

© 1998-2013  
Fellowship at Cross Creek  
The Dream...  
Matt 1:18-25  
12.13.98 (Revised: 12.6.9; 12.1.13)

### Introduction...

Can YOU be obedient to accept God's plans for your life even when at first, they don't seem to make sense? That's the fundamental question that I believe this passage asks of each of us.

In addition, while I have not spent much time here examining how God perhaps communicates to us even within our dreams, I could say a lot. Even today, I am still challenged by my dreams and their potential meanings or implications for my life. In fact, this may be a good starter question. Anyone had a strange dream as of late? Of course, those that remember their dreams could probably go on forever, but even just a couple might be enough to arrest attention because most all of us dream. Then comes the segue...what if you have a dream that speaks directly into your life situation, such as the one we are about to examine more closely—the angel telling Joseph to not break off his engagement with Mary because she is now pregnant—what would you do with that? How might you know it was of God? How could you test it? In this case, we know Mary is pregnant, that would be huge. Also looking up the passage the angel quotes from—in this case, Isaiah 7--would also help immensely.

But the bottom-line skill we want your students to start to think about is...can I accept what is going on in my life, even if confusing, as a further unfolding of God's perfect plan for my life?

God give you grace in answering it.

**Teachers Notes:** 1) There is a difficult, yet critical quote written over seven centuries previous to the events within this passage from the prophetic book of Isaiah concerning a virgin being with child. According to Matthew, as stated by the angel of the Lord, Jesus' conception (without a father or Joseph having sexual relations with Mary) fulfills this ancient prophecy.

2) There are also some assumptions about where babies come from as well. Again, I am not sure what is age appropriate for these kids to discuss.

3) Once you have decided how to cross these two swift-flowing rivers, we are back to the basic stigma of others thinking wrongly about you...or you judging someone else before you know all the facts.

Is there a way in which you as a teacher could set up some scenario by which you ask the students to make a judgment without all the facts?

Do some rush to judgment? Do others, sensing that they don't have all the facts hold back or ask more questions? Does a debate break out? Now once they are engaged within the particular judgment, you can tie this to what they or others might have thought about Mary and Joseph at the time?

4) Now let's take this a step further. Why did God choose to bring his son into the world this way, especially knowing the great emotional costs to both Mary and Joseph and their families?

**Observation: Pray; read over several times and ask questions.**

**Matt. 1:18 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.**

How had they promised? Verbally? Legally? Was it an official type of thing? Did anyone know about it? When were they going to get married? How long from now? How long had they been engaged? Why did Joseph pick Mary? Did their parents arrange this or maybe suggest it? Had this been a foregone conclusion since Mary was a child or young girl? How old was Joseph? Did their families know each other well? Did Mary and Joseph know each other well? Would this have made any difference? Did Joseph love Mary? Was she attractive? Was he handsome? (Do you start to get the picture? Do you start to crawl into these two special people's souls? Could they have imagined what destinies lay before them or what God was going to do with their lives? Doubtful. Just like you don't know what completely lies out there ahead of you. All you can do is be obedient, and that is what these two people are all about.)

"Live together" sounds like what people do today before they get married? Is this the same? Everyone else sure probably thought they had been together, or when she comes back from Elizabeth's, at some point in time. This raises all kinds of questions--how did they handle the rumors, the pressures, the stares, the condemnation--perhaps even from family? Did they tell anyone the truth? Did people believe them? Or were they just obedient? How does the Holy Spirit make someone pregnant? How did he implant the divine sperm of God into Mary's womb (I know this sounds bizarre--but it's what I think of)?

**19 And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly.**

How was he going to divorce her quietly? I mean wouldn't everyone eventually know? And what does it mean by divorce? I didn't think they

were married yet. Evidently, engagement was more serious than it is today. Sounds kind of legal. In other words, once you were engaged you were going to get married--it was a done deal? And to get unengaged, one had to go through a formal-legal divorce--wow? With this description of Joseph as a godly man, we have all four parents, Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, and Joseph described as good, godly people. Also note, it was because he was a godly man that he did not want to divorce her publicly in order to embarrass her, which brings up the question what did Joseph think had happened? Did Mary tell him the truth? The story doesn't read like she had. Did Joseph presume that she had "fooled around?" A lot of human drama is going on here? What did the families have to endure? A lot of potential unrest and heartache is going on in what had the makings of being a wonderful and happy event for both families and the community, but God had already stirred the pot. (Do you think he might still stir the pot of good people today--seemingly cause someone's life to be more difficult, even though they have done nothing wrong, in order to produce a greater good in the end?)

