

Series: **Christmas 2021**
Today's Title: "***A Divine Interruption***"

December 26, 2021 – *Matthew 1:18-25*

Objective: To help people know that God does amazing things in our most difficult times.

Reading through the Christmas cards at the store - looking at beautifully wrapped presents and houses lit up with lights makes Christmas a beautiful and sentimental celebration.

But the events of that first Christmas were not very pleasant.

- A young, beautiful romance went to the brink of disaster.
- Doubts about fidelity...issues of trust
- Ugly rumors and gossip about the untimely pregnancy that would stay with Mary and Jesus for the rest of their lives.
- Unexpected travel that was also long and difficult
- An uncertain future
- No comfortable place to give birth
- Alone
- Plans shattered
- New plans that were hard to understand and imagine

We can all relate in some ways.

Life has a way of changing course on us and going in a direction we never anticipated.

Doubts, rumors, gossip, unexpected trips, uncertainty about our future, being alone - most of us can say we've experienced these things.

But...has God ever interrupted your life and turned it upside down?

Has an angel ever appeared to you and told you some amazing, unbelievable things, and given your life an entirely new direction?

That's what happened to Joseph and Mary.

This young couple - preparing to get married - living a devout, Jewish life.

Faithful to God.

Faithful to each other.

Their future was ahead of them - and it was a simple plan - a simple existence.

- Marriage.
- Then, God willing, starting a family.
- Joseph's business would hopefully grow to provide for a growing family.
- They likely had plans to live in the small town where Mary lived - Nazareth, in the northern regions of Israel - near the Sea of Galilee.

'Small town' life.

Everyone knew everyone else - which was comforting, but also a bit annoying due to what seemed like a lack of privacy at times.

Small towns are known for that...news - better, gossip - travels fast in small circles.

Anyhow, that was their life...until one day...the eternal, divine plan of God entered their life and shattered their expectations.

You've heard the saying, 'Hindsight is 20/20'

Looking back, it's often easy to see how things fell into place. We can see things more clearly.

But, on the front end of the journey, when you try and look into the future - it looks like nothing will fall into place.

It often looks like everything is completely broken.

Like Humpty Dumpty - Life looks like the shattered egg - and we feel like the King's horses and men who:

"Couldn't put Humpty together again"

I want to take a few minutes today - and look at one of the most important passages in the Bible.

It's always difficult to quantify or rank passages in the Bible.

It is God's Word - so I'm always uncomfortable placing rank or levels of importance when they're all from God - they're all important!

But this passage is especially important because it is central to the person and nature of Jesus - the incarnate Son of God.

The 2nd person of the Triune God - who took on flesh - to live a sinless life - so He could be the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world.

As John the Baptizer said:

"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" - John 1:29

In this passage we see the great theological truth regarding the divinity of Jesus.

We also see the evidence provided for the Virgin Birth.

Tucked into these grand and vital truths we see the divine interruption of Joseph and Mary's lives.

- From Joseph and Mary's human perspective - we can see the interruption.
- Since hindsight is 20/20 - from our perspective we can see the interruption, but we can also see the honor - the privilege - the responsibility the birth of Jesus - the Christ - brought into the lives of Joseph and Mary.
- From the divine perspective it's the greatest of blessings.

Turn to Matthew 1:18-25

The divine interruption into Joseph and Mary's life. *vs. 18-19*

18 "Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way.

When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly."

The birth of Jesus Christ was a divine interruption - but also a blessed interruption, even though His conception messed up the plans of this young couple who was betrothed.

When a couple was betrothed, they were legally married - but they weren't yet living together as husband and wife - and there was very little social contact.

The 2 families would have come to an agreement about the marriage, and plans would start being made for the wedding ceremony - which would usually be 6-12 months from the betrothal.

This time allowed for 2 things:

1. It allowed ample time for planning the week-long wedding ceremony.
2. It allowed ample time for the fidelity of the man and woman to be proven - or disproven.

In Joseph and Mary's case - it seemed obvious that Mary had failed the fidelity test.

She was pregnant - before the wedding - and Joseph was not the father.

vs. 18 makes it very clear: the pregnancy is a result of the Holy Spirit's supernatural work in Mary's body.

The fuller - more detailed account of this is recorded in Luke's narrative.

For Joseph, this broke his heart - crushed him.

Now, you must understand the huge cultural differences between our culture - and 1st century Jewish culture.

In our culture, many engaged couples live together and are sexually intimate before marriage.

Our culture thinks nothing of this. It's normative for our culture.

In fact, if you are dating - seriously dating - and you get engaged - people think it's abnormal if you're not living together - or not having sex with each other before your wedding.

Reminder: Being culturally normal does not mean God-approved!

1st century Jewish culture was much different than our culture.

Virginity before marriage was highly valued.

The O.T. Law actually called for the death penalty - by stoning - if a woman was found to be sexually active before getting married.

In the 1st century the legal penalties were not typically enforced - and the Roman occupation of Israel was an extra limitation on the Jewish legal system.

In the 1st century, what would have normally happened was some sort of public trial - where the charge of infidelity would have been brought against Mary by Joseph - and she would have been found guilty - and her public reputation would have been ruined - in shambles.

But, due to his love for Mary, and not wanting to humiliate the woman he loved, we're told:

vs. 19 - “And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.”

There are times in life that God calls us to do something - or not do something - which will lead to a conflict with someone in our family - or a close friend.

When you put your faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins, you're called to begin living a life that honors Christ, and that can cause some tension - some problems with friends or family who don't follow Christ.

Joseph is racking his brain figuring out what to do - he either made the decision...or was leaning heavily toward the option of quietly divorcing Mary.

He was “a just man” - meaning, he was a faithful O.T. believer.

