

Intro:

The focus of the Christmas chronology shifts now from the hills of Judea to the village of Nazareth, the home of Mary and Joseph. Our passage for this service is centered on Joseph himself, and his reaction to the news of Mary's pregnancy.

Everything about this passage serves to underline the fact of the virgin birth.

The passage also does more — though we know nothing of the history of Joseph other than the name of his father, we see in this passage the simple testimony of a man who is called a 'just' man. The Greek word here is *righteous*.

If you recall, this is the way that Zacharias and Elizabeth were described as well.

Luke 1:6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

The word to me means that Joseph is a faithful, orderly, law-abiding Jew. He is a man, in many ways, after God's own heart, as was his father David, and quite unlike a good many other men in the line between him and David.

When Mary returns from the home of Elizabeth, she is obviously pregnant. The situation is very delicate. I will speak a little more about the circumstances in a moment, but at this point I want to pose this question:

What should a righteous man do about a pregnant betrothed wife?

I am sure you are aware of the Jewish custom of the day. Betrothal was much more formal than our engagement. Though the couple did not yet live together, their legal arrangement was as binding as marriage. One could only escape it through death or divorce. If your betrothed died before your wedding day, you were considered a widow or a widower.

So now we have a law-abiding Jew and a pregnant betrothed — what should he do?

What we are going to see in this message is the righteous man make his own plans, but before he can execute them, he receives the Lord's information, and instead of following his own will he follows God's will — and he follows God's will with delight.

Read Mt 1.18-25

Proposition: Following God's will means hearing God's word, laying aside self-will, and obeying God.

I. The plans of a just man (18-19)

A. The discovery of the pregnancy (18)

1. The 'genesis' of Jesus
2. The betrothal of Mary to Joseph
 - a. The verse links us to v. 16 of the genealogy above
 - b. The link to David is the key point of the genealogy – nothing else is told us at this point
3. Mary is 'found' to be with child
 - a. She was three months with Elisabeth
 - b. As I mentioned in the morning message, there must have been parents/guardians with her as well
 - c. As visitors in an unfamiliar town, almost every moment would have put them under supervision and scrutiny – no opportunity for mischief
 - d. How was she 'found' to be pregnant?
 - 1) It is possible that the discovery was made at Elizabeth's house
 - 2) Wouldn't Elizabeth have testified for her honour?
 - 3) Would Mary's parents/guardians have suspected Joseph? Apparently not since all the evidence from this passage shows that he is the one deciding what to do.
 - 4) Nevertheless, the whole party returns to Nazareth and Joseph is somehow notified of the state of things

The Bible draws a complete shroud over this event. It must have been a tense, difficult meeting when Joseph is informed of the situation.

B. The will of Joseph (19)

1. Joseph is a righteous man – unwilling [not purposing] to put her to shame
 - a. He could have put her to trial
 - b. Such a trial could have resulted in execution
 - c. But the law did not demand that he do this

What a contrast with the men who brought the woman caught in adultery before Jesus.

- They were self-righteous, he was righteous
- They were willing to shame the adulterous, he was unwilling to shame the virgin

2. Joseph, on the other hand, is desiring instead to divorce her quietly
 - a. Jewish custom allowed him to divorce without specifying a reason
 - b. Joseph is motivated by the demands of law-keeping, but also by transparent love for Mary

His interest is in her welfare – he does not want her to be a spectacle.

- Braid Scots “Be i the mooth o’ the public.”

The resolve of Joseph as recorded here contributes to the doctrine of the virgin birth – clearly, he has not involved himself with Mary improperly.

The character of Joseph seems most on display here — he is confronted with a bitterly disappointing set of circumstances (it appears) and he determines to quietly resolve the issue.

This is Joseph’s will, but God has something else in mind...

II. The information for the just man (20-23)

A. God’s prohibitive order (20a)

1. An angel appears to Joseph, calling him by name
2. Joseph is designated ‘son of David’ – an attention getting address
 - a. The whole point of Matthew’s record of Jesus’ birth is the royal line
 - b. This address to Joseph means that much more than Joseph’s personal reputation and family life is at stake

3. Do not fear to take Mary: a prohibition

The will of God is clearly that this marriage should take place.

B. God's informative revelation (20b-21)

1. That which is in her is conceived of the Holy Spirit

The only way this fact can be known is by revelation — there is no other way.

“Matthew’s language makes very clear that the pregnancy was a supernatural act of God and not indiscretion on the part of Mary. The doctrine of the Virgin Birth of Christ stands with transparent clarity in this passage. Those who would deny it must contradict the text.”¹

2. She will bear a son whom you will name Jesus

- a. Jesus = Joshua
- b. Means ‘Jehovah is salvation’

3. This son, Jesus, will save his people from their sins

- a. ‘He’ – emphatic – ‘he, and no other’
- b. From sin — not just from foreign occupiers

Men want to be delivered from the symptoms of their sins, the problems their sins cause. They don’t necessarily want to be delivered from their sin.

With this announcement, the man Joseph is confronted with the will of God...

“He had pondered and had planned as best he knew, but now God had called a halt and he had to decide whether he was willing to shelter Mary by marrying her and, if necessary, take upon himself whatever stigma might attach to her.”²

¹ Stewart Custer, *The Gospel of the King*, p. 8.

² A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the Greek New Testament*. Copyright © 1934 by the Broadman Press, Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

C. God's prophetic fulfillment (23-24)

1. Matthew's commentary links this with Isaiah's sign to Ahaz, king of Judah
2. Ahaz [father of Hezekiah] wanted protection from the Syrians and the northern kingdom of Israel – made an alliance with the Egyptians
3. Isaiah rebukes him, and asks him to trust the Lord, and ask for a sign
4. Ahaz piously refuses, so Isaiah offers a sign 'to the house of David'
 - a. A virgin will conceive
 - 1) May be a double fulfillment, some birth in Isaiah's day, but the point of the prophecy for Ahaz is that they will soon be delivered from his enemies
 - 2) The ultimate point of the prophecy is the connection of the virgin with Immanuel
 - b. They shall call his name Immanuel – God with us

The language of Matthew is forcing the virgin birth on us by the facts of the case, the revelation of God through the angel, and the connection with the ancient prophecy. For Joseph, the will of God is now clear...

III. The obedience of the just man (24-25)

A. When Joseph woke, he did ... (24)

1. Implication: immediate action
2. Took her into his home as his wife with all the appropriate Jewish ceremony

Many people are sleeping while wide awake – they persist in doing their own will, regardless of any spiritual admonition they are given.

B. Joseph preserved Mary's virginity until the baby was born (25a)

C. Joseph named the son Jesus in obedience to the will of God (25b)

Conclusion:

Proposition: Following God's will means hearing God's word, laying aside self-will, and obeying God.

Joseph's obedience put him in a position of unique privilege – the righteous man who served God as the adoptive father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Although he was a humble carpenter, Joseph would have the privilege of being the adoptive father of the Lord of heaven. He would see to it that his home was saturated with Scripture. The Lord Jesus had a profound knowledge of Scripture at a tender age (Lk 2.46-47); His younger brother, James, quotes more Scriptures in five chapters than any other NT writer. But then, Mary's prayer was filled with Scripture as well.”³

The way that you become a righteous man, a man who is willing to set aside your own will to follow God's will, is to be a man immersed in God's word and communing faithfully with God's Spirit in prayer.

You will not succeed simply making your own plans your own way.

³ Stewart Custer, *The Gospel of the King*, p. 10.