

LESSON 2

December 13, 2020

Unit I: The Beginning of a Call

Called to Participate in a Promise

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 42:1-9

Background Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25

Print Passage: Matthew 1:18-25

Key Verses—"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. 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." (Matthew 1:20b-21, NIV)

.....
Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. (Matthew 1:20b-21, KJV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Remember the story of the angel's announcement to Joseph of Jesus' birth.
- Rejoice that the birth of Jesus fulfilled God's promise to be with His people.
- Live with greater awareness of God's abiding presence.

Key Terms

Angel (verse 20)—Greek: **aggelos (ang'-el-os)**: a messenger of God.

Christ (verse 18)—Greek: **Christos (khris-tos')**: the Anointed One, "Messiah" (NIV), Christ.

Espoused (verse 18)—Greek: **mnésteuó (mnace-tyoo'-o)**: betrothed; "pledged to be married" (NIV).

Prophet (verse 22)—Greek: **prophétés (prof-ay'-tace)**: a prophet (an interpreter or forth-teller of the divine will).

Righteous (verse 19, NASB)—Greek: **dikaios (dik'-ah-yos)**: correct; righteous; by implication innocent; "just" (KJV); "faithful to the law" (NIV).

Save (verse 21)—Greek: **sózó (sode'-zo)**: to save, deliver.

Sins (verse 21)—Greek: **hamartia (ham-ar-tee'-ah)**: sinful deeds; failures.

INTRODUCTION

How many times have you made a weak excuse for not doing what God would have you to do? "I'm busy." "I don't really want to work with that group." "That's an inconvenient day for me." "I prefer a more visible assignment." "No one is going to know whether I do it or not." "They didn't want me to do it when I first offered." Our long list of excuses never seems to end. But God is not interested in hearing any of them.

God operates His kingdom by the work and labor of those whom He has gifted and assigned to serve. When God gives you a particular gift, great or small, He expects that you would use that gift to serve and bless others, to advance the purpose of His kingdom, to obey His commands, to fulfill His divine purpose, and/or to bring glory to His name, whether in or outside the church.

Often, we are slow to act on what God would have us to do because we are shy or perhaps fearful of what others may think or say. Sometimes, God directs us to do things that may be unpopular or difficult for others to accept and understand. Do you have the courage to say yes to God, even if it costs you the approval of others?

Even though the task to which God called Mary and Joseph would be controversial and difficult, they were willing to do whatever God asked of them. God takes no pleasure in service that is given with a reluctant, half-hearted, or begrudging attitude. It is a privilege to serve God in whatever He has gifted and called us to do. If God has called us to a task, He will certainly provide the ability and provision to get it done. It may not be easy, but it will never be impossible.

God uses ordinary people to fulfill His promise and plan for their generation. Sometimes, with good intention, we aspire to do things that are beyond the scope of God's call. Some people may want to teach or lead, for example, when God has not called or anointed them to the task. God does not look for ambitious volunteers—God always knows exactly what He needs for any given task. Any woman could bear a child, but God called Mary, a young virgin, a godly woman who was up to the task of caring for and nurturing God's own Son, and strong enough to bear the weight of public misunderstanding regarding the child's birth. God has a great divine purpose for this generation. He has already provided what you need to do what He asks of you. The question is, are you willing and ready to serve? Even when your task seems huge and complicated, let God lead you into sharing His gift!

THE BIBLICAL CONTEXT

The name Jesus means “Yahweh saves.” When we say the name Jesus, we are literally speaking of God's salvation. More than a savior, He is our salvation. Significant Old Testament figures have variations of that same name: Joshua, who led the people of Israel into the Promised Land, Hosea the prophet, and Jeshua/Joshua, the high priest instrumental in rebuilding the temple (see Ezra 3:1-3). Most directly translate their names as Savior of God (Yahweh) or God's (Yahweh's) savior as opposed to God's (Yahweh's) salvation.

Joseph sought to keep Mary's surprising pregnancy private, as he was unwilling to expose her to public shame (deigmatisai). Ironically, Mary's Son, Jesus, would publicly shame (edeigmatisen) the great and powerful by triumphing over them in His crucifixion and resurrection (see Colossians 2:15). This public shame came amid Jesus' skillful handling of the direct verbal attacks by Pharisees and Sadducees—He often left them silenced in the midst of the crowds. Isaiah gave the original Immanuel prophecy to King Ahaz of Judah (Isaiah 7:10-16)—that a child would be born to a young woman as a sign that the political threats Ahaz feared would soon be gone. Matthew saw this prophecy as having additional prophetic significance regarding the Messiah and focused much of his writing to connect the dots and present Jesus as the Messiah. Matthew sought to present Jesus as “The Anointed One,” called to participate in and bring finality to God's promise. Although David (see 1 Samuel 16:13), Aaron (see Leviticus 8:12), and Elisha (see Isaiah 61:1) were all anointed to represent the throne, the Law of God, and the Prophets, respectively, only Jesus is the Messiah, the true Anointed One.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Destined to Save from Birth (Matthew 1:18-21)

KJV

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.

20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

NIV

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.”

