

Transcription of 18TM901

Matthew 1:18-25 "Christmas Through Joseph's Eyes" December 24, 2018

If you have a Bible with you, and if you don't - why are you in church? (Laughing) - let's see if you can open it to Matthew 1:18. It's amazing how quickly the year has gone by, don't you think? I honestly don't remember eight months of it; it seems like it has gone so fast.

I know that you're all familiar with the Christmas story. Maybe some parts of it you know better than others, if we were to give you a test. Sometimes people mix biblical parts with folklore. Sometimes people hold common misconceptions. Sometimes there's even outright error. I have, for the last thirty-nine years, had the opportunity to stand somewhere on Christmas Eve and talk about this Christmas story. And I think I have covered every imaginable angle.

- I remember teaching on the census of Mary and Joseph being forced to travel 80 miles to Bethlehem from Nazareth, and the poor girl's nine months pregnant; no one makes that trip unless you have to.
- We looked at the many prophecies of Jesus' birth and how those prophecies were signposts in Old Testament history so that no one should ever miss the promised Messiah when He came.
- We looked at the shepherds in the fields (saw cute ones up here). The announcement that was made to them, they were privileged to receive; no one liked shepherds much.
- We have considered the animal trough that they laid the baby Jesus in, the Savior of the world, that He chose a barn in the condition that it was, to present His Son to the world.
- We've talked on one Christmas Eve about the challenges that Mary faced at such a young age, all by herself, and the only help she had was Joseph; and you women know we're not much help when babies come around.
- We looked at the Magi, who arrived months later, if not even a year later, from that day and the prophetic message that came with the gifts that they brought. We have wondered where the wise men of today are.
- We looked at Anna and Simeon; both of them showed up at the dedication of Jesus, just a week down the road - what they had to say about Him and His ministry, His life, and why He had come, the influence He would have upon the world.

- We spent a Christmas looking at the flight to Egypt, how the Lord warned Mary and Joseph to get out of town, and Herod was angry that he had heard that there was a Child born that would be a King, and so he ordered the slaughter of innocent children in and around the Bethlehem area; and they were able to finally come back to Nazareth when Herod died.
- We looked at Galatians 4 one year, where Paul talks about Jesus' birth as being at the right time (the one that God set), being the right Person (He fulfilled all of the prophecies), and coming for the right reasons.
- We spent a year looking at Isaiah 9, which told us about the divinity and the humanity of our Savior, a Child born and a Son given.
- We spent a year looking at John 1:10; He came into the world made by Him, that the world didn't know Him.
- We looked at John 10:10, that He gave His life so that we might have life more abundantly.
- One year we spent four weeks running up to Christmas looking at the four reasons for His coming out of 1 John.
- We studied one year Isaiah 1. We called it "White Christmas," after the old song because the LORD says there that though our sins are like scarlet, He can make us white as wool.
- We looked at Isaiah 9:2 as the Light of the world is coming; Matthew 4.

And then yesterday I had a great idea - well, a couple of weeks ago - that I'd never looked at Christmas through the eyes of Mary and Joseph. And so I was pretty much out of ideas. I looked at every note, and I thought I don't want to do the same study I've done before. God wants to speak to us today. I've got lots of notes. I have an office here with, I don't know, sixty feet of notes on every verse in the Bible. So I guess I don't have to work anymore. I just have to pull out notes. Or you can hear what God wants to say to you today. He's a living God. We have a living relationship with Him.

So yesterday we, on Sunday morning, spent our morning looking at Christmas through Mary's eyes - the first Christmas. What did she see? How did she get through all of that? And if you didn't listen to it or you weren't here, I'd love to have you go listen to it. We can recap a bit of it for you as we go.

But tonight, I brought you to these verses. I wanted to spend Christmas Eve looking at the first Christmas through Joseph's eyes. And we begin in verse 18, and we're going to read down through verse 25. So let me read it first with you.

It says this, "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 is the entire story, by the way, of Joseph. Eight verses.

