



Christmas According to Joseph

Matthew 1:18-25 & John 6:35-51

Lake Arrowhead Church, Waleska, Georgia
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CHRISTMAS ACCORDING TO JOSEPH

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*Come, adore Him ... gift of heaven
Precious Jesus ... born to save us
Praise His name again and again
Oh come, let us adore Him.¹*

There's a story behind that phrase, "O come, let us adore Him." It's the story behind the great Christmas carol "O Come, All Ye Faithful."

The 18th century was a time of religious and political turmoil in Great Britain. The Church of England was in constant conflict with the Roman Catholic Church, each vying for religious and political dominance. When the Protestant king enacted oppressive laws on Catholics, many sailed across the Atlantic in search of religious liberty and others fled to France.

One such Christian was John Francis Wade. Wade was a Catholic who found exile in France. He made his living as a musician and calligrapher, copying and selling music to Catholic chapels. But the religious war in England left its scars on Wade, and he was disillusioned and depressed. During this period of his life he sought healing for his soul in songwriting. In 1745, Wade composed the lyrics to *Adestes Fidelis*. Or as we call it, "O Come, All Ye Faithful," which includes the phrase "O come, let us adore Him." It was as if Wade was saying, "Why can't it just be about Jesus?"

One hundred years later, religious turmoil continued and the Church of England became even more political and oppressive. One voice of protest was that of an Anglican priest named Frederick Oakeley. Oakeley pleaded for spiritual renewal in the church. But like many others, he was branded a troublemaker and forced to leave the Anglican church. He too was disillusioned and depressed. And it was during this time, in 1840, that Oakeley came across John Francis Wade's *Adestes Fidelis* and translated it into English. "O come, all ye faithful ... O come, let us adore Him." Oakeley resonated with what Wade had written 100 years earlier. "Why can't it just be about Jesus?"

Every day, 360,000 babies are born around the world. Some born rich, but most born poor. Some grow up to be famous, but most do not. But for every woman who gives birth, her baby is special. That was certainly true 2,000 years ago when a Jewish teenager gave birth to her son. An angel declared, "I bring you good news of a great joy ... For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord!" (Luke 2:10-11, NAS). The most unique and most significant birth in history was the birth of Jesus, the Son of God, the Savior of the world.
HE IS BORN!

We read the Christmas story year after year, not because it's traditional and not because it's sentimental. We read it because it's true. We believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who was born through the miracle of virgin birth, who sacrificed His life on the cross, and who supernaturally rose from the dead proving to be the Son of God and proving that everything He

said is true. We believe Jesus is the Savior of the world. That's what Christmas means to us, worshiping and celebrating Jesus Christ as our Savior. "O come, let us adore Him."

WHAT DID JOSEPH THINK ABOUT THIS BABY?

Matthew 1 tells the Christmas story from Joseph's perspective. Joseph was a young man with ambitions of opening a carpentry shop and raising a family with his beloved Mary. Like any other young couple, Joseph and Mary had made a lifetime of plans, until God dramatically altered those plans. As we read Matthew 1, imagine what was going through Joseph's mind. ***What did Joseph think about this baby?***

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

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. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel," which means, God with us.

When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took Mary as his wife but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son, and he called His name Jesus. (Matthew 1:18-25, ESV)

For Mary something miraculous had happened, but for Joseph something scandalous had happened. It was the shock of his life. He was disappointed, he was embarrassed, he was enraged. One moment he felt like punching a hole in the wall, and the next sobbing his eyes out. "How could she do this to me? ... How can I explain this to my family? ... Does she think I'm a fool to believe a story like that?"²

Joseph and Mary were "betrothed." Legally, they were considered husband and wife.³ So much so, that if the man died during betrothal, the woman would be considered a widow. Betrothal lasted a full year. To give the man time to establish himself in a trade and time to reveal if the woman was pure.⁴

Mary had obviously broken that trust, or so it seemed, and a broken-hearted Joseph was ready to walk away. There were two ways he could do it. He could charge Mary with adultery in court and publicly shame her, or he could break the engagement with a private divorce certificate. Joseph choose compassion and "resolved to divorce her quietly" and not "disgrace her publicly" (Matthew 1:19, ESV, NLT).

But he didn't go through with it, because an angel spoke to him as had spoken to Mary. "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. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:20-21, ESV).

It was as if God said to Mary and Joseph, "I trust you with this. Mary, of all the women in the world, and Joseph, of all the men in the world, I choose you. The time of the Messiah has come and I want you to be a part of it. I trust My Son to be your son."

In submission and humility, Mary said, "Be it done to me according to Your word" (Luke 1:38, NLT). And in submission and obedience, Joseph "did as the angel of the Lord commanded him" (Matthew 1:24, ESV).