**20 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.**

How soon before the birth? Was he lying on his bed? Working at his bench? Building a home? What was his state of mind? A dream certainly suggests sleep. The angel certainly clears up whose child it is and what Joseph is to do.

**21 She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."**

A regular sonogram--Joseph already knows the sex of the child. What does Jesus mean? How will he save the people from their sins? Why is this so important? Does this mean he will be like a prophet and turn people away from their unfaithfulness and back to God? Just how will he do this?

**22 Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 23 "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."**

What took place--that Mary became pregnant by the Holy Spirit of God? What Prophet? You mean God said this would happen a long time ago?

What is a virgin? This is the second time this had been brought up; before Luke wrote that Mary was a virgin. Who will call him Immanuel? I thought the angel just said his name was supposed to be Jesus--what is

going on here? Oh, this is a quote of a prophet--not what the angel is saying. Although the angel is quoting the text, it is not saying that this child will also be called Immanuel. Does "God with us" mean that this child will somehow be a symbol that God has not forgotten his people with this person?

How soon? Did he and Mary talk about this? Did he now finally believe what she might have said previously about the cause of her pregnancy? If this was true, did he apologize to her for not believing her before? Did he tell others about the dream?

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

Make love to her--is that what they do in the movies--when they have their clothes off and are in bed together? Why did he not do this? Did he go ahead and get married before the baby was born? Were they already legally married because of the engagement? So he took her into his house--the wedding ceremony (did they still have one) but did not sleep or lie with her--wow--until after she gave birth? And Joseph did just as Zechariah did in obediently naming his son.

**Who?**

**When?**

**Where?**

**What?**

First, Matthew tells us right out front that this how the birth of Jesus came about..

How? With what follows. So what follows?

1) There is a promise to get married...an engagement.

2) But before they live as man and wife together, something turns up--Mary is already pregnant. Ouch! How did this happen?

3) The power of the Holy Spirit.

4) Joseph, her fiancée and a godly man, does not desire to embarrass her (kind of a white-knight type of guy),

but 5) plans to end their engagement to be married quietly.

Taken together, these later thoughts--Joseph not wanting to embarrass her--seems the stronger idea to me. But that's just me.

At the same time, I would simply divide the verses to begin with:

1) Mary becomes pregnant by the Holy Spirit.

2) Joseph not knowing this, intends to break off their marriage quietly so as not to embarrass her.

**Then...**

3) The angel tells Joseph not to divorce her because this is God's child and...

4) he must name the baby Jesus (the Greek version of the Hebrew word meaning *to save, or the one who saves...Joshua or Yehsua...note: there is no "j" in Hebrew*) because he *will save* the people from what? Their sins.

And if you had grown up Jewish, having been taught portions of the OT Law, Prophets and Writings (Psalms, etc.), as well as, having witnessed the Temple sacrificial system in Jerusalem, one would certainly have some idea of the concept of *sin*, and thus the need for either a sacrifice to atone for one's sins religiously or spiritually, or just even the basic struggle to do right when everything within my mind and body sometimes screams to do wrong or rebel.

Now, how will this *Jesus* save Joseph or the nation from its sins may not be entirely clear at this point in the narrative. Even if one subscribed to the idea of a savior or messiah (anointed one), did they understand that the savior could be divine or that he would suffer sacrificially to atone for the world's sins to make or offer mankind a right relationship with God? Hardly. Thus, we have what amounts to a vague, seminal truth or statement being made here, and yet, one whose meaning will be further clarified and will change the history of the world. So simple, yet so complex...so infinite.

[For Teachers: Now at this moment, the kids can usually spill back to you all this dying for our sins stuff--but do they really understand this? Do you?