We have the privilege, here at Morningstar, of doing lots of weddings each year. We take it seriously. They are fun events, but they are serious ones. The divorce rate in the US last year was still at 52%. Less people are getting married so it drops the rates, I guess; but we take it seriously. We think that marriage is something that God ordained. So we have everyone who gets married here - and one of our pastors participates - go through six months of premarital counseling. It doesn't matter how old you are, where you've been. We want things to go smoothly. And we've learned over the years - well you probably know already, we just get to watch it all the time - that the girls take it much more seriously than the guys. They bring books and folders, and they call people, and they think about stuff. And the guy just goes, "What time we gonna be there?" (Laughing) "What do I have to wear, a monkey suit?" They don't really.....but there's this great kind of joy and anticipation, and even the guys, as we get closer to the day, change a little bit. You know? They get more excited. Occasionally there are issues to be dealt with, and it's better that you deal with them beforehand. Periodically, we've told couples that came in, "We think it'd be better if you waited, and here's why." And I must tell you - if we've told ten couples that over the last three or four years, all but one walked away and said, "We'll just get married somewhere else." But that's not on us. We want to help to the best of our ability. But usually things go smoothly. It's a fun time to watch young people, especially. These are times your memories are made, and it's new, and it's exciting, and it's thrilling, and there're a lot of unknowns. One of the meetings we have with the couples is that

we ask them to fill out a budget. And it's amazing what 18- or 19- or 20-year-old minds will do. You'll look at the budget and go, "Dude, you're like \$800 a month short," and they'll go, "The Lord'll take care of it." (Laughing) "Well, no. He won't. Look, you're broke, dude! Serious! What do you mean, 'the Lord will take care of this'? The Lord sent me to tell you don't....." (Laughing) What're you gonna do? It's a good time for us. We enjoy weddings, especially when the kids grow up in the church, and then you watch them get married. It's pretty cool.

I can only imagine that that was the relationship that this young couple had together. Most likely, their marriage was arranged. Over 90% of the marriages in Jesus' day were set up by the parents. The payments were made, the dowries were held, the commitments were there. In fact, even if you go to Israel today, a couple of the hotels that we stay in - on Friday night and Saturday, you'll see boys and girls coming together to talk about weddings when they may very well have only seen each other three or four times. They sit upright, they're very nervous, especially if they're Hasidic. And you can just sense the tension in the air. So, even though this could have been an arranged marriage (which was very common), no doubt this was, like every married couple, a most exciting time. This was like your life is about to begin in many ways. And we mentioned yesterday that the average age for a woman getting married in Jesus' day was 14; they're very young. And so I can't imagine that Joseph, in the midst of that understanding, gets the news that his wife is pregnant. An unexpected pregnancy that is so shocking that it's going to take a visit from an angel of the Lord to fix. So put yourself in Joseph's shoes.

I read a story the week before, I think. I forget what I was looking at, but there was a woman in suburban Melbourne, Australia who, last year at Christmas - setting up her tree, discovered a three-foot tiger snake in her tree. One of the most deadly snakes on the planet. Looked like tinsel. She had a picture of it with her three grandkids sitting in front of it. Nobody knew the thing was there. From reading the story, and they didn't follow up much, it doesn't appear like anyone got hurt, and so that's a good thing. But that's frightening! And then I thought, you know, years ago, centuries ago, there was a snake under the tree of humanity who came slithering out to speak to Adam and to speak to Eve. Satan beguiled Eve; Adam went along for the ride. God met His fallen creation and declared to them the consequences of their disobedience or their choice, that there would be death and the loss of life in His kingdom. But in the midst of that horror, you find the first promise from God of a fix, of a redemption, of a plan, a deliverance. And you

read, there in *Genesis 3:14-15*, that there would one day come a Child, born to a woman, who would have the power and the authority to crush the head of the serpent under His foot, to eliminate him from the picture. That's about to happen here. That promise, centuries old, now is presented to us, and through Joseph, in the most unexpected way; and we get all of the insight in eight verses in looking at life through Joseph's eyes.

