

Christmas-JosephMaryScandal 20-12-20a

Good morning. Welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church on this 20th day of December, 2020. We're going to take a look at some things that pertain in the light of the holiday season this morning.

And I will tell you, I almost forgot I spent most of the week working on Matthew chapter 13 and was just reveling in my newfound insight into the seed parables and so on. And at a rather late moment, I thought, Oh, I suppose I should say something about the holiday. So we will, we will do that some regard every day alike and others don't.

So in any case, we're going to be taking a look at the circumstances of Jesus' birth. We've done many studies over the years and they're fascinating in their own right. We've looked at the circumstances around where Jesus was likely found by the shepherds because there was quote, no room at the inn.

We've looked at the song that Mary delivered upon the birth of the Lord. We've looked at the words of Anna or Hannah and Simeon at the dedication eight days later. We have looked at the appearance of the angels as they stood and said glory to God in the highest.

We've talked about the Magi and their journey from the East and how they would have known about the timing and identity related to Jesus' birth. So we're going to take a slightly different perspective this morning and aggregate some of these circumstances and look for the meaning and application, the pertinence in our own lives when we reflect on this event at this time of year. But let's begin by asking God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study and we'll get started.

Father, it is such a privilege to be called by your name to know that we are eternally related to you through the Lord Jesus Christ. We possess life that is abundant now and eternal in the future. We have so many wonderful promises and opportunities because of what the Lord Jesus did for us in coming to earth and living his life, accomplishing the sacrificial work of redemption and reconciliation and propitiation, the atonement of the cross.

We thank you for the comfort and the assurance that we have in days that are unusual and unpredictable. And as the circumstances of the world swirl around us, we are founded on the rock and storms may beat on our house, but it does not fall because it is the stability and the surety that we have in you that gives us confidence and clarity in these strange days. We pray that as we look at this portion of your word and this part of your plan this morning, that God the Holy Spirit will enliven it and bless it to the nourishment of our souls so that we will be thoroughly equipped for every good work, that we can shine as lights in the midst of our generation and be a beacon to those who are seeking hope and seeking relationship with you through the Lord Jesus.

We pray these things in his name, amen. It is one of the strong evidences that the Bible in

general and the New Testament and the Gospels in particular are not a fabrication of human imagination or man's invention because when it comes to things like the birth of Jesus Christ, it is so counterintuitive. The details given in scripture are the opposite of what anyone interested in creating a religion or making a splash and impressing us all with the coming of Jesus would invent.

And when you look particularly at Mary and Joseph, the hardship that this selection by God placed on them is harsh and almost unimaginable. Ideally, when the culminating happening of human history, the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, biggest thing to ever happen, bigger than the flood, up there with creation and Moses at Sinai, it's just one of the biggest things that ever happened. And it is so inauspicious and creates so many problems for the central characters that it beggars description.

We've heard since we were children, the Christmas story, and I think sometimes we forget what a bizarre method God chose to bring his son into the world. We can start by remembering that the betrothal between Joseph and Mary wasn't based on romantic love. They didn't meet at a cafe or a little bistro and gaze into each other's eyes over a candle and some minestrone soup or something.

Marriages in that day were arranged by the parents, specifically by the fathers. It's been speculated that because Joseph disappears from the scene in the later pages of the gospels that he was an older man, but it's pure speculation. There's nothing to say that he was older, that he was a widower, that he'd had a different wife, that he was just an old bachelor.

Just based on the fact that he isn't alive during the adult ministry of the Lord Jesus has fed this purely speculative idea. As far as we know, Mary and Joseph were typical. They were not unusual in any way, and the usual circumstances of marriage were that the fathers negotiated the bride price, the dowry, which would have been paid by Joseph to Mary's father.

This has been thought to be something by way of compensation because you're losing a worker in the household. When a daughter is married and taken away by her husband, you're a man down, as it were. You're a worker down, a woman down.

The dowry is some initial compensation to the family that is losing the daughter. That dowry would have already been paid. We know that Mary and Joseph are betrothed.

The betrothal period lasted one year, so the dowry would be paid. From that point, the girl was viewed as married for all purposes except living with her husband and consummating the marriage. But in all other ways and for all other purposes, she is thought of as the wife.

It's a done deal. You could compare, as an analogy, our salvation. We have placed our faith in Christ.

