

Called to Be Emmanuel

Kayla laid awake. She had three hours before she had to get up for work. She was angry and contemplative. Torrential rains in recent weeks had brought water into her carpeted basement. She had long wanted to remove the old carpet anyway, but now it was a necessity. Her former handyman, who moved out of town, had referred her to Lemarcus as a repair man.

Saturday, Lemarcus spent a few hours at her house, pulling up the carpet in her basement and fixing other miscellaneous items. During the whole time, he ranted and raved about the evils of Christianity, Jesus, the government, the president, white people, the police, and more.

Kayla tried to defend and explain Christ and the Gospel, and it seemed to enrage Lemarcus even more. Kayla backed off and let him work.

When he left, Kayla felt dirty and ashamed. She repeatedly apologized to the Lord. Later, she realized the Holy Spirit was telling her Lemarcus should not come back. Of course, the Lord was right. He seemed to be bringing evil into her home.

However, that was also a problem. Kayla was a single homeowner. Lemarcus was knowledgeable, available, and very reasonable in price.

Still, Kayla had to obey God. She had to stand up for the lover of her soul! God had looked after her up to this point. It was settled. No more Lemarcus!

Then Kayla fell fast asleep.

1. *When have you been afraid to follow God's command?*

2. *Why is fear the enemy of faith?*

3. *Describe a time when you have felt God with you as you obeyed Him.*

Joseph Hears the News

Matthew 1:18-19, 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.

Matthew 1:18-19, NIV

¹⁸This 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. ¹⁹Because 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.

If Mary and Joseph were of the ages typical for marriage in their time and place, she was perhaps in her early teens and he was perhaps somewhat older. The couple must have dreamed about what their life together would be like. Yet neither of them could have imagined the extraordinary privilege and responsibility that would be theirs—the raising of God’s Son.

However, that was not something positive at the beginning of their engagement. Matthew begins his account of Jesus’ birth with the fact of Mary’s pregnancy before she was married to Joseph. Matthew does not provide details of the angel’s visit to Mary or her trip to see Elizabeth after the angel appeared to her (Luke 1:26-39). Matthew picks up the story when it became obvious that Mary was pregnant, which likely occurred when she returned from her three month long stay with Elizabeth, whom Luke describes as her “relative” (Luke 1:36, 56).

The news of Mary’s pregnancy not only stirred up much controversy in her hometown of Nazareth; it no doubt stunned Joseph. Mary knew she was with child because of the Holy Spirit, but how could she explain that to her future husband? Imagine the difficulty of explaining she remained a virgin in spite of being with child.

Upon hearing of Mary's condition, Joseph decided he could not go through with the marriage and sought a way to quietly divorce her. Since he knew he could not be the father, he drew the only logical conclusion: she had been unfaithful to him.

According to Jewish law, a betrothal legally bound a couple together, which required that Joseph divorce Mary in order to break the betrothal covenant. He could not just walk away from it as one can do today with an engagement.

Joseph displayed much kindness by not seeking to expose Mary to public shame. He desired to handle the matter in private so as not to disgrace Mary. Further, if he had exposed her sin publicly, the law allowed for her to be stoned to death for the crime of adultery since Joseph was already considered her "husband" (vs. 19; Exod. 20:14). So despite what had happened, it seems he still loved her.

4. *Why would Mary find it difficult to explain her condition to Joseph or anyone else?*

5. *How did Joseph display his love for Mary in his response to the discovery that she was with child?*

An Angel Appears to Joseph

Matthew 1:20-21, KJV

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.

Matthew 1:20-21, NIV

²⁰But 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. ²¹She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

An angel appeared to Joseph while he "considered" the

matter of divorce (vs. 20). The angel, perhaps the same Gabriel who told Mary the news, spoke to him in a dream. The angel's address to him as the "son of David" would have alerted Joseph to messianic implications of the message. He needed to pay attention.

The angel told Joseph not to be "afraid" to take Mary as his wife (vs. 20). This indicates Joseph's reluctance to divorce Mary in spite of the evidence of her unfaithfulness and the social pressure to do so. Perhaps he had heard her story directly from her or through others and wanted to believe her explanation.

The angel revealed that the Holy Spirit had conceived the child and that he should name Him "Jesus." Jesus, or Joshua in the Hebrew Old Testament, means "the Lord is salvation." The name points to His divinely appointed mission: to "save his people from their sins" (Mark 10:45).

