

Series: **Christmas 2023**
Today's Title: **"The Parents of Jesus"**
December 17, 2023 – *Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38*

Objective: To encourage believers that God uses people who are faithful and willing to obey.

Plant Pastor Search Update – Offering for church plant reminder.

Opening Prayer

Christmas is 1 week away.

Christmas is a holiday that can be lost in the busyness and events of the season.

It's so easy for the lists – the to-do list – the parties and gatherings to become the focus – and what we actually celebrate on Christmas is lost in it all.

This year, I want to help us look at Christmas through a human lens.

Well... a human and divine lens.

Today we are looking at **"The Parents of Jesus"**, next week, in our Christmas Eve services, we will look at **"The Birth of Jesus"**, and then on Dec. 31 we will consider **"The Reception of Jesus"**.

Turn to **Matthew 1:18-25**

One of the exciting things about becoming a grandparent is watching your kids become parents and how it changes them. To see your kids as parents is both exciting – and weird.

You remember when they were 7 or 13 – and then you see them with a baby of their own!!

It's easy to deify the parents of Jesus – Joseph and Mary. To think they were so perfect – flawless – knew how to do everything.

But the truth is they were normal people – like you and me – and God used them in a glorious way that changed the world.

My hope today is to look at Joseph and Mary – who they were – and I hope this will encourage us in our life and faith today.

There are 2 main passages in the Gospels which tell us about Joseph and Mary.

Matthew tells us more about Joseph – and Luke tells us more about Mary.

Joseph's godly character.

We don't have a lot of information about Joseph in the Bible.

We know he was a carpenter. The Greek can mean woodworker or mason. Many believe Joseph worked with both materials.

vs. 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.”

We know from 1st century Jewish culture that marriages were arranged.

Both families would agree to have the marriage – a price would be paid to the family of the bride – and the planning would begin.

In Jewish culture, this was called a betrothal.

This is like our engagement, but with much more legal force.

The betrothal period usually lasted about 1 year.

During that time, the couple was legally considered husband and wife – but they had no physical contact with each other.

Among other things, the betrothal year provided enough time to judge the character and morals of the couple.

At the end of the betrothal, the wedding would take place.

1st century Jewish weddings lasted many days – up to a week!

After the wedding, the couple would then – finally – consummate the marriage.

So, when we read in **vs. 18** that while they were betrothed (before the wedding and consummation) “before they came together” that Mary was pregnant – this was a problem. This is where we first see the character of Joseph – his kindness and genuine concern for Mary.

Most theologians and scholars believe Joseph was older than Mary. Some think he was much older – while others hold to a much smaller gap in their ages.

Marriage – and its sacredness was a huge deal in this culture.

Our culture has lost much of the sacredness of marriage.

So, it's important to understand what happens here through a 1st century point of view.

When Joseph found out Mary was pregnant, this would have been devastating news.

We know from his reaction that Joseph was not a hot-tempered man. As upset as he must have been, he was not just reacting – he was thinking through the problem and what the best course of action was.

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

“...being a just man” – Greek = ‘*righteous*’

Joseph is a man of faith – but his faith was not just in word, he lived out his faith.

He didn't just add faith to his life – his life was molded – directed by his faith.

Because of this, we're told he was “unwilling to put her to shame...”.

According to Jewish law, Joseph's 1st option was to inflict the maximum penalty for a woman in Mary's

situation (pregnant outside of marriage), which was death by stoning.

However, in the 1st century, this maximum punishment was not carried out very often.

Instead, since a legal divorce was required to annul the betrothal, the 2nd of Joseph's options to get out of this mess was to have a public trial – and Joseph would bring obvious evidence to publicly shame Mary and to protect his own reputation.

This would free him from the obligation of the betrothal – but it would ruin Mary's reputation forever in the small town of Nazareth.

A 3rd option would be to divorce Mary – but do so quietly – in a more private setting.

This would require 2 or 3 witnesses who would sign the divorce decree and the reasons for it.

This would then be recorded but would allow for Mary to retain her reputation – at least until she started to show. Maybe she could move to a relative's home in another town and have the baby – limiting the amount of small-town shame and humiliation which she would find in Nazareth.