I think that Joseph is the forgotten man of Christmas. You think about it. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of Christmas songs. Rarely does Joseph pop up in any of them. I had someone come yesterday (when I mentioned that) and say to me, "Well, here're a couple songs that Joseph's in," and I had never heard of those songs. Okay. He's in those. But if you go into any church hymnal, you won't find Joseph; you'll find Mary. In most pictures, you'll see Joseph over here, like this (Laughing) "Really had nothin' to do with this. My dad fixed me up with this girl, and this is pretty much it." (Laughing) That's Joseph, isn't it? That's the picture we have of Joseph. He was part of the family, by God's choosing. Other than that, he just seems to wash away. In fact, there is not one recorded word from Joseph in your Bible. Not one. You know, to hear him go, "Oh, that's great," "Oh, isn't that a beautiful baby?" or, "Honey, I love you, I'm gonna believe you." Nothin'. Just....."I'll be over here".....over there. "That baby." Just standing by. Here, in *Matthew*, we are given his story. It is, like I said, the most in-depth report of him in eight verses that will soon be a fulfillment of *Genesis 3*, the first Christmas from his perspective. And I have to believe that this Christmas, this first Christmas for Joseph, was far more cataclysmic than any Christmas you've ever been through. What a time! Eight verses, and you can break them up into three parts. There are two verses that tell us what happened before his God-given dream. There are four verses which tell us what happened during the dream. And then we are given two final verses to tell us what Joseph did after he dreamed and woke up. Three words that you can apply to those three divisions - confusion (I think we understand that), clarity and, finally, compliance. Because much like Mary, who we looked at yesterday, submitted herself to God's plan (though she couldn't have fully understood it), Joseph will ultimately submit himself to God's plan as well.

Now this is the birth of Jesus, and it follows like this. You see, here's the story. Before they came together, she was pregnant with a work of the Holy Spirit. And Joseph's reaction, being a "just man," was he didn't want to put her to public shame, but he did make a decision he would divorce her, or put her away, privately.

Can you imagine the excitement of, "Hey, just a couple more weeks"? And now it becomes this, "You're what?!" Bewilderment, incredulity and confusion at the news. In Joseph's day, marriages fall under two stages. The first was called "*kiddushin*." "*Kiddushin*" was a Hebrew practice where you would get married or betrothed (sometimes the word is). It literally is to be married; it is seen that way in Hebrew culture, if you will. It lasts for a year, until the "*chuppah*," which is the actual wedding day and the ceremony that then the couple move together. During the time of the "*kiddushin*," the couple are legally married. If they want to break it off, they've got to go get a legal divorce. The contract is legal, even if the parents arranged it. And it was during that time that Mary turns up pregnant. It was at a time that Joseph (notice in verse 19) is already called her husband. The only other restriction was there was no physical intimacy allowed during this time, and the couple still had to live apart - usually at their parents' home. So, until the actual day of the wedding, at the end of this long year, it's almost like an engagement with some extra rules. Right?

Now, we talked about it yesterday, some, just as far as time was concerned, or timeline. Mary's cousin, Elizabeth, lived in Judah. That's a ways away. She had gotten pregnant. But she was old. She didn't think she'd ever have a baby. Her husband worked as a priest; he worked in the Temple from time to time. And it was there that the angel Gabriel came and said to him, "Hey, you're going to have a baby," and he went, "I don't buy that. I've been prayin' for years. Too late now." And the Lord said, "I'll show you," and He took his ability to speak away for nine months. So he went home, and he had to draw pictures to tell his wife what happened. But this was going to be John the Baptist being born to Elizabeth, Mary's cousin. Mary, when that woman was six months pregnant, received a visit from the angel as well. She is told basically what we read here, and what you know of the story, that God was going to do a work in her womb, and through this Child that she would bear - this Savior, this Lord, this One that would rule and sit in the kingdom of David's throne, if you will, forevermore - that she was the one that God had picked, a favor among women, to be the vessel through whom He would bring forth His Son. It freaked Mary out. Poor thing. "I'm a virgin!" "Yeah, this is a God thing. And Mary, by the way, God has also allowed your cousin to get pregnant, though she didn't think she'd have a baby, and she's six months pregnant now." And the angel told Mary this, and Mary goes, "Well, whatever the Lord wants to do with me, I'm His." And he bails out, and she runs over to Judah, finds her cousin pregnant, showing. Answers the door, the baby leaps in her womb; and Elizabeth is filled with the Spirit and says to Mary, "Why is it that the mother of my God would

come and see me?" And it blew Mary's mind. "Well, I know that's who you're bearing because the baby leaped the minute He heard your voice." Mary stayed for three months. It would be the time till John the Baptist was born. Was there to help and support her cousin, and then came home.