He adhered to the stipulations of Judaism - the sacrifices and special observances - he was “a just man”.

Doing the right things - staying in the lanes - doesn't mean you'll never experience pain or sorrow.

Joseph was doing everything right - he sought after God - but now...his life was falling apart...his plans were ruined.

And when we look at Mary, she said ‘Yes’ to God's plan for her - even though it would cause problems. False accusations and rumors that would last her entire life.

The most common rumor she had to endure was that she had sex or was raped by a Roman soldier.

About 30 years later, when Jesus was debating the religious establishment, they dug up this ugly rumor - or at least referenced it when they said, (John 8:41)
They said to Him, “We were not born of sexual immorality.”

What is God calling you to do - or not do - that might cause tension in your family - with your friends?
Are you willing to say ‘yes’ to God - even though it might cause tension?

The divine explanation and instructions given to Joseph. vs.
20-21

What a difficult day / or days it must have been for Joseph after Mary told him about her pregnancy.
We’re not told what she told him.

‘Joe...I’m pregnant...but don’t worry...I’m still a virgin...this is God’s child.’

We see he was deep in thought - trying to make sense of everything - and finally coming to a decision on how to handle it.

20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from 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.”

This was not a dream like we have dreams.

Dreams in the O.T. - and in Matthew's gospel - are not sub-conscious imaginations during sleep.

They are real encounters - real conversations - not imagined.

I can't explain it much more than that.

In this dream he has a real encounter with a real angel - and it dealt with the reality that was unfolding in his life.

Do you ever wake up from a nap and you're still so tired - groggy - you just want to go back to sleep?

I'm sure when he woke up from this nap, he wasn't groggy at all!

He finally had clarity on the situation!

Mary was telling the truth!!!

The baby in her really is God's Son!

He had an explanation - from God - via the angel.

And he also had some instructions.

vs. 21 - "She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

No ultrasound needed here to determine the sex of the baby.

No gender reveal party.

Mary would have a son - and they were to name Him "Jesus" - Yeshua (Aramaic)

It's interesting - and insightful to note - that all throughout the birth narratives - the Bible never says this is Joseph's baby - and it never refers to Joseph as the father.

The common reference is "the Child and His mother".

"Child" always coming first.

Galatians 4:4-5

"But when the right time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman, subject to the law.

God sent Him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that He could adopt us as His very own children."

He was "born of a woman" - because Joseph was not involved in the conception.

No human man was. The Spirit of God was.

They were to name Him Jesus - Yeshua - because "He will save His people from their sins."

Divine prophecy fulfilled. vs. 22-23

Once again, we see prophecy being fulfilled by the details of Jesus' birth.

These 2 verses are not part of the narrative account.

Matthew breaks from the narrative to give a Holy Spirit inspired commentary on the events surrounding Jesus' birth.

22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

23 “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).

This is the prophecy from **Isaiah 7:14**.

The prophet Isaiah lived and wrote about 700 years before the birth of Jesus.

The plan of God - the plan of salvation - was not an afterthought for God.

The Apostle Paul tells us in **Ephesians 1:4**

“even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world...”

It shouldn't come as a surprise to us that 700 years before Jesus was born - God knew the details of the plan - and the Holy Spirit inspired Isaiah to record some of the details.

Isaiah prophesied during a very troubling time in Israel.

- King Ahaz of Judah was afraid the royal line would be wiped out - killed.

So, through Isaiah, God gives a promise - an assurance that this would not happen.

The sign would be a virgin conceiving - and giving birth - while still a virgin.

Truly a remarkable sign.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Matthew connects Isaiah's prophecy with Mary - and Jesus' birth.

“Immanuel” - God with us.

This is affirmation of Jesus' deity - He is God incarnate.

Obeying the divine plan. vs. 24-25

Joseph's life was in ruins.

It seemed like his plans were shattered - broken.

Their reputation would be tarnished in the small town of Nazareth.

But the angel's message was clear - and a great encouragement.

God was at work, and He was working through himself and Mary!

24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife,

25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called His name Jesus."

What he thought was a disaster - a broken present and future - was actually an amazing blessing, honor and responsibility.

He obeys in 2 areas.

1) He takes Mary as his wife - fully assured that she has not been unfaithful to him. Her baby is the Son of God - Savior of the world!

2) He names the baby Jesus - just as the angel told him.

We don't have a command to Joseph not to consummate the marriage, but he maintains and protects Mary's virginity until after the birth of Jesus.

The Bible tells us they had other children - we're even told their names.

But until Jesus was born - Mary remained a virgin.

Apply it...

God interrupts your life.

Are you being pulled in opposite directions - pulled toward God and His will for your life - and pulled by the world and what the world values and prioritizes? The ways of God are contrary to most of the world's ways.

Becoming a Christian does set you against much of the world's values, attitudes, and practices.

Know that being a Christian - a follower of Christ - interrupts your life!

The clarity of God's Word.

The Bible is how God communicates His desires for our life.

In the Bible, God not only explains the details of what it means to follow Jesus - but He also gives instructions on how we should live...how we should honor Christ with our life.

An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream - and explained what God was doing - and gave instructions on what Joseph needed to do.

Today, we don't need to wait for an angel to appear -
we can open up a Bible - and God can speak to us
loud and clear through the pages of Scripture!

Trust and obey God's plan for your life.

God is always true to His Word.

What He says He will do - He does.

When He makes a promise - He keeps His promises.

Trust Him.

When God tells us to do something - we need to
obey.

Joseph obeyed - he took Mary as his wife - he
named the baby boy Jesus.

God has kept His promises to you.

He loves you.

He lived - and died for you.

He rose from the dead - conquered death and sin.

He calls you to believe - to put your faith in Jesus -
because He was born - “to save His people from their
sins.”

Close in prayer