Joseph chose option #3 - the quiet divorce option.

vs. 19b - “...resolved to divorce her quietly.”

Joseph chose this option due to his love and care for Mary.

But a divorce – even a quiet one - would be a huge problem for Mary trying to raise a child on her own.

Joseph's obedience and spiritual leadership.

As I mentioned a moment ago, Joseph didn't simply add faith to his life – his life was molded and directed by his faith.

This is what we see here – in how he made decisions – major decisions in his life.

Read Matthew 1:20-21

The biggest question / concern for Joseph was answered by the angel.

Mary's pregnancy was as she said – from God – not due to her indiscretion.

Maybe she was godlier than he thought!

But taking Mary as his wife would still be problematic.

They would still have to deal with the small-town gossip and the disgusted looks from those who would suspect what Joseph himself assumed to be the truth.

This small-town gossip was not a mere inconvenience.

He was a small-town businessman.

Who was going to hire the carpenter who didn't care about God's Law?

Who didn't follow God's Law?

What about their family and close friends?

How would they respond to this situation?

The angel not only confirms Mary's version of events, but he also tells Joseph what to name the baby boy: Jesus.

But we also see Joseph's spiritual commitment to God in what he doesn't do.

Read vs. 22-25

His obedience was immediate, "he took his wife" (24b).

But his obedience was also long term.

Somehow, Joseph understood, at least in part, the importance of Mary's virginity – up until the baby was born.

"...but knew her not until she had given birth to a son."

There is no doubt that this was a denial of his desires and a delay in his marriage 'rights'.

But Joseph understood – and was committed to God's plan – even when it was not in his own interests.

He understood that God's commands and His purposes are a higher priority than his own.

We also see his obedience in 2 other occasions.

First, in the family's escape to Egypt.

Read Matthew 2:13-15a

Once again, Joseph's obedience is immediate.

Leaving the country – going to Egypt would be a huge disruption to his business back in Nazareth – even more than their time in Bethlehem.

Aside from leaving all family and friends – without notice.

Nobody would know where they were.

They would simply be gone – for about 2 more years in addition to their time in Bethlehem.

Second, we see Joseph's obedience about 12 years later.

Read Luke 2:41-42

Luke 2:41-42

“Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He (Jesus) was twelve years old, they went up according to custom.”

“every year” the family made the trip to Jerusalem for Passover – not a small journey!

This reveals the spiritual leadership of Joseph's to his family.

We know from Matthew and Mark's Gospels (Matt. 13:55-56; Mark 6:3) that after Jesus was born, Joseph and Mary had a normal, sexual, husband and wife relationship.

Mary was not a perpetual virgin for the rest of her life.

According to **Mark 6:3**, they had at least 4 other boys and an unspecified number of daughters after Jesus was

born. (“Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him.)

Imagine traveling 70-80 miles – on foot – with 6+ kids -
= all under the age of 12 – every year!

Joseph led his family to value spiritual things.

He led by example.

Nowhere in the Bible are the words of Joseph recorded.
Only his actions – his obedience – his example.

Mary wasn't the only one God chose.

He also chose Joseph to be the adoptive, earthly father
to His only begotten Son.

Now let's shift and look at Mary.

Turn to Luke 1:26-38

We are introduced to Mary in **Luke 1**.

Mary's godly character.

The Bible gives us a picture of Mary's faithful life to the Lord.

We believe Mary was probably 13-15 years old when she gave birth to Jesus.

In 1st century Jewish custom, as soon as a girl hit puberty, a marriage would be arranged.

There's no reason to think Mary's situation was any different.

Read Luke 1:26-38

I want to draw attention to 3 character traits of Mary we see in these verses.

First, she was morally faithful to God's commands.

She was a "virgin".

vs. 26-27

"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary."

The virginity of Mary is vitally important for our faith.

I don't have time in this message to focus on the importance of the virgin birth.

If you're interested in that I would point you to our website – or the church app – 2016 Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's series – sermon titled, "The Virgin Birth" - December 4, 2016.

The virgin birth speaks volumes about the person and nature of Jesus, but it also reveals Mary's devout, committed life.

Like Joseph, she was obedient to God's commands, even if they were in conflict with human desires.

We hear so much today about *'being true to yourself'* – or *'the true you'*.