6. What does the angel's message for Joseph not to "be afraid to take Mary home as your wife" imply about Joseph's state of mind?

7. What does the angel tell Joseph about the purpose of Jesus' life?

Joseph Obeys the Lord

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

Matthew 1:22-25, NIV

²²All 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").

²⁴When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵But he did not consummate their

KJV

him his wife:

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

NIV

marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

As he does throughout his Gospel, Matthew shows how Jesus fulfilled prophecy. In this passage Matthew quotes Isaiah 7:14, which predicts the Savior's virgin birth. Even though such a miraculous birth had never happened before, the prophet Isaiah spoke of it centuries earlier.

Matthew wanted his readers to know that Jesus' birth resulted from a miracle performed by the Holy Spirit in fulfillment of the words God had spoken through Isaiah. It happened just as Isaiah prophesied centuries earlier (7:14).

The name "Immanuel" literally means "God with us." Only Jesus fulfills such a title. As we see from the New Testament, He was equal to God the Father in every aspect (Heb. 1:3). No one else reveals God as the One who came to us long ago.

Isaiah's words initially referred to a more immediate birth as a sign to the "house of David" (7:13). The name "Immanuel," however, clarifies that Jesus ultimately fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14. Only He came into the world as God just as the name tells us He would do.

Once Joseph awoke from the dream, he promptly obeyed the word of the Lord revealed to him through the angel. Though not an easy path for either Joseph or Mary, they both accepted the roles God designed for them in bringing His Son into the world.

Matthew does explain why Joseph and Mary did not have sexual relations until after Jesus' birth. Perhaps they abstained out of their respect for the child or possibly to further refute allegations that Joseph was Jesus' natural father.

8. *How did Jesus' miraculous birth fulfill prophecy?*

9. *What does Joseph's obedient response the angel's message tell us about him?*

The Power of Obedience—The Consequences of Disobedience

Joseph and Mary knew that there was grace and favor in obedience to God, despite the unique and daunting task He had given them. There are rewards for obedience and consequences for disobedience.

People in biblical history fall into one of two categories: they are either an example of what to do, or an example of what not to do. When you read the Bible, always recognize when God is warning us not to follow the path of the unrighteous.

Jesus is the perfect example for our lives; we should “look unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2, KJV). All other believers (the kings, priests, prophets, and disciples) did some things well and failed in other ways. When you read the Bible, always discern who pleased God and who grieved God.

Even someone “after [God’s] own heart” (Acts 13:22) failed miserably at times. David’s adultery shows what not to do; we see the judgment that followed. David remained king, but he eventually buried the first child born to Bathsheba, Israel was defeated in battle, his daughter Tamar was raped by her half-brother Ammon, and his son Absalom fought to take David’s throne.

God is exalted in our hearts when we obey Him in all that He asks us to do. Consider the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, their suffering and sacrifice not only impacted their generation but still impact believers today. Obedience produces endless fruit.

10. *Why is it important to take responsibility for our disobedience and confess our sins to God?*

11. *When have you seen the consequences of disobedience and the rewards of obedience in your own life?*

12. *How can Philippians 3:13-14 help us understand what to do when we disobey God?*

Listening and Obeying

It is an honor for us to be chosen by God to do things for Him. There are tremendous rewards for those who put Him first in their lives—first in study, worship, giving, and obedience. The promise and obedience go hand-in-hand. When we both listen to Him and obey Him, we glorify Him and others are drawn to Him.

► *Examine every aspect of your life and weigh your obedience. Are you obeying the Lord on your job, in your home, even at church? Is your life characterized by righteousness and peace? Pray about how the Holy Spirit can help you change that this week as you obey the Lord more and more.*

KEY VERSE

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. 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

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. 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

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of December 14 through December 20

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** Exodus 1:15-22—Midwives Frustrate Pharaoh's Decree.
- Tues.** 1 Kings 3:5-14—God Answers Solomon's Dream.
- Wed.** Daniel 1:8-17—Insight into the Meaning of Dreams.
- Thurs.** Galatians 3:25-29—In Christ, No Divisions Are Allowed.
- Fri.** Micah 5:1-6—A Great Ruler to Come from Bethlehem.
- Sat.** Matthew 2:19-23—A Successful Return from Egypt.
- Sun.** Matthew 2:7-15—Safe in the Midst of Danger.