

Bible Study Guide for the week of 12/12/22

1. Read through the gospel reading

2. Read the notes and comments

3. Read and answer the questions at the end by yourself or with other people

Matthew 1:18-25

18 Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. 19 Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. 20 But just when he had resolved to do 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 as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” 22 All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 23 “Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.” 24 When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife 25 but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.

19 Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly.

This is the part of the text where we see Joseph's reaction to Mary being pregnant. Joseph isn't said to be mad or shameful or any of those things (even if he was and it wasn't written down). Joseph is said to be righteous and gracious. Joseph doesn't want to drag Mary out into the streets and shame her, he wants her to still have a life. And dismissing Mary quietly would sever her attachment to Joseph. By doing this, Joseph is not only following the Jewish custom of the day, but the action of doing this would allow the father of the child to step in, obtain Mary's hand, and while there might be whispers, Joseph would have done the right thing, and everyone would be ok. However, it still seems cruel by modern societal culture for Joseph to leave Mary like this. But thanks be to God there is more to the text than this.

20 But just when he had resolved to do 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 as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

This is the part of the text where multiple different things are going on. One is that Joseph finally comes to a decision. This is not an easy situation that Joseph has found himself in. And after what seems like a good bit of discernment, Joseph is going to leave Mary because it seems to be the right thing to do. But God has different plans. Here we see an angel appear to Joseph in a dream. Matthew is telling us that Joseph is being addressed as a son of David by the angel to show that the Holy Spirit is truly the father of Jesus and while Jesus is fully divine, God is asking Joseph in this moment to be the someone to raise Jesus in on this earthly kingdom. To which the

"righteous" comes into play. Joseph obeys God's command from the angel. Joseph marries Mary and she gives birth to Jesus, and they name their son Jesus. Joseph and Mary follow God's word as a way to take responsibility of the holy Son that has come into the world and show that they are God's followers. Throughout the whispers and the talk and the silence that follows Joseph (Joseph isn't really talked about in the rest of the New Testament), Joseph follows the word of God even in the most complicated times.

**22 All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:
23 "Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us."**

Here the text refers to Isaiah 7:14 where King Ahaz is ruling over Judah and is in the midst of an attack from King Rezin and King Pekah. God told Isaiah to tell Ahaz that those who were trying to break Jerusalem's walls would not be able to. When Isaiah tells Ahaz to ask for a sign, he says he won't test God in that manner. But Isaiah makes his prophecy that God will give him a sign regardless. That a young woman is with a son, she will give birth, and his name will be Immanuel. Isaiah also goes on to prophesize that by the time the son, Immanuel, knows what is good and bad, the kings and the conflict will have gone away, and Jerusalem will have risen to great heights again. Matthew uses this prophecy to show that God is continually renewing his prophecies and covenants with his people as a sign of his everlasting grace, mercy, and love. Matthew shows how Joseph follows in a royal tradition of obeying God's commands and bringing about God's kingdom on earth and in heaven through a son who God is with and who saves the world from their sins.

Discussion Questions

- 1. Try to put yourself in Joseph's shoes, could you see yourself doing what he did to follow God's commandment, in staying by Mary's side and raising Jesus as his own (even if Jesus is God's son and Joseph is Jesus' earthly appointed guardian)?**
- 2. What would it look like to listen/follow God like Joseph does? Would you have to break a habit or follow through with something? Have you already answered God's call like Joseph did? Share your story or reflect on it as part of a meditative practice.**
- 3. Where has God renewed his promises with you in your life? If you haven't seen it yet, where would you pray that he guides you and strengthens you?**