We've trusted Him as our Savior, and we're inevitably, irretrievably, irrevocably saved. We have not yet entered into the fullness of our salvation. That happens when the Lord Jesus returns

and either raises us from the dead or raises us from the ground, and we will be transformed in a moment in the twinkling of an eye.

That has not yet happened. We're in a fallen world with fallen natures. We're conceived in iniquity, born in sin.

But at the point of our salvation, that relationship with God is created, and it is irrevocable. It is a certainty that the Lord Jesus is going to come and remove us from this earth and take us into the next phase of God's plan. It's an absolute certainty.

That's what betrothal was like. Once that contract is sealed between the fathers, it was a father-to-father contract. This is why, when Jesus talks about as it was in the days of Noah, when they were marrying and giving in marriage, giving in marriage as the fathers were entering into these contracts.

It's essentially a contract between the father of the bride and the groom. Fathers would often arrange who would marry whom, and that arrangement is family-to-family, father-to-father. But the contract itself, the betrothal, is the husband agreeing to take the father's daughter off his hands and contributing the dowry as earnest and bride price.

So this has already happened with Mary and Joseph when our birth narrative picks up. They are betrothed. Joseph spends that year getting ready to have Mary come and live with him and fulfill the final two portions of the marriage, which is cohabitation and consummation.

Interestingly, when God announces to Mary, through Gabriel, that she is going to be the father of the Messiah, He doesn't do it before the betrothal. He doesn't do it when she is single, unpromised, uncommitted. God's timing in bringing these things about, waiting until after they are betrothed, creates a huge problem.

Because now, and again, working off what was usual and common, and Scripture gives us no reason to believe otherwise, Mary was quite young. In the ancient Near East, people did not have the luxury of their children spending an extended childhood through the teenage years and not really entering into adult life until their early twenties. In that day, both men and women were considered such at the age of 12 or 13.

And this notion is preserved in the Jewish community by the Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah, which occurs at the beginning of one's teenage years. And that's because this is the point at which you were considered an adult member of the community. So girls were typically married at the age of 12 to 14.

Now that shocks us because our 12 to 14 year olds are completely unlike what 12 to 14 year olds were in the ancient world and particularly in the time of the Lord's birth. Children were involved in the family business and the family work from an early age and were trustworthy and mature and contributors and ready to shoulder responsibility and keep commitments and so on at a much earlier age. And I think we radically underestimate often what our children are

capable of by not expecting much from them until much later in life.

But the common age for young women to be betrothed and married, betrothal would happen anytime after age 12 and the fullness of marriage a year after that when the betrothal was completed. So because Mary becomes pregnant during the betrothal, this is a real problem. She is guaranteed by her father to be a virgin when he enters into the betrothal contract with the groom.

This is part of the assurance and we've covered the area of the law where if the husband marries the girl and then decides that she's not a virgin, there is a ritual, there is a ceremonial undertaking that takes place. And the parents produce the virginal outfit, the clothing that a girl wore before she was betrothed. And I've been through that a few years ago.

But suffice it to say that everything is on the up and up at the point that the betrothal is entered into. And between the betrothal and the consummation of the marriage in that one year period, Mary turns up pregnant. God does not appear to have talked to Mary's father.

God does not appear to have talked to Joseph or anyone else. Only Gabriel has told Mary that that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And this is why when you get to the issue appearing, you can turn back to Matthew chapter 1 since we've been studying the Gospel of Matthew.

Look at Matthew chapter 1 verse 19. This problem has already arisen before anything is said to Joseph. So beginning in verse 18, the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows, after his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph.

Notice, after she was betrothed, before they came together, before the marriage was consummated, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. So Joseph, her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. Nothing has been said to Joseph at this point.

Mary probably has to let him know when she starts to show. So he's probably, if this is a usual age range for a betrothal and marriage, unless there's something extraordinary and he's the old man that tradition has made him out to be based on nothing in Scripture, Joseph is likely about 18 years old. 18 was considered by the rabbis to be the ideal age for a young man to marry.

So 13 to 14 for the girl, 18 for the groom. So Mary is now an unwed, pregnant teenager, although she is very solidly engaged, if you will. Under the law of Moses, a woman who, without the benefit of marriage, got pregnant could be stoned on her father's doorstep.

