

Joseph's Dream

The Christmas story starts in the gospel of Luke with the announcement that John the Baptist will be coming in the power and spirit of Elijah the prophet. This was predicted in Malachi 4:5-6. We will discover in the gospel of Mark that John was the messenger who was to clear the way for the Messiah (Mal. 3:1; Mark 1:1-3). In addition to these prophecies being fulfilled, miracles also occurred. The first miracle was the birth of John the Baptist to a senior citizen named Elizabeth. Later an angel named Gabriel visited a young girl named Mary, a virgin, and told her that she would give birth to a son named Jesus even though she had not had sexual relations with a man. This was the second miracle. Before 640 B.C. Isaiah the prophet predicted that the Messiah would be a descendant of Jesse (Isa. 11:1-12), and we have discovered in the gospel of Luke from Mary's genealogy that Jesus fulfilled that prediction as well. We have also found that Joseph, Mary's future husband, is a descendant of Jesse too! When we come to Matthew 1:18, we learn that God is still putting the pieces of the Christmas puzzle together. Mary has returned from her visit with Elizabeth in the southern part of Israel, and she is about three months pregnant (Luke 1:56).

FROM JOY TO PAIN. I wonder when and where Joseph saw his future wife after she returned from her visit with Zacharias and Elizabeth. I wonder what they said to one another. Since her cousin Elizabeth had eagerly received her news with joy, she probably thought that Joseph would be wonderfully excited too! But she was mistaken. I imagine that Mary had talked about Gabriel's visit, Zacharias and Elizabeth, and her pregnancy. As we will see shortly, Joseph did not believe his future wife. I am sure that there were strong emotions and maybe some strong words during their discussion. What did the parents of these two think and what did they say? In Matthew 1:18-19 the Holy Spirit gives us a clue that the conversations and conclusions of the family members were not very positive.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. (NASB) Matt. 1:18-19

If the family had believed Mary, then Joseph would

not have been thinking about putting "her away secretly." According to Jewish law, an engagement was a legal contract requiring the couple to marry. The engagement could only be broken by divorce or adultery. Deut. 22:23-25 gave the law allowing the woman and man to be killed for a violation of the engagement contract. Once engaged, the marriage did not occur until the groom ceremonially took his bride home and the couple had sexual intercourse.

