

THE FIRST ADVENT OF THE SAVIOR

A Life Changing Dream

God is our refuge and strength,
abundantly available for help in tight places!

The LORD spoke with Mary concerning her giving birth to the Son of God through His angel messenger, Gabriel. The LORD spoke with Joseph, Mary's betrothed husband, concerning God's Son through dreams. *Hebrews 1:2 (ESV)*² *but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.* The obedience of both Mary and Joseph to the will of the Heavenly Father gave the couple the privilege of participating in the first advent of the Savior of the world.

Matthew tells the story of Jesus with the intention of showing the Jews that Jesus was their long-expected Messiah, the Son of David. He often links his readers with the Old Testament by quoting the Old Testament prophets. Matthew was one of the first to clearly visualize how the Old Testament points to Jesus. Matthew, the tax collector turned disciple, traced Joseph's family line back to King David.

After Mary's conversation with Gabriel, she understood that she was with child through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph her betrothed husband, on the other hand, was in the dark regarding what was going on. Upon hearing of Mary's pregnancy, he would not have been thinking along the lines of miraculous births.

Sometimes when we experience many of life's difficult situations, we find ourselves in the dark as well. We ask 'Why did this happen?' 'Why now?' 'Why me, Lord?' We feel we need to 'know everything' in order to trust God. God's Word reminds us in *Romans 8:28 (ESV)*²⁸ *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.* However, in Joseph's life, that verse had not yet been written down, but Joseph proved to be a man of faith in God. It came at the point in his life when he was betrothed to Mary.

Betrothal in most eras of Bible history involved two families going into a formal contract that was as binding as marriage itself. Betrothal was more of a business transaction between two families than a personal, romantic choice. Dowry or bride price agreements were included, so that a broken engagement required repayment of the dowry. After betrothal, all that remained were three matters: the wedding celebration, the bride's move into the groom's house, and the consummation of the marriage. However, the act of betrothal between a couple was also a spiritual picture of the relationship between God and His people.

Read Hosea 2:19-20 (ESV)¹⁹ *And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy.*²⁰ *I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD.*

Hosea was looking forward in time to God's relationship with what the New Testament calls the Bride of Christ. When we think of human betrothal and weddings, it is natural to think of wedding gifts. God's wedding gift to His Bride, both in Hosea's day and in our own, is the life-saving gift of God's Son as the Perfect Sacrifice for our sins, God forgives us and makes us right with Him.

Christmas is the time of year when the presence of family seems more significant than any other time. Therefore, the holidays often bring loneliness and depression to those whose family circles have been broken by death, distance, or despair. When the waves of sorrow and loneliness sweep over your soul, find contentment and peace knowing that if you have put your trust in the one born in the manger at the time we call Christmas, you have been betrothed to God Almighty forever. Do not despair over the lack of money for presents or even the empty chairs around the table, or where you might be. Rejoice in God your Savior. Let's read some of the details of how God's plan for His 'wedding gift' to us came about.

Read Matthew 1:18-19 (ESV) 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.*

Joseph as a man of God would have felt himself in a 'tight place when he found out that Mary was with child since he knew for certain he was not the father. According to Jewish law, Joseph had options when it came to divorcing Mary for what he perceived to be her unfaithfulness. He could accuse Mary of wrongdoing publicly. There was the possibility that such charges could lead to death. The law says in **Leviticus 20:10 (ESV)** ¹⁰ *"If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.*

Or, Joseph could give Mary a certificate of divorce with two or three witnesses or he could do it privately and let her figure out what to do. That was the road Joseph first determined to take. Throughout the Bible, God has frequently used dreams to communicate His will to men and that is how God chose to communicate with Joseph.

Read Matthew 1:20-23 (ESV) 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."* 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).*

As we ponder dreams, some might ask, 'Does the Lord still speak to us in dreams today?' The dreams of Joseph were unique to only one individual – the man chosen to be the earthly father of our Lord Jesus. This period in history from the birth of our Savior to His death and resurrection, and ascension into heaven was a time of great miracles and wonders on earth. However, I believe it is quite possible that we might experience a vision similar to that of the Apostle Paul in **Acts 16:9 (ESV)** ⁹ *And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."* The Lord is looking for obedient hearts to respond to the call of God to share the good news of Jesus Christ with our world. We do not have to be afraid.