Many of these modern-day attitudes are an excuse to live a selfish life – with your greatest concern what you want to do or be.

There's little regard for others – how your choices will impact others – or even any thought to what God's commands tell us.

Mary was faithful to God's commands.

Second, we see God's grace in her life. We see her faith.

vs. 28, 30

And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"

And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."

The phrase "O favored one" is translating a Greek word that speaks of God's favor, or His grace.

It's only used here, and in **Ephesians 1:6**.

Ephesians 1:6

"...to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved."

It speaks to Mary's faith – as she also testifies to in her song of testimony – called 'The Magnificat', which is recorded at the end of **Luke 1**.

Here's the first few verses of her testimony:

Luke 1:46-48

And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has looked on the humble estate of His servant.”

She clearly states her reliance on God as her Savior. She is a sinner – like all of us – in need of a Savior. She has a humble view of herself – and embraces her role as “His servant.”

Third, she was a servant to the Lord.

She probably had a sense – certainly not a full understanding of all the implications in this moment – but she knew this miraculous pregnancy would not be seen as miraculous by others.

Yet, knowing what she did know – and certainly not having time to think through the entire proposal and all its implications – she did not hesitate to say, “May your word to me be fulfilled.”

How quick are we to say ‘yes’ to God’s plan for our life?

Usually, we’re really good about using reason in making life decisions.

We make the calculations and figure out what is reasonable, affordable, most advantageous, and safe.

I’m not against reason.

God gave us a brain – I’m not sure we use it enough!

But what about when our 'reasoning' starts to collide with divine revelation?

But... will we set aside reason – in order to obey and follow God's revelation to us?

God's plan doesn't always sync with our human reason.

What if Joseph had used reason in his decision.

What if Mary had relied on her own reason?

Their life would have been 'safer' – more stable.

But think of what they would have missed out on?

They were faithful in poverty.

Joseph and Mary were poor.

Jesus did not grow up in wealth.

We know they were poor from the sacrifice they brought to the temple – when they presented Jesus, their firstborn male, to the Lord, and for Mary's purification sacrifice.

The purification sacrifice – a sacrifice women were to offer after giving birth – the detail for this sacrifice is recorded in **Leviticus 12**. I'm just going to read from **vs. 6 and 8** – which refers to the type of animal required for this sacrifice.

Leviticus 12:6-8

vs. 6 - “And when the days of her purifying are completed, whether for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting a lamb a year old for a burnt offering, and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering,

vs. 8 - And if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering.”

For the poor, the sacrifice required was not a lamb, but 2 turtledoves or 2 pigeons.

Turn to Luke 2:22

Read Luke 2:22, 24

“And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord... and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.”

Poverty does not mean God is not with you – or that He is judging you.

Poverty is a reality of life.

It’s part of the human condition.

According to our reason – we think it’s easier to worship God if you have money.

But the Bible is clear – money often hardens the heart toward God.

Money often makes a person believe they don’t need God – they already have everything they need.

Apply it...

Live by God's revelation, not just your reason.

Reason is part of the image of God in us, but it's not the only thing He's given us to guide and direct our life.

He's given us His Word.

Theologians refer to the Bible as 'Special Revelation'.

It's unique to all the other forms of divine revelation.

The Word of God – the Bible – is "living and active" – it's inspired by the Spirit of God.

Psalm 119:104-105

"Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

We need to let Scripture guide our steps – where our reason often doesn't allow.

Proverbs 3:5-6

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.

In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths."

God prefers the obedient over the talented.

He's not against those who are talented, competent, skilled, capable, or extremely gifted.

But He doesn't need any of that.

What He really wants is someone who is obedient.

Someone who will listen to what He has revealed – and do it.

Paul said is this way.

2 Corinthians 12:9b-10

“I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities.

For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Joseph and Mary – I’m sure they had some wonderful talents.

Joseph may have been a skilled craftsman.

But we’re not told about any of that – because that’s not the most important thing.

We are told about their obedience – their faithfulness to the Lord.

God does the amazing through the ordinary.

1 Corinthians 1:27

“God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong...”

Focus on obedience.

This Christmas, give God what He wants the most.

Your heart.

Your life.

Your obedience.

Close in prayer