What does this mean--not in a trite sense?

Think about just one or two of your sins which you committed today or yesterday. Scripture says that he even died to take these small pieces of

“non-holiness” or “sin” away from you so that through faith you would not be separated from your perfect Father.

Remember, it only takes one sin--one imperfection to separate us from a purely, holy God.

The beauty of all of this?

All of God’s attributes or characteristics are satisfied: his holiness (perfection...without evil), his power, justice, and mercy (yes, compassion)--wow!

This is why the coming of this child is so important--he provides a way back to be in a loving presence with a holy, just and merciful God; this baby, this Son of Man, will provide the divine sacrifice or the atonement or restitution for OUR willful disobedience; he is the sacrifice!]

### **What’s next?**

This was all a part of a larger, greater divine or heavenly plan or purpose. And how do we know this? By looking backwards. This was all the Lord’s will, including a virgin birth of God’s son, as revealed to or hinted by the prophets (over seven centuries before, according to the prophetic scroll of Isaiah).

The angel quotes Isaiah 7 here to Joseph, and quite frankly, Joseph might have needed this. Believing his wife-to-be was pregnant by God is a lot to swallow. But it had always been foretold. All one had to do was look back at the ancient Scriptures.

Note: You might want to have one of the kids read this from a Bible, but note the passage has it challenges. It has to do with being a sign to an Old Testament Jewish king—in fact, a not very righteous one at that (Ahaz)--that he and his kingdom (Judah...remember Israel divided into two nations over two centuries before...Israel, made up of ten northern tribes, and Judah, made up of two southern tribes...Judah and Benjamin) would NOT be defeated by the two-nation alliance of (Israel and Syria or Aram) to the north.

Some interpreters suggest that Isaiah’s sign to King Ahaz was fulfilled both then (the eighth century B.C. and now, in Jesus’ day). Others suggest the sign waited to be fulfilled until the birth of the savior, Jesus. I tend to hold the later view, but it doesn’t make much difference. It is now happening with the conception and birth of Jesus.

### **Finally, vv. 24-25?**

Joseph did what he was supposed to do--he took his bride-to-be home and did not make love...have sexual relations...with her until after Jesus' birth, with the implication being--this birth was clearly not the result of a sexual union between Mary and Joseph, nor anybody else. This child was humanly conceived by the Spirit of God...God.

**Implication:** he, the child, must be divine or God for his death to make a divine atonement for Man's sins. Why? Because when a man dies, it can atone or pay for very little. It can be an inspiration, but it can't do anything for another man's broken relationship, due to his own sin, with his holy, perfect Creator. But when the God-man, Jesus, dies, his death, because he is also God can atone for anything God so desires it to atone for—in this case, the sins or evil, of an individual creature.

**Summary:** Instead of divorcing (or breaking off this engagement with) Mary because she had become pregnant before their marriage, Joseph obeys the messenger--angel.

From the angel, Joseph comes to understand that this is indeed God's child, created for a purpose. Thus, Joseph takes Mary into his home as his wife and does NOT have sexual relations with her BEFORE the child is born.

### **Bottom line:**

Joseph is obedient to the angel's message and remains committed to marrying the divinely impregnated Mary.

**Note:** So Matthew's account of the angel's notification to Joseph, taken together with Luke's account of Zechariah, Elizabeth, and Mary being notified as well means all four parents of these two incredible individuals, as well as, earthly cousins, John and Jesus, have now become God's obedient servant-parents within Redemption's mysterious, unfolding drama.

**Why Did God include this account in his inspired word for us to read so many years later? (What do we learn about God? Life? People? Myself?)**

- Obviously, the big why would be to show us how Joseph was turned around and brought onto the team;
- Another would be to show us Joseph's character, demonstrating to us what kind of earthly father Jesus had--that he was a good man, practical and yet compassionate and obedient. He was a man of character and integrity, and yet spiritual courage. Jesus was blessed of God to have such a good man as an earthly protector and father.