Matthew opened this section with a description of the birth of Jesus. Matthew shared the private, internal wrestling of Joseph which began with the explanation that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit while Mary was engaged to Joseph (verse 18). The verse further shares the fact that Jesus was born before Joseph and Mary where intimately involved. Joseph knew that the public ridicule of an unwed pregnancy would be a heavy burden for Mary (verse 19). In fact, a premarital pregnancy would have meant embarrassment for both families of the engaged parties. Although both Mary and Joseph were innocent of fornication, it would be hard to defend a pregnancy against accusations of apparent immorality. The pregnancy suggested that either Mary had been disloyal in the relationship, or that both Joseph and Mary had dishonored the religious customs and laws of the culture. This verse reveals the moral character of Joseph, saying that he was a “just man.” Because of his devotion to God and respect for the Law, Joseph contemplated the best way to end the marriage in a quiet, discreet manner. This internal conflict is a reality for those who live in a culture whose laws do not always fit God’s plan, purpose, and process. The penalty for adultery under the Law of Moses was death (see Deuteronomy 22:23-24). As Joseph pondered the best course of action, “an angel of the Lord” appeared, telling him to proceed with the marriage without fear, and explaining that

Mary’s child was conceived by the Holy Spirit (verse 20). The angel further revealed to Joseph that the child’s name would be Jesus, and explained the reason for the name (verse 21). From before His birth, Jesus was destined to be our salvation, the saving grace for God’s people.

What Do You Think? Has God ever called you to do something that challenged traditional norms and popular opinion?

Destined to Be with Us from Birth (Matthew 1:22-25)

KJV

22 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,

23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

24 Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:

25 And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.

NIV

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.

Matthew moves to connect the Jewish readers to their heritage by reminding them of Isaiah’s prophecy concerning the birth of the Messiah (verses 22-23)—that a child would be born of a virgin (see Isaiah 7:14). Matthew introduced the child as Emmanuel, “God with us,” which is more than a name or a title. The angel revealed that Jesus would not only be salvation, but also God incarnate, dwelling on earth. From this revelation, Joseph awakes from his dream and does not ponder, question, debate, or seek any greater explanation of what has been shown to him. Clear that he is doing God’s will, Joseph immediately proceeds to take Mary as his wife (verse 24). Joseph’s reaction to the angel is similar to that of Mary’s (see Luke 1:38), in that both had an immediate response to the Word of God shared by angelic visitation. Their responses mirror those of many others from the Old Testament who obeyed God’s call without hesitation. Sometimes, the things God requires may be contrary to popular thinking and common religious practices. Joseph pondered God’s Word to him, considered the matter, confirmed the instructions, and obeyed as God directed. The text further notes in verse 25 Joseph’s discipline and integrity in refusing to consummate the marriage (sexually) until after Jesus’ birth. As directed, the couple named the child Jesus. The official public naming took place in accord with Jewish tradition, eight days after His birth (see Luke 2:21).

God has planted a gift within each of us. The moment we realize the presence of God’s gift is when we must move by faith to understand and share the gift with others. Joseph and Mary understood early that Jesus was born for a purpose that was greater than the family life and identity that Joseph could provide. Joseph received Jesus as his own earthly child through public dedication at the Temple, but Joseph and Mary both knew that Jesus was not just their child but God’s own Son—a gift of salvation to the world.

What Do You Think? Have you ever refused to complete a spiritual task because you focused more on your own inability rather than trusting God's presence with you?

A CLOSING THOUGHT

Jesus was called as a Savior before His birth. Jeremiah was destined for prophetic ministry from the womb (see Jeremiah 1:5). Likewise, each of us has been ordained for a special purpose in the kingdom of God. We are called to participate in God's promise to His people. Too often, we seek God's promise for ourselves—seeking promotion and other personal gains. The gifts and promises of God are never for anyone's self-promotion or personal greatness—they are always given for the blessing and benefit of God's people. Remember that as you tap into your gift and begin to use it for God's glory, you will be giving honor to God.

YOUR LIFE

This week, set aside daily time for prayer and meditation, combined with the personal study of God's Word. Seek guidance and understanding of your unique gift from God and God's plan to use that gift to serve others and glorify His name.

YOUR WORLD!

Plan to connect with at least one person to pray about how both of you can, in God's timing, use your respective gifts to make a difference for others.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, we humbly seek Your guidance as we strive to align our wills with Yours. You have blessed Your entire creation with the grace of Your many gifts. Reveal Your will to us and teach us to be humble as we labor to do Your will and Your work. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

CONCLUSION (PREPARING FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON)

While reading the Background Scripture, please consider this: "In what ways can we demonstrate the honor that is due to the King of the world?"

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(December 14-20, 2020)

Monday, December 14: "Midwives Frustrate Pharaoh's Decree" (Exodus 1:15-22)

Tuesday, December 15: "God Answers Solomon's Dream" (1 Kings 3:5-14)

Wednesday, December 16: "Insight into The Meaning of Dreams" (Daniel 1:8-17)

Thursday, December 17: "In Christ, No Divisions Allowed" (Galatians 3:25-29)

Friday, December 18: "The Gracious Ruler Is to Come from Bethlehem" (Micah 5:1-5)

Saturday, December 19: "A Successful Return from Egypt" (Matthew 2:19-23)

Sunday, December 20: "Safe in The Midst of Danger" (Matthew 2:7-15)