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The Truth about Jesus' Parents: Part 2- Joseph: "A Righteous Man"

by Tal Davis

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. 19 And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. 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. 21 She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." 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." 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. (Matthew 1:18-25 NASB)

About five and half years ago my son and daughter-in-law invited my wife, my daughter-in-law's parents, and me to their house for dinner. After we had eaten, they said they had gifts for us for all that we had done for them during the three years they had been married. They handed each of us little wrapped packages which we all quickly opened. At first we were a bit confused, all the boxes contained little socks. Suddenly it hit us, they were expecting a baby! The grandmas cried and the granddads shook hands and everyone

hugged. Now that sock girl is five years old and has a two-year old sister.

But, men, what if six months before your wedding date you learned that your future wife was already pregnant? Furthermore, what if you knew you could not be the father? What would be your reaction? Sadness? Anger? Hurt? A feeling of betrayal? Grief? Probably you would experience all these emotions.

Last time we began a two part series titled "The Truth about Jesus' Parents." In the light of Scripture, we first examined the role of Mary, Jesus' mother, in the birth of our Savior. We showed how some churches have exaggerated her place in their theology or distorted the record of how Jesus was conceived. We also discussed the significance of the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. (see: The Truth about Jesus' Parents: Part 1 - Mary, "How Can this Be?")

In this installment we look at a person who really wasn't asked whether he wanted a part in the drama of Jesus' birth and life. Joseph essentially had his role unexpectedly thrust upon him. His part in the events surrounding Jesus' birth was just as significant as was Mary's. From the Scriptural accounts we can ascertain why God specifically chose Joseph and how he contributed enormously to Jesus' prenatal care, birth, and early life.

Actually we don't know anything about Joseph prior to his engagement. Matthew's Gospel begins with Jesus' genealogy (Matt. 1:1-17). Luke's version (Luke 3:23-38) gives Jesus' physical descent and is somewhat different from Matthew's. Scholars suggest that Luke presents Jesus' physical lineage and Matthew's may

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describe Jesus' legal lineage. In any case, Joseph was clearly a descendant of King David.

So what difference did that make? It fulfilled Messianic prophecy in two ways. First, the Old Testament indicated that the Messiah would be a descendant of David.

12 When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom ...
16 Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever." (2 Samuel 7:12,16 NASB)

So I will establish his descendants forever
And his throne as the days of heaven. (Psalm 89:29 NASB)

Also, the Old Testament foretold that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Hebrew: "House of Bread"), also referred to as "the city of David."

But as for you, Bethlehem Ephra-
thah,
Too little to be among the clans of Judah,
From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.
His goings forth are from long ago,
From the days of eternity. (Micah 5:2 NASB)

Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" (John 7:42 NASB)

That was why Joseph took Mary to Bethlehem to register for the census.

4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the

house and family of David ... 11 for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:4, 11 NASB).

Thus, Joseph's selection as Jesus' adoptive father made Jesus a legal descendant of King David, fulfilling those prophesies. (see also Romans 1:3)

Matthew says that Joseph was "betrothed" to Mary (v. 18). As we explained in the last installment, a betrothal in ancient Jewish tradition lasted for one year wherein the couple lived together before the marriage was consummated. Marriages were usually arranged by families and the husbands were older than their wives.

However, as we well know, in this case, a serious circumstance disrupted Joseph's and Mary's engagement. Before they came together she was found to be with child! Initially, Joseph did not know the whole story. He knew he was not the father so he could only suppose the worst: Mary had been unfaithful.

Can you imagine how Joseph felt? He was probably confused and may have plied Mary with questions: "When?" "Who?" "Why?" According to Jewish law, Joseph had every right to divorce her (a betrothal legally required it). He could even have had her executed for adultery. But Matthew said something that revealed the depth of Joseph's character and faith: He was "a righteous man." This meant that he was a good, honest, humble, and fair person (not sinless) who faithfully practiced the Jewish religion.

Nonetheless, Joseph was caught in a dilemma. Mary's condition would look bad to his family and community. They would naturally assume that either the couple had violated the betrothal law and had been intimate before marriage or that Mary had been unfaithful. Either way, Joseph would have to take

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action to keep his honor and name clean. Being the man he was, Joseph had compassion on Mary and decided not to shame her but to divorce her quietly.

It seems to me that Joseph was what some would call a "man's man." What's a "man's man?" Let me give you one contemporary example. One of my all-time favorite football players was the Dallas Cowboy's quarterback Roger Staubach. Staubach, now age 72, is rated as the number 46 greatest NFL player of all-time by NFL.com. In 1985 he was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. He also won the Heisman Trophy as college football's top player in 1963.

Every football fan knows that. But people forget that Staubach graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy and served as a naval officer for four years. During that time he had to put his football career on hold. Actually, he could have gotten out of the Navy early to play Pro football because he was color blind. Nevertheless, he chose stay in the service and even served a couple of tours of duty during the Vietnam War.

So, I think most of us would say Roger Staubach is a real man! But I would say that not just because he was military veteran and a football star. His greatest honor is that he has been married for 50 years to the same woman. They have five children and thirteen grandchildren.

Joseph was also a real man. He was certainly physically tough and hard-working. He was a carpenter by trade (Matt. 13:55). Thus, he was a skilled craftsman and a businessman. He could not walk everywhere and haul wood if he were not strong. So, in that sense, he was the kind man our culture idolizes: athletic, strong, outdoorsy, etc.

But real men have other, even more important, qualities, including love and compassion. Joseph was an excellent example of that kind of person. Like Mary, he was willing to put aside his personal pride to do God's will. An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and explained what was happening. So, with his questions fully answered, Joseph readily took Mary as his wife. Like Mary, Joseph was willing to sacrifice his own convenience for God's purposes.

In the years following Jesus' birth, all indications are that Joseph was a good husband to Mary and good father to his adopted son Jesus. We know he took the infant Jesus to the temple with Mary where he shared in his naming, circumcision, and dedication (Luke 2:8-33). Joseph also fled with Mary and Jesus to Egypt to avoid Herod's decree to kill all boys in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:13-23).

Later, he faithfully took his family to Jerusalem for religious festivals and was gravely concerned when Jesus went missing when he was twelve years old. He was, of course, found debating the temple elders at "my Father's house." Jesus then lived and grew up with his family in Nazareth (Luke 2:41-50). This is last we read of Joseph in the Bible. He probably died sometime before Jesus began his public ministry.

One of the great cultural crises of our generation is in the family. A primary aspect of that is the epidemic of fatherless families. Recent studies have shown significant correlations of the following problems of children in father-absent homes compared to those in intact families.

- * Four times the level of poverty
- * More emotional and behavioral problems
- * More serious health problems

- * Higher rates of crime and incarceration (particularly among boys)
- * Higher rates of teen pregnancy and abortion
- * Greater levels of alcohol and drug abuse
- * Even higher levels of childhood obesity

Joseph was one of history's finest models of what a real man and father should be. What a difference it would make today if more men followed his example.

Conclusion

Mary and Joseph were truly heroes in God's Hall of Fame. God selected two godly people to be Jesus' parents. Nonetheless, Mary and Joseph both understood that Jesus' life and ministry was essential to their eternal destiny. The same is no less true for us today. It is only through the life, death, and resurrection of that same Christ that we may enjoy the assurance of salvation.

That makes Christmas truly something to celebrate, with or without Christmas songs, trees, or colored lights. "Linus is right!" said Charlie Brown (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kVGJgJ5cReg>).

Merry Christmas!

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