Which brings us to verse 19. Because after three months of now being away, she came home with some news for Joseph. "Hi, Joseph. I don't know if you're going to believe this, but here's what happened." And then she tells him in some manner, although we don't have the record of it, what the story was. Now, again, you're Joseph. You only have eight verses. You're the guy that stands over on the side a lot. And he has to look into the eyes of this pretty girl that he loves and wanted to spend his life with and listen to this. This had to be startling, unbelievable. "What do I do with this?" So, Joseph has a decision to make. He's an excited groom-in-waiting. He hears about Mary's condition. He listens to her explanation. Sexual purity in that culture was held in high esteem; it should still be that way among us today. But Joseph was confused. You would see that. He felt betrayed. He felt let down. His relationship had been violated. And yet we read, in verse 19, he's a "just man." He's a good guy. He's a faithful man. He's a godly young man. He loves his wife. He doesn't want to expose her to future ridicule or censure. But he has decided in his heart he cannot go through with this. "So the only thing I can come up with is to somehow take her down the road to a town that nobody knows us. I'll secretly bring it to an end. We'll go our ways. It's about all I can do. In love for her, I'm going to try to cover our tracks." Put yourself in his shoes. Look, the Christmas story had not been written yet. There was no New Testament to refer to for information, and the most important relationship in your life has just fallen apart, and the explanation that your betrothed wife was giving you was almost too preposterous to repeat. "The Holy Spirit came upon you? Okay. You and Elizabeth cook this up? Wonderful." I can imagine. I don't think guys are much different then as they are today. Mary had received the angel's explanation three months earlier. It wasn't in a dream like Joseph will get it. It was face-to-face. She'd had time to process it, work it through, think about it, see what else God was doing. But Joseph is surprised by the news. And he's, like most guys, moving quickly. He's in panic mode. He wants to do what's right. He wants to be merciful. But he wants to get away from this as quick as he can. So his implemented plan in his mind, "I've just decided I've got to get rid of her quietly. We've got to end this and move along. She can have her life. I'm going to have mine. Better now than later."

Verse 20 says, "While he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream." The angel said, "'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for what 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.' " Joseph lies on his bed, makes up his mind, tries to sleep it off, mulling over what he's facing, felt betrayed, hurting, and he falls asleep. God speaks to him through this angel Gabriel (and we assume it's him), and He says to him, basically, "Joseph, relax, man. You're only in Matthew 1; we need to get you to Luke 1." (Laughing) No. That's not what he said. He came to verify or to clarify what his wife had been telling him. But He came to him in a dream.

Scientists tell us that we all dream. Oftentimes we have no recollection at all of what we dream when we wake up. Sometimes our dreams are part of our subconscious to help us deal with the conscious things that we're facing in the normal way of life. Sometimes it's because we had this good pizza right before we went to bed. Scientists tells us REM sleep (rapid eye movements, deep sleep) - that dreams can only last sometimes for seconds, maybe as long as thirty minutes (usually not more than that), and yet you can feel like you've been goin' all night.

We know from the Bible that God likes to speak to folks in dreams. Joseph had a couple of very famous dreams (*Genesis 37*) about what his future would hold and how he was going to rule over his family and over the land and over his parents. He made the bad move of telling them that. Said to his brothers, "Yeah, I had a dream, man. I'm gonna be rulin' over you." They said, "Mom, Joseph's havin' weird dreams." Joseph went to bed the next night and said, "Hey, Mom, I had a dream about you guys, too. I'm also gonna rule over you." "You shut up, Joseph, and go clean your room." But he became the second in control, didn't he, in Egypt. He became the second to Pharaoh. Everyone came to Joseph. And God's Word was true through the dream.

So God sends this angel to Joseph in his dilemma, in a dream, to clarify the situation. And Joseph gets a pep talk from an angel while he's asleep. Notice he says to him, in verse 20, "Joseph, you're the son of David." Reminds him of his lineage, of his heritage. "You're in the royal lineage of David. You were given, through David, a promise of One who would come and sit upon the throne forever.

You are a part of those who are Israel's hope and their proud heritage. You're in that line, Joseph. You're not just anybody. God has put you right here, in line for those things. And I don't want you to worry about taking your wife as your wife. I want you to take that Child and raise Him and name Him JESUS because He is the One that has come to save His people from their sins. It's a work of the Holy Spirit. Stop being afraid." Joseph was afraid. He was afraid of what would happen if word got out. He was afraid of what would happen to Mary, to him; but because he had a good heart, he was a "just man," he loved God, he wanted to do the right thing, he figured this is the best solution. And now the angel said, "No, no, no. Don't bail out so quickly. You're a descendant of David. You should know the promises of God to David. They invade your family." He assures him that the fulfillment of God's promises and the pregnancy are a work of God, the Holy Spirit. And he gives him not only an exhortation and an explanation, but he gives him some instruction. He said, "You take her as your wife and have this baby and name Him JESUS. Translation: Jehovah is Salvation. That's what His name means. JESUS. He's going to save His people from their sins. His name identifies His mission. Joseph, you have an easy part in all of this. You just take her as your bride. You don't even have to come up with a name. I'll give it to you." Again, poor Joseph doesn't have much to do. Just standin' around.

