

## Mathew 1:18-21: Joseph's Choice

### <sup>18</sup> Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows

Mathew describes the origin or source of Jesus, his Genesis, just as John does in John 1:1-4 from the perspective of the Power of God in performing this unique miracle by the Holy Spirit.

#### **when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph,**

The focus in the Gospel of Mathew is on Jesus the anointed one, the King of Israel, the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, and God's promised Messiah. Mathew starts out his book in Matt 1:1 **The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham** The original intended audience of Mathew was Jewish people and Jewish converts, in other words those familiar with the Old Testament. There were really four relationships that a couple had.

Promise--or pledge. Parents would get together and "arrange the marriage".

Proposal--Now when the girl was old enough to be married, a large gathering would be planned between the two families, during which the Groom to be would propose marriage by offering the potential Bride to Be a glass of wine. If she accepts the proposal and drank the wine, then the official year of betrothal began. It's interesting as the Bride of Christ—it's one of the things that's wrapped up in communion. We remember our Groom, our Lord and Savior, and what He did to make a relationship with God through Him possible, and we look forward to being united with Him permanently someday as the Bride of Christ. See Eph 5:25-7, 2 Cor 11:2, Rev 19:7 and elsewhere for a picture of the Church's relationship as the Bride of Christ.

Then the Groom would go back to his village to build a home for them to live in, or an addition to his parent's home. Now sometime toward the end of this year's espousal, the groom would arrive, back at the bride's house, usually unannounced, with the wedding party and bring her back to his village for the wedding feast. That's what Jesus is doing right now: John 14:2-3 Jesus said **"In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. <sup>3</sup> If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also."** Like a first century groom, Jesus is going to come for His bride and take us to a place that He has prepared. And what a celebration the Marriage Supper of the Lamb will be one day, where we celebrate our relationship with Jesus as the Bride of Christ.

Mary and Joseph are in the betrothal period. The OT law treated betrothal as creating a legal state of marriage, with possibilities of adultery, divorce, and widowhood, as well as marriage. In this interim period sexual relations were not considered proper, and would result in shame for the couple.

#### **before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.**

This part is important, because Mathew goes out of his way to mention that Mary and Joseph strictly observed the law. They saved themselves for marriage, which is what Mathew means by "before they came together". This is very important, both to emphasize the purity of Mary and Joseph, but also because, as we learn later in verse 22 **Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 23 "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which translated means, "God with us."** It is an important fact that Jesus was born of a virgin. **With Child by the Holy Spirit** is a reference to the role of God's creative power from God to produce this extraordinary miracle, a unique miracle of God. Mathew is careful to mention that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, not by man. This, was very important to Joseph, for obvious reasons, but it's even more important to us. Why? Because, we learn in Romans 5:12 **Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned**— that Adam was held accountable for the sin of eating of the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil, and that through him sin was passed down. That means that, since the conception of Jesus did not involve a male, this original sin would not have been passed down to Jesus. Recall that it's Jesus' sinless nature, along with his humanity, that what qualified Jesus to bear the sins of the world— because he had no sins of his own to atone for. Important!!

**<sup>19</sup> And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly.**

Mary and Joseph were betrothed, and therefore considered legally married, so it was Joseph's decision. And here's where the righteousness of Joseph really shines. We don't know how or under what circumstances Joseph found out that his wife was pregnant before they'd come together, we only know that it must have hurt him tremendously. Planning for their future, but all that was dashed in an instant when he found out that Mary was pregnant. He would be humiliated in front of his entire community for what he thought Mary had done, or he would be humiliated by everyone thinking that the baby was his. He was in a hard spot.

**Joseph had a Choice to make**--Joseph didn't want to disgrace her, or make a public example of her. This would likely consist of a public trial in determining the cause of Mary's pregnancy. Being a righteous man, Joseph may have considered himself obliged to divorce Mary in these circumstances, and so obey the Law of Moses. So Joseph's plan was to put her away—divorce her—secretly, with just the minimum witnesses necessary, instead of a public trial. He could break off the betrothal by giving her a writ of divorcement, since he had legal grounds for divorce. Joseph had a choice to make, and Joseph chose mercy in the face of disappointment, supposed betrayal and humiliation. He could so easily have made another decision, seek vengeance, be bitter, to punish, to avoid personal embarrassment...

**Choose Mercy**--Joseph chose mercy, instead of revenge against Mary, even though he was hurt by her. Just as Joseph chose mercy, we As Christians, we are to choose mercy. We are to have compassion on those around us, loving those who have wronged us, and turning the other cheek. It's not easy sometimes, but it IS the life that we are called to. Joseph had a plan to let mercy triumph over judgement, to show compassion.

**<sup>20</sup> But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream**

So it was when Joseph was planning to show mercy, planning to follow what he knew was the Lord's will, walking according to God's plan, that an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. As we take a step in following God's will as we understand it, He shows us the next step. So Joseph had another choice to make. He could follow the expectations of the Pharisees interpretation of the law of Moses, that he was obligated to divorce Mary, or he could follow the instructions of the Angel, from God, and take Mary as His wife. He was in the same position that the apostles were, later in Acts 4:18-19 **18 And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, make your own judgment; 20 for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."** God had told Joseph to Marry Mary, and the Pharisees said no, according to their legalism. The apostles had been told to proclaim the Gospel, but the Pharisees and other members of the Sanhedrin said No. They both had a choice-to obey God, or to obey a traditional interpretation of the Law.

**"Joseph, son of David,**--Joseph was a direct descendant in the royal line from King David. Son of David was a messianic title as well as a claim of descending from David, it immediately begins Joseph thinking about the Messiah, so that what the angel tells him next fits right in.

**do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife**--ordinarily, he wouldn't do this, both because he was a righteous man and wouldn't want to take who he'd thought was an unrighteous woman as wife.

**for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.**--The Jewish religious leadership at this time was not teaching that the Messiah would be born by conception-by the Holy Spirit.

**<sup>21</sup> She will bear a Son;** -Now this is a prophecy that is often overlooked, but remember that approximately 50% of babies are female

**and you shall call His name Jesus,**--"And you shall call his name..Yeshua". That's the Hebrew and Aramaic version of the name, and that's what he would have said to a person who understood Aramaic and some Hebrew.

**For He will save His people from their sins.”**

And of course, it was Yeshua, Joshua who led the Jewish people to the Promised Land of Israel and the name Joshua means “The Lord is salvation”. The Jews were looking for a Messiah to save them from the Romans, but God had a better plan. God was going to save His people Israel from their real enemy, their sins. This is not hosanna with a little h, save us from our circumstances, but Hosanna with a big H, save us from eternal separation from God, save us from the eternal consequences of our actions, save us from all of the ways in which we fail you Lord God. With the Birth of Jesus, the Hope of Israel was realized, and the Hope of Nations was realized. To know Jesus is to know Hope.

**We have an important choice to make**--Will we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, and follow His plan for our lives? **We have an important role to play**--Like Joseph’s Role in teaching Jesus about God, we have a role in following Jesus closely, so that the way that we lead our lives help people around us know the genuine Jesus.