This is what the law of Moses provides as a remedy. This is Deuteronomy 22 verses 21 through 24. The remedy under the law, Joseph would have been fully within his rights to have her stoned on her father's doorstep.

Deuteronomy 22, 21 through 24. However, this evidently 18 year old young man makes a different choice. It says, because he was just or righteous.

This is in Hebrew tzaddik from the word tzedek, which is the word for righteousness. Now, a righteous man normally in Israel meant you are dedicated to the law of Moses. You keep it.

If you look at what Paul says about himself over in Galatians, when he says, I was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a Pharisee, and blameless when it comes to the law of Moses. I think it's over in Galatians four or five, but he says with regard to the law, the righteousness of the law, blameless. That's what scripture says Joseph was.

He was a strong believer and he was dedicated to God's word and God's law. So he's got a real problem and God gives him no heads up on his own based on what he already has in his soul. Joseph decides I'm not going to make a public example out of her and have her stoned at her father's doorstep.

It doesn't say that he made this decision on the basis of romantic love, or he just couldn't bring himself to do it. Or, you know, she had big brown doe eyes and he, it was just too much for him. He makes this decision based on his righteousness, on his justness.

So he's not just a legalistic adherent to the law. He understands God's righteousness. And so he makes up his mind to put her out of sight privately.

Now, because she is still living in her father's home during the year of betrothal, he's going to have to work this out with the father, but he has the right to demand that she be removed from public site, taken to a cousin's house in another village or whatever, taken out to a rural relative's domicile because he is the husband. Betrothal is that formal a circumstance. So he thought, well, I'm not going to have her stoned and humiliated and disgrace her father's house.

I think I'll send her away, have her out of sight, not in the community. But in verse 20, while he thought about these things, what a great thing to say about Joseph. He doesn't have a knee jerk response.

He doesn't just peg the meter toward a legalistic execution or a, you know, secrecy solution. He thinks about it. He's trying to figure out before the Lord what he should do.

And because he is thinking, God comes to him and gives him guidance and gives him direction. So an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying, Joseph, son of David, very fraught with significance, Joseph, son of David. David had a lot of hard choices to make as well.

Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you, marry your wife for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy spirit. She will bring forth a son and you shall call his name Yeshua, Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. All this was done that it might be fulfilled, which is spoken by the Lord through the prophet going back to Isaiah chapter seven, verse 14.

So Joseph verse 24, being aroused from sleep did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him, his wife did not consummate the marriage until she had brought forth her firstborn son. Catholics say Joseph never consummated the marriage. This verse seems to be something they have overlooked.

He did not know her until she had brought forth her firstborn son and he called his name Yeshua, Jesus. Now you think about how straightforward this is when you read it and how difficult it would have been in practical terms. Never before in history has anybody been told that their wife is pregnant and the Holy spirit is the father.

An angel appears and you say, well, if I saw an angel, I would believe in many cases we wake up from something we've seen in the night and decide that can't be real, that can't be right. But someone who is accustomed to and practiced in recognizing God's truth will recognize it in normal circumstances and will recognize it in extraordinary circumstances. The reason Joseph can believe this is not that the angelic appearance was so powerful.

It's because Joseph knows God's truth when he hears it. And that comes through experience. It comes through practice.

It is a just man. He is a Sadiq man. This is why when he gets a really startling, unusual, profound piece of truth, he recognizes it as true and he can handle it.

And not only can he handle it, he obeys it to the letter. Do not be afraid to take Mary, your wife to yourself. And so he does call the child's name Yeshua.

And so he does. This is the reason God selected Mary and Joseph for this unique role in his plan. God can do extraordinary things with us and through us when we are faithful and diligent to show ourselves approved unto God, a workman who does not need to be ashamed.

That brings me to my next point, which is Joseph was not a carpenter. The word translated carpenter is Technon, T-E-K-N-O-N. I'm sorry, Tecton.

I was enjoying the wordplay because Technon is a child and Tecton, T-E-K-T-O-N, is what Joseph was. And it's tech is related to the same root that we get technical, technician, technology. T-E-K-T-O-N, a Tecton.

And this means an artisan or a craftsman. It's unlikely that Joseph worked in wood. For one thing, he would have probably had to import the wood.