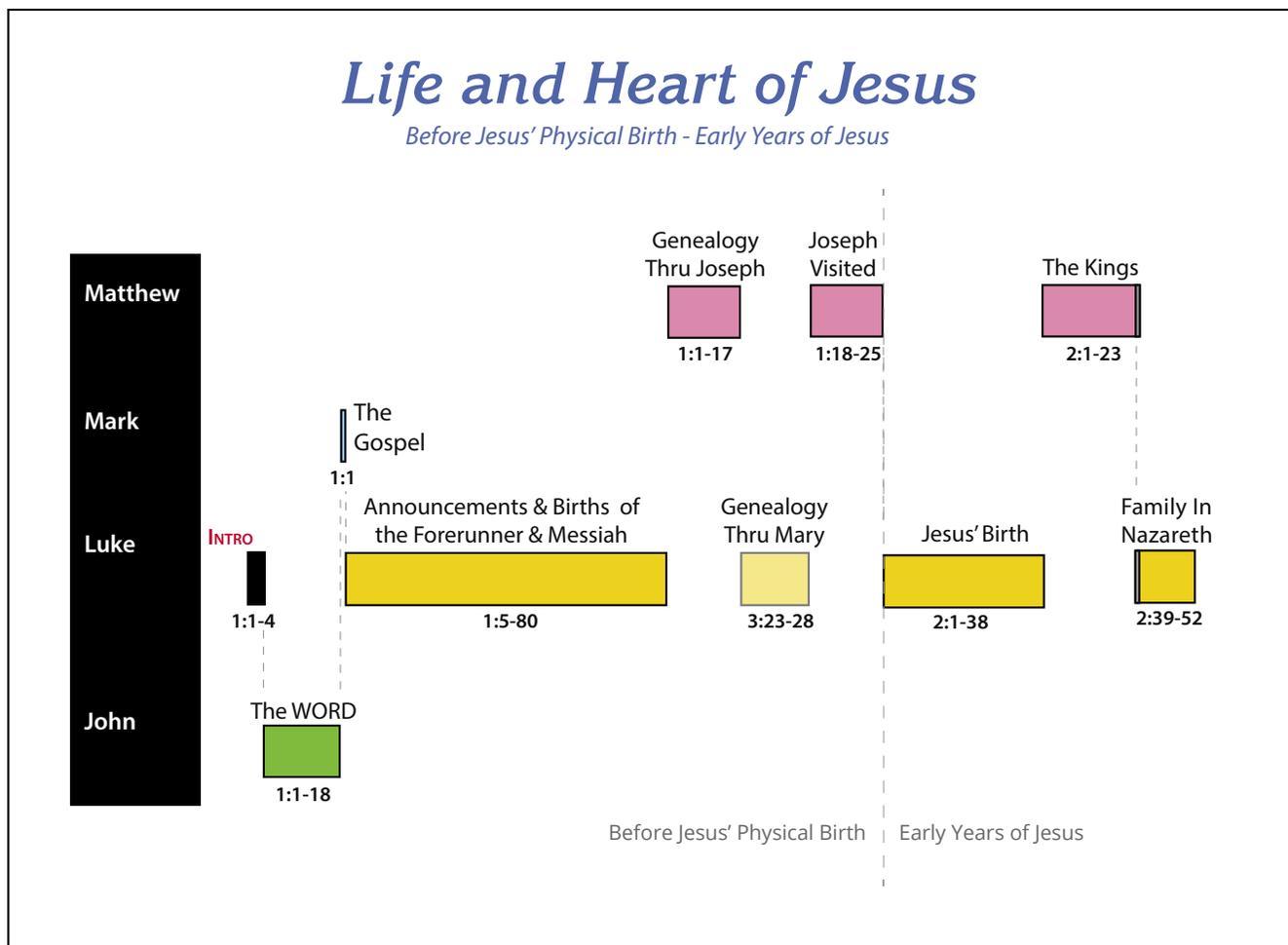
MARK OF A RIGHTEOUS MAN. In this passage Matthew has told us that the couple had not come together yet. Therefore Joseph had several options. By marrying her, Joseph could send the message to others that he was the father of this child and imply that they had had premarital sex. Legally he could have had her stoned for being unfaithful - at least he thought she thought she had been unfaithful.

So it is not a surprise that Joseph was planning to put "her away secretly." He did not want her stoned to death; and because he was a righteous man, he did not want her humiliated.

Gossip is not the mark of a righteous man or woman. If Joseph had started complaining to others about Mary's problem, he would have disgraced her. In Proverbs we dis-

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cover that gossip is the revealing of negative secrets,

He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, therefore do not associate with a gossip. (NASB) Prov. 20:19

That is, when we reveal a damaging secret, we have gossiped. It does not matter what our motive might be. Some individuals do not know when they are gossiping, because gossip has become so common our lives. That is who they are. Those who associate with gossips become like them. Gossips are not trustworthy people. No one should confide anything to them.

He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy conceals a matter. (NASB) Prov. 11:13

The Holy Spirit lists gossip as a sin in 2 Cor. 12:20. Joseph

was not a gossip!

THE DECISION. Apparently, Joseph had been thinking about this decision for awhile and was ready to put her away when God spoke to him in a dream through an angel.

But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." (NASB) Matt. 1:20

God has often spoken to men in dreams: Joseph (Gen. 37:5), Solomon (1 Kings 3:5), Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2:3), and Daniel (Dan. 7:1). God has spoken to those who believe in Him and to those who have not believed in Him. Some of the unbelievers have been Nebuchadnezzar and the magi (Matt. 2:12). In Deuteronomy God indicates that He does speak to His prophets in dreams.

If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, "Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them," you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the LORD your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, to seduce you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from among you. (NASB) Deut. 13:1-5

Could God speak to us a dream today? The answer is,

She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." (NASB) Matt. 1:21

The angel does not say that Jesus will be a conquering Messiah who will rescue the Israelites from the Romans and establish a Jewish Kingdom. No, he says that Jesus will come to rescue them from their sins. The name Jesus means "Jehovah the helper," or "Jehovah will save." The angel sends this message when he says, "He will save His people from their sins." We will see later that Jesus is a prophet, priest, and a king, and the title "Savior" includes them all. Jesus was coming as a Savior. Jesus was and is the Savior.

