

## **THE ANGEL OF THE LORD AND JOSEPH**

Matthew 1:18-25

**Intro:** In Luke chapter 1 we learned how the virgin Mary was informed how the virgin Mary was informed that she was to become the mother of the promised Savior, the Messiah of Israel. The angel Gabriel was the one sent from God to give her this extremely important message just as he had appeared to the priest Zacharias to tell him that he would be the father of the Messiah's forerunner who was to have the name of John. But let us look at the way Gabriel described himself to Zacharias. The words are found in Luke 1:19:

And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings.

The only two times that Gabriel is mentioned in the NT are in Luke 1:19, and again in Luke 1:26. The only other references to Gabriel are in the book of Daniel (8:16; 9:21). Each time he came in the book of Daniel it was with a message from God. And that was true of his appearance to Zacharias as well as to the virgin Mary. Here in Matthew 1 when "the angel of the Lord" appeared to Joseph, it was for the same purpose. We can only assume that this also was Gabriel (even though his name is not given), and that he had come from the presence of God, this time, to speak to Joseph. He came when Joseph was facing the most difficult time in his life.

Let me call it:

### **I. JOSEPH'S PERPLEXITY (Matt. 1:18-19).**

We are told in verse 19 that Joseph was "a just man." This not only means that he was just before God, a saved man, but he lived a life which proved that he was righteous before God. In other words, he was righteous before God, and he was righteous before men. And it is very much to be expected that he would have fallen in love with Mary who was a virtuous virgin. Mary was promised to Joseph. They were engaged to be married.

However, before they came together as husband and wife, Joseph discovered that Mary was pregnant; she was going to have a baby. And he knew that it was not his child. We can only guess that this must have been some time after Mary's visit with Elisabeth. She had been with Elisabeth for three months. We are told in verse 18 of our text that "she was found

with child of the Holy Spirit.” But all that Joseph knew was that “she was with child.” We do not know what conversations had gone on between them, if any, *but what we do know is that Joseph could only come to the conclusion that Mary was guilty of adultery.* This was incredible to him. He had fallen in love with Mary because of her godliness, and it was the worst moment in his life when he was confronted with the fact of her pregnancy.

This was a clear violation of the seventh commandment which said, “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Ex. 20:14). The penalty for the violation of this commandment was death. And death was to be by stoning. Deut. 22:22-24 described the apparent situation that Mary had been involved in:

22 If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then they shall both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel.

23 If a damsel that is a virgin be betrothed unto an husband, and a man find her in the city, and lie with her;

24 Then ye shall bring them both out unto the gate of that city, and ye shall stone them with stones that they die; the damsel, because she cried not, being in the city; and the man, because he hath humbled his neighbour's wife: so thou shalt put away evil from among you (Deut. 22:22-24).

Joseph, being “a just man,” would have known the Law, but obviously he did not want to kill Mary, nor have her killed. He was not setting aside the Law, but he was exercising mercy as God had shown mercy to David and to Bathsheba. Joseph did not even want to publicize the sin he thought that Mary had been involved in. So it was his plan to break their engagement as secretly as possible to spare her as much shame as he could.

We can't blame Joseph for thinking what he was thinking. He was not willing to do what the Law said he could do, but he knew that he could not go ahead with the wedding. You talk about a man who was crushed into the dust, so to speak; Joseph was that man. He was forced to believe the worst about the one whom he had considered to be the personification of virtue. And yet he knew that she was not divine. He knew that she was not perfect. And if a godly man like David could initiate such a sin, it was certainly within the realm of possibility that his beloved Mary could fall.

At this point Matthew tells us that Joseph experienced:

## **II. DIVINE INTERVENTION (Matt. 1:20-21).**

The words, “while he thought on these things,” expresses the time of indescribable agony of heart and soul that Joseph was experiencing. His whole life seemed to crash down around him.

Then it was that a messenger was sent from the very presence of God. I don’t know how fast angels can fly, but you can be sure that this one came from God to Joseph faster than the speed of light. And he appeared to Joseph in a dream. We can imagine that Joseph had trouble sleeping that night, and that finally, from sheer exhaustion, he fell asleep. It was not at all unusual for God to speak to people in dreams before the Scriptures were concluded.

He spoke to Joseph by name so there would be no question in Joseph’s mind but that the angel of the Lord was speaking to him. And in view of the child that was at that moment in Mary’s womb, it is significant also that the angel addressed Joseph as “thou son of David.” This would have Messianic significance to the godly Joseph.

And then he began his message with the same words that he had spoken to Mary, the words, “Fear not.” Joseph was probably struggling with fear at that moment as much or more than he had at any time in his life. But he was soon to learn that he had no reason to be afraid. His fear was soon to leave him to be replaced with the greatest sense of the peace of God that he had ever experienced. Look at the words which he heard in his dream as they are recorded in the latter part of verse 20 and all of verse 21.

(Read.)

Instead of breaking the engagement and putting Mary away silently, but in shame, he was told as a direct revelation from God to go right ahead with their wedding plans. She had not been unfaithful to him. She was just as pure from any such sin as she had always been. She was to have a child which was conceived in her by the Holy Spirit. And the angel told Joseph what he had told Mary. She was having a son. His Name had already been chosen by God. It was JESUS! And it had the full significance of its meaning: “For He shall save His people from their sins.” If you know the doctrines of grace, you can see here the great teaching of particular redemption! Our Lord could have saved everyone who ever lived by His death (and it would cost Him His death), but His death was particularly for those whom the Father had given to Him. These JESUS would not help people to save themselves, but He had come to Mary as the One Who would do all that was necessary for the salvation of those whom He intended to save.

