

Series: Seeing Christmas as it really is (1)

Joseph, man of justice

Message Notes

Text: Matthew 1:18-25

18 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. **19** 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.

20 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. **21** 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."

22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: **23** "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. **25** But he did not

consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Joseph is usually a sideline figure in the Christmas story. It's like he's there but doesn't really count. And yet if it wasn't for Joseph there would be no Jesus, no messiah and no Salvation...

1. Joseph: A Just Man

***19** 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.*

Joseph was faithful to the law (a righteous man, a just man)

A betrothal was much more binding than a modern-day engagement. Mary's parents probably arranged the marriage with Joseph and Mary's consent and Joseph would have paid them a bride price. It's likely that Mary was aged about 12 to 14 and Joseph about 18 to 20. A couple was betrothed to each other for one year before they consummated their marriage. It's unlikely that the couple had any time alone together during the betrothal year and any sexual activity with anyone else was considered to be adulterous.

At this time Joseph didn't know about the miraculous conception (that information came later from an angel in a dream)

"Joseph...was faithful to the law." These words mean that Joseph was a person who obeyed God's law and applied its rules fairly (without favouritism).

So, what did the law proscribe for Joseph to do?

Deuteronomy 22:22-24, *"If a man is found sleeping with another man's wife, both the man who slept with her and the woman must die. You must purge the evil from Israel. **23** If a man happens to meet in a town a virgin pledged to be married and he sleeps with her, **24** you shall take both of them to the gate of that town and stone them to death—the young woman because she was in a town and did not scream for help, and the man because he violated another man's wife. You must purge the evil from among you."*

According to the law Joseph was within his rights to have Mary stoned to death (and the man she committed adultery with)

*"Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, **and yet...**"*

Think of the options if there was no "and yet"

Mary could have been stoned to death killing the baby Jesus inside her womb – no messiah, no salvation

Mary could have been ridiculed with a public divorce that would mean she'd be an unmarried mother and unlikely to ever be married. When her parents died she'd have no means of support and it's likely that her and Jesus' lives would be cut short – no messiah, no salvation

So what an amazing man of justice Joseph was! We see this sort of justice beautifully illustrated by the prophet Isaiah in Scripture on which Joseph had no doubt meditated many times...

Isaiah 42:1-4, *"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations. **2** He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. **3** A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; **4** he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth..."*

Justice = "Compassion for the weak and exhausted"
(Not retribution or judgment or application of the law)

3 *A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice.*

Bruised reed: Reeds were used for pens but damaged reeds were broken and thrown on the fire.

Smoldering wick: A clay lamp would be filled with olive oil and suspended high against a wall. The wick was at the edge of the lamp and had a tendency to sever as it burnt and fall to the ground starting a fire. A bowl of water would be placed on the floor under the lamp to stop this occurring.

The servant of God spoken of in Isaiah 42 (Messiah / Jesus Matt. 12:18-21) would not break a bruised reed or snuff out a smoldering wick. He will be compassionate to the weak and exhausted.

How about you, are you feeling weak and exhausted? Jesus is compassionate towards you and you need people around you who are compassionate too...

2. Joseph: An Angry Man

Matthew 1:19-20, *"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..."*

“Considered” (Gk.) has two meanings. The other one is, “angry, very upset.”

The Greek verb is used in other places in the New Testament:

Luke 4:28, *“All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this.”*

Matthew 2:16, *“When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem...”*

Acts 10:19, *“While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Simon, three men are looking for you.”*

Joseph processed his anger into grace. He took Mary as his wife & took her to Bethlehem to protect her. Without Joseph there would be no Jesus, no Christmas and no salvation. Let’s choose to imitate his fine qualities.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you met people who are faithful to the law but who lack compassion? Have you ever been like that or are you like that now? How do you think God might want you to change?
2. Discuss this statement: "*Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, **and yet...***"
3. Read and discuss Ps Rob's blog on "Understanding Leviticus" on the Bayside Church website. How does this help you make sense of this 3,500-year-old book of law?
4. In Isaiah 42:1-4 Justice is defined as "Compassion for the weak and exhausted." Share instances in your life when you've felt weak and exhausted and someone extended compassion to you – or maybe no compassion was given. How did that make you feel?
5. Maybe "weak and exhausted" describes how you feel right now. How can others in your connect group best demonstrate compassion to you at this time?
6. Jesus learned true compassion from his earthly father, Joseph. How can we learn from this lesson in being a good influence on others?
7. "It is not wrong to be angry but we need to consider how best to express our anger." Discuss this statement in the light of Joseph's example. Share examples on when you expressed your anger well/not well. What were the outcomes?
8. Two of Jesus' parables teach on processing anger into grace. Read and discuss Luke 14:16-24 and Mark 12:1-12.