The New Testament records very few words from Mary, and none from Joseph. Which leaves us to wonder what went through his mind and what he thought about this baby.

When I held each of my sons for the first time, I wondered what sports they would play and who they would marry. I thought about teaching them how to ride a bike and how to shoot a basketball. Wonder what was going through Joseph's mind?

Surely, the angel's words ricocheted in his mind. "Conceived by the Holy Spirit ... name Him Jesus ... save His people from their sins ... Immanuel ... God with us." It was too fantastic to believe, yet too fantastic not to believe.

As Joseph held that baby in his arms surely he wondered, "Is my son really God's son?" Joseph and Mary must have asked that question a thousand times. Surely, they must have sat back at times watching Jesus and wondering, "Who is this child?"

I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

That's the same question we ask, and the same question we must answer. "Who is this child?" What are we to think about Jesus? Jesus helps us understand who He is by using several metaphors to describe Himself.

- To those who live in spiritual darkness, Jesus said, "I am light of the world" (John 8:12).
- To those who cannot find their way to God, Jesus said, "I am the door" (John 10:9).
- To those who need guidance and direction, Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11).
- To those whose hearts are withering inside, Jesus said, "I am the true vine" (John 15:5).
- To those who are seeking God, Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

He also referred to Himself as “the bread of life.” Jesus said, “I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me (whoever believes in me) will never be hungry again” (John 6:35, NLT). Let that sink in and understand that ***Christmas is about Jesus satisfying the deepest hunger in the human soul.*** Jesus repeated the metaphor, and said, “Yes, I am the bread of life! ... I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever” (John 6:48, 51, NLT).⁵

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, which means “house of bread.” How appropriate for the “house of bread” to be the birthplace of the one who would be called the “bread of life.”

Jesus used a simple object to describe Himself. Something found on every kitchen table. Both rich and poor understand bread. Bread is a staple in every culture. In France, it’s a baguette. In Mexico, it’s a tortilla. In New York, it’s a bagel. And in Georgia, it’s a Krispy Kreme doughnut. Bread is key to survival. Bread sustains life. It’s also a symbol of community. Breaking bread binds families together and expresses hospitality to neighbors. Bread is also used for celebrations. It is a sacred symbol in many cultures and religions. Bread also reminds us of God’s provision. It reminds us of our dependence on God.

Current statistics on world hunger report that 1 in 4 people are at risk of dying from starvation. Two billion out of the 8 billion people on the planet are hungry. That’s 25%. It’s worse in Africa where 60% of the population lives in a constant state of hunger. The eastern region of Africa – Sudan, Ethiopia, and Somalia – is called “the hungriest place on earth.”⁶ But there is more than enough food produced each year to feed the entire world, but government corruption, military conflict, economic instability, violence and lawlessness prevent that. So over a thousand people die from starvation every hour, 24,000 every day, and 9 million every year. World hunger is a complex crisis, but the solution is simple. People need bread.

And the same is true spiritually. When Jesus said, “I am the bread of life,” He was telling us that only He can satisfy our deepest hunger.

John 6 records the miracle of bread when Jesus fed 5,000 people with only five loaves and two fish. But the miracle was not just filling people’s stomachs. Jesus offered a different kind of bread. Not bread that satisfies for a day, but bread that satisfies for eternity. It was as if Jesus said, “If you think what I did on the hillside was incredible, by multiplying bread to feed 5,000, listen to what I am about to offer you.” Then Jesus said, “I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me (whoever believes in me) will never be hungry again ... Yes, I am the bread of life! ... I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever” (John 6:35, 48, 51, NLT).

What bread is to physical hunger, Jesus is to spiritual hunger. He once said, “Man shall not live by bread alone.”⁷ Meaning there is more to life than eating and breathing. There is the soul. There is something spiritual about us. And that’s why, as “the bread of life,” only Jesus can satisfy the deepest hunger of the soul.

And what is that hunger?

We hunger for acceptance. We want to belong. No one wants to be on the outside looking in. So God invites us to become a part of His family. The Bible says, “To all who believe him and accept him, he gives the right to become children of God” (John 1:12, NLT).⁸ Nothing could be more significant or satisfying than being a child of God.⁹

We hunger for forgiveness. All of us are embarrassed and ashamed about something in our past, and when we realize our mistakes offend a holy God, the conviction is heavy. And we want relief. And God promises that relief. The promise is repeated in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, when God says, “I will forgive you ... your sins I will remember no more.”¹⁰

We also hunger for help. Life is tough. It can be painful. And we need help. And God promises to be that help. Psalm 46 says, “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1, NIV). He promises, “Do not fear, for I am with you; do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10, NAS).