- This passage tells us once again that this is God's child, not Joseph's, nor anyone else's.
- Jesus receives his humanity from his mother--not his father.
- Again, the significance to this is that: 1) God can't die, only man, but 2) if a man dies it can only be an inspiration; his death does nothing to atone for the sins of the world.
- But if the God-man, Jesus Christ, dies, his death can be accredited to whatever God wants it to be--He is God! And in this case, God had decreed that Christ's death shall cover all the sins of those who will believe and accept God's offer of mercy and atonement.

### **What else does this tell me about God?**

- That he cares deeply for me to go through all this--the sending the second person of the divine Trinity, the Son, to die for my sin, etc.
- That God can accomplish anything he wills or decrees--conception without a male donor. In fact, according to Genesis 1, God but says the word and his word becomes reality. God is a true king. He is the true monarch of the Universe. The Universe is his realm.
- Angels or divinely empowered messengers do exist and can communicate or translate God's messages, words or decrees to us.
- That God already knows and has created the future--because of the fulfillment of the prophecy (there is no time to God; both the past and future are like the present with him. God supersedes, or is bound, by his creation of time as a medium in which his creatures exist and have their bodily experience).
- That God is extremely patient from a human perspective--if he allows seven centuries to pass before this prophecy is fulfilled. Man has little concept. Seven centuries, while looking back from a historical perspective can be accurately described, at the same time, looking forward, cannot be grasped! Try thinking seven centuries into the future right now. If Christ tarries, we are not even close in our imaginations, just as the ancients could not imagine today!
- Again, that Jesus Christ is God; and that the Trinity exists (Father, Son and Spirit) with each triune person of deity having his role or function within the Godhead: The Father directs, the Spirit empowers and the Son comes, serves, dies, is resurrected, ascends and will return to conquer, rule, judge, reward and enjoy...



## **What about people?**

- Although Joseph was not perfect--he had his fears, doubts and worries (while thinking on his bed)--when confronted by the truth he was Spiritually and courageously obedient. He stepped up to the plate to take his turn at bat, regardless of how difficult the situation might have been, including possible shame, embarrassment etc. But regardless of what others might have thought, Joseph quietly performed his part, and for that, we are all most grateful.

## **(Prayerful) Application...**

**Thanksgivings...**I am thankful for today. I am thankful for my late-night home church going way overtime this past week in describing to each other where each other was at mentally, Spiritually, physically...even financially, at this time of year. I suppose I was like a parent needing to know how my children were doing. I have been described as a Spiritual codependent. Guilty as charged. I have been doing this too long to be able to disconnect from those I love. Impossible. Their joys are mine; their fears...mine; their hopes...mine. And when they share, now I have earthly fodder for prayer. I may not be able to do a lot, but I can care, I can ask and I can pray, and I will.

The family I spent time today with in the loss of their loved one—what a joyful experience. Ms. Evelyn's prayers are still bearing fruit! I love you, Ms. E. Thanks for adopting me so late in life. No doubt, you were a Godsend.

And this lesson. Thank you for your word, Lord.

## **Struggle...**

I have been somewhat lost these past couple of weeks...post-Thanksgiving, snowstorm, missing a Sunday, having NOT done a LC lesson in several weeks.

## **Application...**

I love what is going on here in this passage. Thanks for coming close to me through your Word, and in this case, going back in time and crawling into the skins of servants, who, while not understanding everything that was going on, were simply obedient. May I as be as simply and quietly obedient. May I play my role as directed by your Spirit as quietly, beautifully and simply as Joseph and Mary played theirs.

## **What about your kids?**

Again, ask them, the most difficult thing they are going through at the time--or any problems they may be having. They will tell you something. Believe me, in their only little minds they have their struggles, and sometimes you will be surprised by how sophisticated those struggles are. But now at such a young age you have the opportunity to teach them that God has a word or message for them in their current situation.

After they share one, two or three, then ask the class is there anything that we've studied--anything that we've learned--that might help this person out this morning. Again, they will come up with something. Remember we are not shooting for perfection here. At this point we just want them to believe that the text relates to them and their problems.

God's blessings on your spiritual moment of worship with the kids. I wish I could be there--just to enjoy their presence.

Joe

Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation Used by permission." ([www.Lockman.org](http://www.Lockman.org)).