The angel assured Joseph that he did not have to be afraid to take Mary home as his wife. If God tells you to do something, you do not have to fear. He will make a way. When the Apostle John encountered the Lord in a vision on the isle of Patmos, he wrote in **Revelation 1:17 (ESV)** ¹⁷ *When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though*

*dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last. When fears arise we can rest assured that there is safety in the Rock. **Psalm 94:22 (ESV)** ²² But the LORD has become my stronghold, and my God the rock of my refuge.*

The words Joseph heard in his dream were comparable to the words spoken to Mary by the angel Gabriel. We can only imagine what comfort Mary and Joseph must have found together knowing that God was directing their lives. Not all of us are privileged to be a part of a Christian family by blood or marriage. However, all of God's children are part of the family of God and we draw strength from that union. That is why it is so important to unite with a local body of believers. **Hebrews 10:24-25 (ESV)** ²⁴ *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,* ²⁵ *not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.* Mary and Joseph were both told to name the baby Jesus. Let's recall Gabriel's words to Mary.

Read Luke 1:31 (ESV) ³¹ *And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.*

The purpose of the virgin birth of Jesus was to bring salvation. It would be a life changing event for Mary and Joseph and the world as well.

Read Philippians 2:10-11 (ESV) ¹⁰ *so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,* ¹¹ *and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

The name Jesus is the Greek form for the Hebrew word Joshua meaning "Jehovah is Salvation."

Read Matthew 1:24-25 (ESV) 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.*

Joseph heeded the word from the Lord and changed his plans quickly after learning that Mary was not an unfaithful bride. He obeyed God and proceeded with the marriage. Joseph and Mary would have been legally married before the birth of Jesus although their marriage was not consummated physically until after His birth thereby proving that Jesus was virgin born. The dream that Joseph experienced before he took Mary to be his wife was not his last dream. Let's check out the three others.

Read Matthew 2:13 and 16 (ESV) ¹³ *Now when they [meaning the wise men] had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "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."* ¹⁶ *Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.*

Satan was already at work to destroy the Son of God but the LORD protected His Son through the obedient heart and listening ear of Joseph. The killing of the children is called the Massacre of the Innocents. Today, Satan works through humans to destroy God's story. If you read Wikipedia, you will discover that they say that most modern biographers of Herod conclude this massacre did not happen. They say that Josephus who wrote

the Antiquities of the Jews did not mention it. So what? Matthew did and he connects the prophecy of **Jeremiah 31:15** to this dreadful event. I trust Matthew's version over Wikipedia any day. Herod had three of his own sons killed; therefore, it is easy to believe that he could do something this awful. Some later church records of the numbers slaughtered may be wrong. Those numbers range from 3,000 to 64,000. However, estimates of the Bethlehem population at the time of Jesus' birth were about 300 people and it is estimated that the number of male children two and younger in a town that size would have been about six or seven. If yours were one of those children, you certainly would have been weeping. Let's move to Joseph's next dream.

Read Matthew 2:19-20 (ESV) ¹⁹ *But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,* ²⁰ *saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead."*

In the Old Testament, the children of Israel were taken to Egypt for their protection and wound up staying there 400 years. Jesus was taken to Egypt for protection as well. However, His calling and ministry was to be to in land of Israel. We are not sure how long they remained in Egypt – possibly several years.

Read Matthew 2:22-23 (ESV) ²² *But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee.* ²³ *And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.*

The northern province of Galilee was different in history, political status, and culture from the southern province of Judea which contained the holy city of Jerusalem. The geographical framework dividing the north and the south would culminate in the confrontation of Jesus of Galilee and the religious establishment of Jerusalem.

Just so you know, the wording, *He will be called a Nazarene* is not specifically found in the Old Testament. Matthew was not using a direct quote – he referred to prophets. The idea of being a Nazarene was a descriptive word of reproach as used by Nathanael before he became a disciple of Jesus. **John 1:46 (ESV)** ⁴⁶ *Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"...*

The last mention of Joseph was when he and Mary were separated from Jesus during Passover when Jesus was 12. Most believe that Joseph died before Jesus was crucified since Jesus felt the need to commit His mother's care to the Apostle John when He was dying on the cross. I think Jesus losing His earthly father to the horror of death helps us to realize that the Jesus who now intercedes for us in heaven knows all about our troubles because He has experienced them all firsthand – even losing a family member He loved dearly.

The New Testament does not contain a single word that Joseph ever said. Surely he spoke, but his words are not found in the Bible. Instead the Bible records what Joseph did! Joseph was consistently a person who obeyed God. To put it simply, he heard God's Word and acted accordingly. Will we do the same?