wasn't easy. Even though God revealed this plan through His angel, it was still up to Joseph to hold up his end of the plan.

How many of us once we know God's plan for our lives, just assume it's going to be easy or comfortable. We can get that false thinking that God is going to work everything out nice and smooth and we are just along for the ride.....I've learned that God doesn't really operate like that. We have to take care of our end, just like Joseph did.

Joseph had to take Mary as his wife, no intimacy for several months, live as though this child was his own in the face of a culture that would condemn such actions with death.....and the child is the Son of God. You know.....Jesus, who will save His people (including Joseph) from their sins!

Maybe you are here in this room today and God has brought change, unexpectedly upon your life, maybe He has even shown you what is to come.....it still might not be easy. I'll confidently say it WON'T be easy. You may not like it, you may doubt, you may question, but you've got to trust that His plan is what is best for you.

You may consider yourself an ordinary person.....why would God want to use me? God will use anyone who is willing to be used. The only rule is that He is in charge and you've got to trust Him.

Do you trust the comforts and systems of this life more than God?

Psalm 20:7 (NKJV)

7 Some trust in chariots, and some in horses;
But we will remember the name of the Lord our God.

What about when you are faced with tragedy or conflict, do you lose hope, or trust God?

Psalm 56:3 (NKJV)

3 Whenever I am afraid,
I will trust in You.

Things happen in life. Some by God's design, some things he allows, others may just be consequences of your actions catching up to you. In the end all of these lead to the same need....trust in God.

Proverbs 3:5-6 (NKJV)

5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;
6 In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths.

God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

God used a righteous man named Joseph, to step-father the Savior of the world. Talk about a big task! He is Immanuel.....God with us.

Whatever God has brought or allowed in your life, If you have accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior, He is with you.

Like Joseph you must trust Him, you must be courageous, you must follow His path because He has something more for you.