



## Parkway Fellowship

Savoring the Christmas Fruitcake • Throwing More Family Into the Mix •  
Matthew 1:18-24; Luke 1:28-31 • 11/25/2018

### Main Point

Joseph's response to Mary teaches us how to relate to our families rightly so that we don't miss the true meaning of Christmas.

### Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Do you have any traditions or expectations at Christmas that must be met, and if not, it ruins the holiday for you?**

**Can you recall a Christmas when your plans unexpectedly changed? What happened?**

**How can unmet expectations and unexpected changes deepen your relationship with God?**

How life-altering do you think it was for Mary to find out she was pregnant because of the Holy Spirit before she had ever known a man? How do you think Joseph felt about it? His expectations were certainly unmet by this unexpected life-altering event. We can be certain they both wondered why this was happening to them. Though Joseph must have initially thought Mary's pregnancy was like one of those "fruitcakes"—something that spoils everything— that we learned about in this week's sermon. But because he responded well to that unmet expectation and unexpected life event, he got to experience the most miraculous event in the history of humankind—the birth of Jesus!

### Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Ask a Volunteer to read Matthew 1:18-19.

**How do you think Joseph felt when he first learned that Mary was pregnant? Why do you think the Bible highlights that Joseph was “a righteous man”?**

**What do you think of Joseph’s impulse not to disgrace Mary publicly?**

Joseph was certainly shocked and upset when he heard that Mary was pregnant. How else would a man react upon hearing that his fiancée was pregnant if they had never been intimate! Such news would be enough to devastate anyone, and it is safe to say that Joseph was no exception.

Joseph demonstrated his righteousness by not wishing to publicly humiliate Mary. One of the impulses after such news might be to get even. Joseph cared enough about Mary not to humiliate her even after he thought she had betrayed him. Despite his pain and confusion, he sought to show Mary mercy. One lesson we could all learn from Joseph is that when we have times where life doesn’t make sense and is painful, we could still have the character to show mercy to others. In this week's message it was put this way: Joseph took the high road.

**What is a relationship or situation where you might need to "take the high road" with family this Christmas season?**

| Ask a volunteer to read aloud Luke 1:28-31.

**What wrong conclusion had Joseph made in wanting to divorce Mary quietly? What was the truth about Mary's pregnancy?**

The facts are facts, it's true. Mary was pregnant, and Joseph had every legal right to divorce her quietly or take action that was much worse (Deuteronomy 22:20-21). But it wasn't because she had been unfaithful. Mary was a virgin, pregnant with God's Son Jesus, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Joseph's jumping to the conclusion of unfaithfulness, while the normal conclusion to make, was wrong.

**How does jumping to conclusions about family members cause us to miss out on the true meaning of Christmas?**

The facts about the people in your family who drive you crazy may be the actual true facts. You may even have the right to react in anger to them. But you could also choose to engage in open, honest dialogue with them rather than jumping to conclusions about why they do what they do.

| Ask a Volunteer to read Matthew 1:20-24

**In verse 20, what did the angel instruct Joseph to do? How did Joseph respond to the angel's command?**

**What about you? When you realize God is at work, do you immediately do the hard thing He's telling you to do (forgive someone, love someone who is hard to like) or does it take you some time to get that place of obedience? Why?**

Joseph may have been more shocked by the angelic announcement than he was to find out about Mary's pregnancy! After all, never before in the history of the world had such a pregnancy occurred. Needless to say, Joseph's world was turned upside down by Mary's pregnancy.

The angel probably called Joseph the Son of David to remind him of his ancestry. Joseph was a poor man making his living as a carpenter, and that is a long way from being King over all Israel! God had not forgotten His promise to David to send a son to sit on the throne forever, and now that was going to be fulfilled in the son of Joseph.

Both Joseph and Mary would have the honor of raising Jesus as their own son. Joseph went from thinking he had lost his fiancée to realizing he was about to be a father for the first time. I'm sure that this caused not a little fear and anxiety in Joseph's life, but he handled all of this upheaval with faith.

**Do you think that Joseph's life got any easier or more difficult after he found out the good news about Mary and her pregnancy? Why?**

It's probably easier for us to imagine why bad news might lead us into a time of angst and thinking that life isn't making sense. The truth is that good news can lead us into difficulty just as easily as bad news. Any time something changes our lives, it can lead us into fear and angst.

Sometimes, the things that God allows into our lives—like "fruitcakes" at Christmas— cause us confusion and difficulty. But like Joseph and Mary, we can trust in the Lord, knowing He is with us.

## Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**How can Joseph's example in this story help us to cope with unexpected and unwelcome circumstances in our own lives?**

**The holidays can be a time of high stress and difficulty, so what steps can we take to remain merciful people as Joseph was towards Mary?**

**Which of the three points from this week's message do you struggle with the most: don't jump to conclusions, take the high road, or look for God to work? How can this group help you with that?**

## Pray

Thank God for His gift of Jesus. Invite Him to help you relate to family members this Christmas season in a way that will allow you to experience His joy.

## Commentary

| Matthew 1:18-25

1:18. As Matthew launched the account of Jesus' birth, note that he was careful to highlight the title "Christ"—the title he used in the preceding passage that demonstrated Jesus had the right to claim deity. Watch for Matthew's use of this title throughout his Gospel. His purpose in writing was to make the case for Jesus as the promised King.