We will discover later that Jesus only saves us from our sins when we believe in Him and desire and trust that He will forgive our sins. If we have no desire to be forgiven, then we will not care that He is a Savior, and God will not forgive us. Jesus is the Savior of only those who want to be saved.

A BIG PROMISE. Then the angel adds this statement.

Jesus is the only Savior of saviors!

"Yes." But will He speak to me in a dream? Only He knows the answer. God could and did speak to Joseph in a dream using an angel. In fact, we will discover that God will speak to Joseph again in several dreams. The angel's message was simple. Mary was pregnant by the Holy Spirit and not by a human male. Joseph needed to hear that and understand.

PROOF FOR THE RABBIS. The rabbis of Jesus' time said that six individuals had been named before their birth. They were "Isaac, Ishmael, Moses, Solomon, Josiah, and the name of the Messiah, whom may the Holy One, blessed be His name, bring in our day." It is not important if the rabbis were correct about these individuals; but it is true that Jesus, the Messiah, was named before He was born. Is that why Matthew records for us that the angel told Joseph that Mary would have a child whose name was Jesus? It would have been another proof to others that Jesus was the Messiah.

Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US." (NASB) Matt. 1:22-23

These two verses record the conclusion of the angel's message to Joseph. Everything that occurred was a fulfillment of prophecy. Many times the idea of "prophecy" is considered to be nothing more than a prediction about a future event. But "prophecy" is something more. Each one is a promise of God that has come true! "God with us" was a BIG promise from God and He fulfilled it. The Messiah Jesus was born. He was born of a virgin, Mary, and He was and is God in human flesh. The apostle John has already told us that

“the Word was God” (John 1:1) and “the Word became flesh” (John 1:14). God was faithful and His promise came true. He kept His promise!

It is wonderful that God keeps His promises. The fulfillment of prophecy reveals God’s character. He is One whom we can trust. He never fails to keep His promises. He never says, “I forgot.” He never says, “The job prevented me from keeping my promise.” God always keeps His word and His Word. He is faithful toward us. We can trust Him. What a great example He is to us. He wants us to be just like Him! The birth of Jesus proves that God keeps His promises.

Today, most Christian couples have sex before they get married. They ignore God’s Word and prove themselves to be unfaithful to God even though He is faithful to them, but not Joseph and Mary. The Greek phrase translated as “kept her a virgin” is in the imperfect tense and it means that he continued to keep her a virgin until she gave birth. That is, he abstained from sex. He controlled his urges. It must have been hard for a young man to sleep with his wife without having sexual intercourse, but he controlled himself.

CONCLUSION. God was faithful to all of us and kept His promise that Jesus would be born into this world. Joseph

God always keeps His word and His Word.

FAITHFUL JOSEPH. When Joseph awoke from his dream, he proved himself faithful too but in a different way!

And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus. (NASB) Matt. 1:24-25

Joseph had made a promise to marry Mary, and God was directing him to do just that. She had told him the truth, and he had not believed her. I wonder what he said to her. Did he apologize? What did he say to his parents and to her parents? Joseph would have brought wonderful news to Mary. His love and support must have been comforting. His emotions were different now. Her stress would now disappear. This was wonderful news.

She had seen an angel in real life, and he had seen an angel in a dream. She had heard that her son would be the “Son of the Most High” and that He would “reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom would have no end.” He was to be a king. Joseph heard that He would “save His people from their sins.” They both heard that His name would be Jesus.

was faithful to God and married Mary and kept her a virgin. The scriptures said that a virgin would give birth. If Joseph had had sex before she gave birth, that promise of God would not have been true. God has been and is faithful. He is an example of faithfulness and He calls us to be faithful when scripture says,

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.” (NASB) Rom. 1:17

The righteous are to trust God. Trust is the result of believing. So, to trust God means that I am believing God, and faith in God starts when we believe in Jesus Christ.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. (NASB) John 3:16

God wants us to trust Him - Jesus Christ. He is the Prophet of prophets. He is the Priest of priests. He is the King of kings. Jesus is the only Savior of saviors!