Acceptance, forgiveness, help. That’s what we hunger for. That’s what everyone hungers for. But there’s more. As “the bread of life,” Jesus promises eternal life. “For it is my Father’s will that all who see his Son and believe in him should have eternal life ... Yes, I am the bread of life! ... I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever” (John 6:40, 48, 51, NLT).¹¹

Is it really true? Can a baby satisfy the hunger of the human soul? Can a baby make us acceptable to God, forgive our sin, and help us when life is tough? Can a baby guarantee eternal life?

The answer is yes, yes, yes! It’s possible because the baby grew up. Because the baby is the Son of God. Because the baby went to the cross. Jesus hinted of the cross when He said this bread is “my flesh” (John 6:51). He was talking about His death. He was talking about giving His life in order to give us life. “Anyone who eats this bread,” anyone who believes in Him, “will live forever” (John 6:51, NLT).

We wonder just like Joseph and Mary, “Who is this child?” He is the Son of God, the Savior of the world, Immanuel, God with us. And as “the bread of life,” only Jesus can satisfy the spiritual hunger of the soul.

WHO IS THIS BABY TO YOU?

Most of us have found this to be true. And that’s why worship Jesus and celebrate Him at Christmas. But what about you? *Who is this baby to you?* Maybe you’re still unconvinced. Maybe you’re not ready to accept the claims of Christianity. I respect that. But let me ask you, do you ever feel like something is missing?

You might say, “Missing? I don’t feel like anything is missing. My life is great.” Okay, things may be great in your life right now. You have a great job, live in a great house, have a great family, and even a great golf score. I admit a person can live without God and enjoy a great life.

Maybe you've tasted a lot in life, but if you've never tasted the "bread of life," if you don't have Jesus in your life, then you are missing something.

The greatest mistake, the most fatal mistake, a person can make is to think that life without God is better. It may seem fulfilling and liberating, but it's just not true. Life without God means you're on your own! It means no relationship with God, no guidance from God, no help from God. It means no forgiveness, no salvation, and no eternal life. Do you hear what's at stake? The greatest mistake, the most fatal mistake, a person can make is to think that life without God is better. Are you sure you want to do that? Because you don't have to.

The moment you believe in Jesus, you will be forgiven of everything you've ever done wrong, you will experience peace within and peace with God, you will become a child of God and He will become your Father, and you will have the hope and the assurance of one day seeing Jesus face to face and living with Him forever in heaven. Again, the Bible says, "To all who believe him and accept him, he gives the right to become children of God" (John 1:12, NLT).

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me (whoever believes in me) will never be hungry again ... Yes, I am the bread of life! ... I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever" (John 6:35, 48, 51, NLT). As "the bread of life," only Jesus can satisfy the deepest hunger of the soul.

NOTES

¹ Lyrics of “Come Adore Him.” Songwriters – Colby Wedgeworth, Riley Clemmons, Molly Grayson. © Capitol Cmg Paragon, Capitol Cmg Genesis, Wedgeworth Publishing, Colby Wedgeworth Designee, Riley Clemmons Hold Account.

² Max Lucado writes, “Common sense told him not to ... ‘Conceived by the Holy Spirit? Come on!’ Self-defense told him not to do it. ‘Who will believe me? What will our families think?’ Convenience told him not to do it. ‘Just when I was hoping to settle down and raise a family.’ Pride told him not to do it. ‘If she expects me to buy a tale like that ...’ But God told him to do it (to believe it). And that’s what bothered him.” [Max Lucado, *God Came Near* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1987), pages 39-40.

³ Verse 19 calls Joseph “her husband.”

⁴ See Deuteronomy 22. According to the Old Testament law, a woman could be stoned to death for breaking the trust of betrothal.

⁵ Jesus was actually rebuking the religious leaders in this scene. “So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, ‘I am the bread that came down from heaven.’ They said, ‘Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Do not grumble among yourselves ... I am the bread of life ... I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.’” (John 6:41-43, 48, 51, ESV).

⁶ Jason Straziuso, “Hungriest Place on Earth – And Getting Worse,” *Associated Press*, 4/8/2010.

⁷ See Matthew 4:4.

⁸ Changed tense for presentation.

⁹ See John 1:12, Galatians 3:26, and 1 John 3:1.

¹⁰ See Jeremiah 31:34 and Hebrews 10:17.

¹¹ When Jesus said this, some in the crowd said, “Isn’t this Jesus, the son of Joseph? We know his father and mother” (John 6:42, NLT). Some were saying, “I remember when He was born. We know his father and mother. He’s just a carpenter’s son. Who does he think he is?”