

Joseph

Previously, we studied Mary the mother of Christ, and her faith and role within the Christmas story. As we continue through our Advent series for our Bible study, we will turn our attention to Mary's husband, Joseph. Recall that Advent is the season right before Christmas as we patiently anticipate and celebrate the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ ('advent' means 'to come, or arrival'). When we considered Mary, we read pieces of Luke 1-2, but for this study, we will read pieces of Matthew 1-2, since Matthew emphasizes the role of Joseph in the birth narrative of Jesus Christ while Luke emphasizes the role of Mary.

The Gospel of Matthew opens with a genealogy of Jesus Christ, which traces his lineage through the men of his family tree all way back to Abraham, the father of all the Jews. As you look at the genealogy, read the last two verses (15-16), which say, **“and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.”** These verses contain quite a few important words to which we must pay careful attention. The grammar you learn in your English class is truly important, especially for reading the Bible. First, the flow of the genealogy, 'this man was father of that man, and that man was father of so and so,' is broken when it comes to Joseph. The passage does not say Joseph was the father of Jesus, but Joseph was the *husband* of Mary. Joseph is not the sire of Jesus, but the husband of Mary; and it is of Mary that Jesus was born. Matthew the Evangelist clearly communicates that Jesus was born of Mary, not of Mary *and* Joseph. Like Luke, Matthew says that the child within Mary **“is from the Holy Spirit”** (Matthew 1:18, 20).

While Matthew plainly tells us that Joseph is not the biological father of Jesus, he still impresses on us the fatherly role that Joseph played in Jesus' life. This is the second thing that we must notice at the end of the genealogy: that while Jesus was not fathered by Joseph, he is still traced through Joseph's line. Jesus is tied to Joseph's family tree like every other natural son is tied into his own father's family tree. By taking Mary as his wife, Joseph is also taking Jesus to be his son. Joseph is not biological father of Jesus, but he is the adoptive father of Jesus. Since he is adopted by Joseph, he truly is a legitimate son, although he did not come from Joseph. The New Testament is very clear, Jesus is eternally begotten of the Father as it relates to his divine nature, and was begotten by Mary as it relates to his human nature.

Why does Joseph's genealogy matter? What may seem like a boring list of strange names at the beginning of the book is actually Matthew's first piece of evidence that Jesus is the Christ.

Matthew is seeking to prove that Jesus can trace his line back to the royal house of David, whom the LORD had given a promise that he and his sons would reign forever over Israel. Eventually, the prophets were told by the Spirit that there would be a specific royal son of David who would be king over Israel and establish everlasting peace, righteousness, and prosperity for the kingdom and the rest of the nations of the world—the Gentiles, which would include us. This future king was called the Messiah, or Christ, which means ‘Anointed’ (since the kings were anointed with oil). By showing that Jesus comes from the line of David through his mother’s husband, Joseph, Matthew tells us that Jesus has the pedigree to prove that he has the right to the throne and to be the Savior of the world.

Continue in Matthew 1 and read verses 18-25. We read about Joseph’s godly character in verse 19: **“And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.”** Take a moment to imagine the situation that Joseph was going through. Mary, his beloved bride-to-be, comes back to town from visiting her cousin Elizabeth in the southern hill country, and Joseph goes to meet her. When he sees her, she probably has a nervous look that is alarming to him. Then he notices something else. He sees her pregnant belly and knows quite well that he is not the father. Think of the great pain and confusion he would have experienced. He thought that Mary had betrayed him and God, and slept with another man and was carrying his baby, not Joseph’s. To him, she was no longer the same Mary that he thought he knew. Yet, the passage reminds us that Joseph was an upright man. He was a righteous man who walked in the ways of the LORD. He sought God and was kind to his fellow man. When he thought Mary had done something outrageous, he resolved to be both kind and just. He was **“unwilling to put her to shame.”** Joseph still loved and respected Mary, so he did not retaliate and spitefully shame her to their city. In the middle of his hurt, he decided to do what was right. While he was considering these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him and told him the truth. The angel confirmed that Mary was still a virgin, that the child truly was from the Holy Spirit. So, Joseph courageously took Mary to be his wife and the Messiah in her womb to be his son. When the child was born, Joseph named him Jesus as the angel had told them.

In chapter 2, wise men from the east arrive in Jerusalem asking to see the newborn King of Israel. These wise men, possibly from Babylon or Persia, travelled hundreds of miles to Israel because they had seen a star arise in the heavens, which they knew to be sign that the King of the Jews had been born. So, they travelled to Jerusalem, since that was the capital city that David

had established long ago. Instead of finding a young prince in the palace, they find a confused Herod who is ruling over Israel as a king, although he is not from the line of David. The ruthless and paranoid Herod feels threatened that a child has been born that wise men from afar have recognized to be the rightful king; so, he devises a plan to figure out where the child is located so that he can get rid of him. After the wise men are sent to Bethlehem where they find the newborn Christ with his holy family, they are warned in dream to not inform Herod what they have found, but to leave secretly.

Joseph also has a dream where an angel tells him to **“Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him”** (Matthew 2:13) Please read Matthew 2:13-23 to see rest of this story’s details. Joseph heeds the angel of the Lord and flees with his family down to Egypt, where they stay until it is safe to return to the land of Israel, where they settle in Galilee. Notice in this passage that God addresses Joseph, not Mary. Joseph, as head of the household, is given the responsibility to guide and guard his family. As a man, God has made him to lead and protect his family, just as he has called every husband and father to do. Much to our surprise, God cares tremendously about women being excellent wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters to their family, and about men being excellent husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers within their family. God’s commanding word penetrates into the home; it does not get stopped at the door and left to be picked up only on Sundays. No, Jesus Christ has come to restore all things, and that includes the family; it includes restoring manhood and womanhood to what the Creator intended.

Joseph’s obedience as the man of the house was absolutely crucial to the survival of Jesus, the savior of the world. In one sense, the Father would have protected his Son, but in another sense, Jesus really could have been destroyed by Herod if Joseph did not seek refuge in Egypt. It was ordinary, fatherly faithfulness to his family which God commanded that saved Jesus from the bite of the sword. We see in this story a wonderful convergence between man’s responsibility and God’s sovereignty. God has placed the keys of his kingdom into the hands of men and women of faith. Just as the state of the kingdom rested on the shoulders of Joseph, so also the state of the kingdom, the church, rests on the shoulders of the Christian. Jesus will surely build his church; but he will do so by regular believers. We have an obligation to one another: to build one another up in self-sacrificial love. The health of the church is our responsibility.

Let us give thanks for all that Christ has given to us that we have seen in these passages.