Well, with the further clarification, the angel adds one more word to kind of sew it up. He says to him, "Look at the Bible or consider the Word of God. All this was done in fulfillment of God's Word which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet" in chapter 7:14, about a virgin conceiving and bearing a Son whose name would be "God with us." God would then be with us through this Child born in her life. Explanation, encouragement, instruction. And Joseph's just asleep. Had the Lord not intervened, I don't think this thing would have ever worked out. We read, in verse 24 and in verse 25 (the last couple of verses), that Joseph, when he was aroused from his sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, went through the last portion of that engagement time, did not physically know his wife until she had brought forth her firstborn Son, and he named this Child JESUS. No doubt, there was some very significant cost involved in doing so publicly. It's a small town. People talk. He would have been, really.....no one else was going to buy what he was tellin'. He understood that. Ridicule, judgment, alienation. But Joseph is a man that wants to serve God no matter what. And once that whole situation was placed in a spiritual context for Joseph, his response was like Mary: he believed God, and he acted accordingly. Convinced of the Scriptures, he understood this position, he loved his wife, he trusted her enough to buy that kind of explanation.

The dream was easy, though, compared to the reality of being obedient. And so he took her as his wife. They waited until the Child was born to have a physical relationship. There're plenty of verses in the Bible (Mark 6, Matthew 13) you'll find Jesus' brothers and sisters, and some of their names there. Mary had lots of kids but none until she had Jesus.

So, here we are on Christmas Eve, and we consider Jesus and His unexpected appearance. Amazing to young Mary, flabbergasting to young Joseph; both of them, in response to things they didn't fully understand, acted in faith. Totally in faith. They opened their hearts, they did what they were told, they followed the Lord's guidance, they were obedient to His direction. They understood that that Child they were bearing would come with a purpose. And Joseph, a "just man," does the right thing at a very significant cost. He puts the Lord's Word before his own comfort and even his own, maybe, better judgment.

Back in *Genesis*, the snake had climbed out from under a tree to lure men to sin. But now Jesus would come, and thirty-three years down the road, He would hang on a tree and take the sins of the world upon His shoulders so that you and I could be brought back into the kingdom of God. He was the only way back. Religion couldn't do it. Good intentions wouldn't save us. But a Savior would. And it took the cross to make salvation available. Jesus was the only Person ever born to die. Call His name JESUS. He's comin' to die. You were born to live. Sin will take that, but God's desire is that you live.

So Joseph was, indeed, a marvelous man of faith. He did what he was told. He obeyed the Lord. He would hear, again, from the Lord about moving his family to Egypt for a time. He would move back to Nazareth. His (Jesus') father, it would seem, died when He was in His early teens. Jesus would become the craftsman or the carpenter and run the family business.

We know nothing else about Joseph after verse 25. We would find, and will find, Mary in the gospels at various places, always in the company of ladies. Except one time with her husband when Jesus was twelve, that He stayed behind in the Temple. But when we see her at the cross, it is John that needs to take care of her and care for her. We see her, for the last time, in the upper room (in Acts 1 and 2), waiting for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as the church is born.

So both Mary and Joseph played significant roles, and both disappear very quickly because it's all about Jesus. Everything else is learning and helpful, but it's all about Him. The Old and New Testament, the first and second coming of Christ - it's all we care about. It's all that, really, the Bible is interested in as well. So, increasingly, the focus in the Bible turns to Jesus and then His work through the church to become who He is to us today.

But I like Joseph. He's confused. The clarification was sufficient for him, based on the Scriptures. He ultimately turns out to be compliant and does what God wants from him, even though it would have cost him plenty. And I think it's kind of like that with salvation today. You need Jesus to go to heaven. Your sins aren't forgiven because you're sorry; they're forgiven because He died in your place. And your sorrow turns to Him for help. To be a Christian, though, increasingly - in our world - will bring a share of difficulty. But I would rather have difficulty now than later. And if I'm going to take a side to stand on, I'm gonna go stand with Jesus. Somebody says, "Well, you're brainwashed." At least I know who washed my brain. (Laughing) God has life for you today in His Son. And no matter what you're doin' for Christmas, this is why we have it.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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