Now remember, it was not the privilege of angels to make up their own messages. They were messengers of the Word of God! And therefore this message would have come to Joseph with the same power, the same convincing power that Gabriel had given the Word of God to Mary!

But there was added proof which was also brought to Joseph's attention. I will call it,

### **III. THE ADDED PROOF OF SCRIPTURE (Matt. 1:22-23).**

Recently in our Tuesday Class I took up the verse that Matthew quoted here in verse 23. You all know that it is found in Isa. 7:14. Those who like to deny the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ have argued that Isa. 7:14 does not have anything to do with a Messiah; that it is merely a prediction that Isaiah's wife was going to have a son, and that son was to be a sign to King Ahaz that Judah would not be overrun by her enemies. It is true that Isaiah's wife did have a son, and that he was a sign to King Ahaz. But the word that the Holy Spirit, the Author of Scripture, used in that place was capable of meaning *a young married woman*, or *a virgin*. It was a prophecy of double reference. So that while it was a prophecy that had an immediate fulfillment in Isaiah's family, it also was to have a future fulfillment in a Child Who was to be virgin-born, that is, with no human father, and so the word that Matthew used means what it meant in the case of the birth of our Lord. "Behold, a virgin shall conceive..." It was not until just before that prophecy was to have its fulfillment in the birth of the Lord Jesus that it was revealed that He was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

And so Isaiah 7:14 included words which could not have been completely fulfilled in any other way except through the birth of Mary's Son. Our Lord was a real, perfect human being. But He was also "Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." So, as we learned from Luke 1, Mary's Son was God manifest in human flesh. If Jesus had had a human father, he would have been a sinner like we are, and so instead of being a Savior, he would have needed a Savior just like we do.

But what is important for us to realize about this passage so far, is that the message of the angel of the Lord was confirmed by the prophecy of Isaiah. Both the angel and Isaiah spoke as messengers of the revealed Word and will of God.

The passage concludes as our text in Luke 1 concluded in telling us about Mary's response to the message of Gabriel. Here in verses 24 and 25 we

have:

#### **IV. THE OBEDIENCE OF JOSEPH (Matt. 1:24-25).**

If Joseph needed confirmation that his marriage to Mary was the will of God, he certainly had it! The angel of the Lord had said to him, “Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife.” And so by the gracious intervention of God through the angel of the Lord, he was no longer afraid to take Mary as his wife, and what had been the most unhappy days of his life, turned out to be a time of unsurpassed joy.

But the Holy Spirit also tells us in the last verse of the chapter that Joseph and Mary did not actually live together as husband and wife until after “her firstborn son” was born, thus preserving the truth that JESUS was not Joseph’s son, but the Son of Mary, conceived by the Holy Spirit.

And although we are not told so, it is reasonable to expect that as Joseph and Mary talked about their experiences with the angel of the Lord, their faith was confirmed and strengthened when they realized that they both were told the same thing on separate occasions when it would have been natural for them to have never considered such a possibility. And what they were told was also confirmed by the prophet Isaiah in words written some 700 years before the birth of JESUS, their Messiah, and their Lord.

**Concl:** While we have never seen the Lord as Peter did, yet we can say with him that “we have not followed cunningly devised fables.” What we believe about the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ was predicted by Isaiah years before it took place when such a birth had never been known to the prophet. Then the angel of the Lord told Mary what was going to happen to her, and separately revealed to Joseph in a dream that what he feared was not the case at all. Instead, God was fulfilling in Mary that prediction Isaiah had uttered so long ago. So we have three messages from heaven confirming that the Messiah would be born of a woman, the seed of the woman, and yet without a human father because He would be conceived in Mary by the Holy Spirit.

But we have the added encouragement to our faith because we have four records of the life and ministry of JESUS – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – which fully confirm what Isaiah led us to believe, and what the angel of the Lord told Mary and Joseph, that Mary’s Son was also the Son of God, Who came to earth to die for sinners. No other sacrifice would be acceptable to God. The OT sacrifices which typified Christ were to be “without blemish,” typifying His sinless perfection. There is no other way

we could have such a sacrifice except through One Who was born without sin. Christ died as a perfect Sacrifice. And this is why Peter uttered those wonderful words which we find in Acts 4:12,

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Calvin said about this passage:

Certainly, no man will ever raise a question on this subject, except from curiosity; and no man will obstinately keep up the argument, except from an extreme fondness for disputation (XVI, 107).

The case in favor of the virgin birth of our Lord Jesus Christ is fully confirmed. The evidence is indisputable. The persons who close their hearts and minds to this great truth, do so to the eternal condemnation of their own souls. Let us not be ashamed to declare that Jesus Christ, the Savior, has come, and shed His blood on Calvary's cross for the salvation of sinners, and that whosoever believeth in Him shall not be ashamed.

Notice in the last verse of our chapter that Mary's part and Joseph's part are, as Alexander Maclaren so clearly pointed out: "**She**...brought forth her firstborn son: and **he** called his name JESUS." Thus, their obedience was complete. And the One Whom Joseph thought would be the offspring of shame, was the greatest One ever to be born, the holy Son of God, JESUS, our Lord, and our Savior.