There's not a lot of wood around his hometown in Nazareth. And secondly, the majority of homes and buildings and structures in that area were made of stone, not wood. So Tecton more likely refers to him being a stonemason or some other type of builder or laborer.

Nazareth is only three to four miles from the ancient town of Sepphoris, S-E-P-P-H-O-R-I-S, Sepphoris, S-E-P-P-H-O-R-I-S, Sepphoris. At the time that Jesus was born, Herod was building

Sepphoris into a great city. He had a massive construction project there.

And there was a huge rock quarry nearby. And so Herod was building the town of Sepphoris, cutting and hauling these huge stones from the nearby quarry that was located between Nazareth and Sepphoris. So within a mile and a half or two of Nazareth is this enormous quarry.

You could work at the quarry. You could go on to Sepphoris and be involved in this enormous construction project. So it seems likely, probable, that Joseph's work was related to that.

It employed hundreds of people. And both Joseph and later Jesus would have been able to find employment in that project. Young boys could haul stone, carry away debris.

As stones were shaped and chipped, somebody's got to haul all that stuff off, sharpen tools, work in the building industry. So Joseph was likely some sort of contractor or stonemason. But when faced with a choice between the letter of the law and the spirit of the law, Joseph chose mercy rather than letter of the law justice.

And this comports with God who loves mercy more than wooden unthinking compliance. I desire mercy and not sacrifice. So already, before the child is even born, there is this enormous stress and decision points put in front of both Mary and Joseph, particularly Joseph.

And God made a great choice with Joseph because he makes the right call. He does the right thing. And if it were not for him, I mean, you can only imagine what extraordinary measures God would have had to use if they had hauled Mary out to her father's doorstep and started picking up stones.

The Christmas story would be quite different than it is. But we think that sometimes that when God is in our lives and when we're doing the right thing, that we're going to find circumstances in a confluence of happiness and a just wonderful coincidence and divine support, enablement, blessing. When I'm doing what I'm supposed to do, I'm not only attending church and Bible class, but I'm thinking about what I learned.

I'm praying over it and reflecting on it and seeking to implement it into my life. I'm trying to be that approved workman that does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. So why is my life such a mess? Why are circumstances so challenging? And why am I facing so many difficulties? We can take heart and take hope if the divinely chosen parents of the Lord Jesus start out with this level.

You think about Mary's reputation. You know, how many people are going to believe you when you say, well, you know, I didn't mess around with a Roman soldier here. This is the Holy Spirit that made me pregnant.

There's no indication of what her own family thought about this. This is a hard thing to hide when you're living in your father's house. I like to imagine, but I have no way of knowing that because they produced an extraordinary woman like Mary, that they were of that same fabric

and understood things the way that Mary did.

And that Joseph and his kith and kin were similarly ready to accept what was a profoundly difficult social situation. And you say, why would God do this? If he's bringing his son into the world, why is it surrounded by potential scandal and misunderstanding and strangeness? Why is there no way to explain this to people who don't already believe? Well, it is often the same in our lives and circumstantial difficulty is no indication that we're not doing the right thing. We're challenged.

Doki Madzo is testing for the purpose of approval. And over and over again in scripture, we are challenged. We do face difficulties.

We are misunderstood. We are mischaracterized. We are thought to be rascals when we're not.

We're thought to be wrong when we're not. We are dismissed and despised without a cause. Well, the Lord Jesus is 30 years away from beginning his public ministry, and the circumstances of his birth are already creating questions and skepticism and social and moral and spiritual challenge.

God has the right people in the right place making the right choice so that his plan and purpose is fulfilled. But these choices are not going to be vindicated by an angelic host appearing over the town of Nazareth or the town of Bethlehem and saying, hello, this is God speaking. These people are in the right.

They're doing the right thing. They have done nothing wrong. There's no divine vindication except in the hearts of Mary and Joseph and those who know them, love them and trust them and believe them when they say, this is what God's word has revealed to me.

So we're going to pause here and take our break. But already you can see the beauty of the example of Joseph in particular in his life of preparation so that by the age of probably 18, he is able to make one of the most difficult interpretations and choices that anyone has ever had to make. And he nails it.

He does it right. Well, let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to look at more of the unlikeliness and divinely appointed circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth, counterintuitive to say the least, and what that represents when God seems to work counterintuitively in our own lives.

But let's pause here and take our break.