To understand the significance of some statements in this passage, it is necessary to understand the Jewish marriage customs of the day. The bride and groom went through a period of betrothal or engagement. In that culture and time, betrothal was virtually as binding as marriage. In this waiting period, Mary was found to be pregnant. Matthew was careful to protect the virtue of Mary and the supernatural origin of Christ.

Why is it so important that the Christ, the promised king, be born to a virgin? The virgin birth is more than a miracle to draw attention to the unique nature of this child. Because Mary was a virgin, only God could have been the father of Jesus, making Jesus the one and only God-Man in all the universe. God's plan would have been impossible if Jesus had been anything less.

1:19. A betrothed couple was as good as married, and breaking off the relationship was seen as divorce, even though the couple had not yet been married. It also helps us gain a better perspective of the emotional state of Mary and Joseph when we realize that she was probably in her teens at the time of these events. The minimum marriageable age in Israel was twelve for women and thirteen for men. To remain unmarried as late as one's twenties may have been cause for social embarrassment.

1:20-21. Mary, initially fearful of being an unwed mother, accepted God's revealed intentions for her. And Joseph, initially not all that sure himself about the "virgin birth," was originally thinking divorce, albeit quietly and with no public scandal. But when Joseph was approached by God through the angel, he accepted his role and did precisely as he was instructed by God. He kept Mary a virgin until after Jesus was born, after which their normal marital relations produced other children who were the half-brothers of Jesus. And Joseph, as the legal heir to the throne, named their son "Jesus" as he was told. Mary and Joseph learned that

the only way to follow God was to “trust and obey” His word. The character of these two young adults reminds us that God fulfills His purposes by using people of strong character and unquestioning obedience.

The name “Jesus” chosen by God for His Son (1:21) was, in that day and for centuries before, a common name with special meaning. Jesus is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew “Joshua,” meaning “Yahweh is salvation.” Jewish boys for centuries had been given this name Jesus with the frequency of today’s John or Mike. This reflects, in part, the hope of Jewish parents for God’s salvation from centuries of oppression under a succession of world powers. God’s choice of such a common name, when He could have chosen something unique, also emphasized that Jesus came in a way that identified with “the average Joe.” He came in love to become one of us, that we might be drawn to Him and become one of His. Jesus was approachable and touchable. He was one of us. “We do not have a high Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses” (Heb. 4:15). Jesus did everything to build bridges to us.

Yet, while the name Jesus was common, only this child was qualified as the God-Man to save His people from their sins (1:21). Jesus came at the strategically appointed time to seal the eternal salvation of all whom the Father had chosen.

1:22-23. In these verses Matthew provided the first of many direct quotes from the Old Testament, and the first of many Old Testament prophecies fulfilled by the earthly life of Jesus. These Old Testament quotes and prophecies show, in part, the linkage and unity between the Old and New Testaments, helping us understand how God was preparing the way for the Christ from centuries past. They also validate the identity of Jesus as the promised Messiah, strengthening our faith in Him. And their perfect fulfillment in Jesus gives us confidence that God is faithful and mighty to keep His word to us today.

Matthew is quick to support the doctrine of the virgin birth, and his quote in 1:23 is from Isaiah 7:14, originally written by the prophet Isaiah over seven hundred years before Jesus’ birth. This verse in its original Old Testament context seems to be referring to a child who was to be born in that setting of Isaiah’s day, rather than centuries later. However, Matthew’s inspired revelation fills the original statement out to its full intention. God is never so clearly present with His people as He is through His virgin-born Son, the Messiah of Israel. Jesus is Immanuel! The linguistic components of the name Immanuel and their individual translations—Im = “with,” anu = “us,” and el = “God”—make it clear that Isaiah’s original prophecy could refer in its fullest sense only to the promised Messiah. This name of Jesus is a strong argument for His deity.

1:24-25. The dream that had begun for Joseph in verse 20 ends in these verses with him waking and choosing to obey everything the angel had told him to do. This fine man had learned to “trust and obey.”

| Luke 1:28-31

1:28. The angel greeted Mary with the words, “Rejoice, favored woman! The Lord is with you.” The word for rejoice here was a common greeting, somewhat akin to our greeting “Hello, how are you?” Mary, a normal Galilean girl, received favored status not because she was in some way unique or sinless but because God selected her for a high honor. Because of her favored status, Mary received full assurance of God’s support and help. The words underscore God’s gracious action in choosing Mary for such a high honor and responsibility.

1:29-31. At first the angel’s greeting “deeply troubled Mary.” Confrontation by an angel might disturb anyone. No sense of panic overcame Mary. However, she did wonder about the circumstances. Verse 30 expands on verse 28. The angel instructed Mary, “Do not be afraid.” He then told her the reason that she need not fear. She had found favor with God. Again, God based His favor not on Mary’s status or any special abilities she possessed. It rested completely on God’s choice. Gabriel delivered a shocking message to the young Mary. She would conceive and give birth to a son. The idea of conception by a woman not yet married made this a hard statement to accept. The angel even provided the name of the Child—Jesus. Take note that God chose the name. Traditionally, a father named his child. In this case, God as the Heavenly Father claimed that right over Joseph to name the Child Mary would give birth to. The name Jesus means “Deliverer, Savior.” In the Old Testament, the equivalent Hebrew name is Joshua. Moses’ successor, Joshua, served God as a deliverer of the people out of the wilderness into the land of promise (see Josh. 1:1-5).