

## GOD’S ANNOUNCEMENT TO JOSEPH

Matthew 1:18-25

**Intro:** My Christmas series for this year has to do with God’s Announcement to Mary, the mother of our Lord, which I gave last Sunday. Today I want to speak on God’s Announcement to Joseph. And next Sunday, the Lord willing, I plan to speak on God’s Announcement to the Shepherds. The first of these three is found in Luke, chapter 1. The second, is found in Matthew, chapter 1. And the third is found in Luke, chapter 2. I call them *announcements*, not because what the angel told them was unexpected. But that the event which believing Jews had long expected, was finally going to take place, and, in the case of the shepherds, had taken place!

I don’t think that we can overlook in considering the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, into the world, as a human being, what the prophet Isaiah is remembered for saying so strongly in the fifty-fifth chapter of the prophecy which bears his name. They are words which came to mean a lot to us in the days when Trinity Bible Church began. Of course I am referring to verse 8 and 9 of that wonderful chapter. There we read,

8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.

9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isa. 55:8-9).

This is a truth that we face again and again throughout Scripture, and we face it continually throughout our experience as the people of God. We expect God to work in certain ways, the way we would work in similar circumstances, only to find that He works in different ways. But as verse 9 tells us, even though we may not agree at the time, that God’s ways are infinitely higher and better than our ways would be – “as the heavens are higher than the earth.”

For example, when Abraham got into the promised land, he encountered a famine. He didn’t expect that. And so he took matters into his own hands, and went down into Egypt – an act which he later had great reasons to regret.

Another illustration, major illustration, is to be seen in the life of Joseph, the son of Jacob, which is found in the last chapters of the book of

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Genesis. Joseph had no idea of what his brothers would do to him. They wanted to kill him (he was aware of their jealousy), but instead they sold him into Egyptian slavery. Potiphar, one of the Pharaoh's highest ranking military men bought him. Potiphar's wife took a liking to Joseph, and when he refused her advances, she lied about him, and he found himself in an Egyptian jail where he was forgotten for two years plus. I think most of you know the story. It is an amazing account of the providence of God.

The Bible is full of illustrations of Isaiah 55:8 and 9. I am sure that you have found this true about the Lord's dealings with you. I certainly have in my life.

But the greatest illustration of Isaiah 55:8 and 9 is to be found in the events surrounding the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ into the world. This was clearly the event which was anticipated throughout the OT. It was the hope of Israel, a promised Redeemer. And it was even predicted that He would be Deity. But let me ask you a question as we being today: *Would you have brought your Son into the world the way God did if you had been God?* We are all familiar with Joseph and Mary, and we consider them to be two of the most important people in all of the Bible. But who were they in the eyes of their fellow Jews? They were nobodies. They were members of the royal family of Israel, but that seems to have been so buried in the past that they were not considered to be any but the most common people among the Jews. Even after the Lord had begun His ministry on earth, the Jews were baffled because He could perform so many miraculous things because it was commonly said about Him, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at Him" (Mark 6:3).

And even going back to the time of His birth, would you have put Joseph and Mary under the burden of making that long trip down from Nazareth to Bethlehem in a time when everybody was going back to their home towns to be registered for taxation by the Roman government. You ladies can appreciate how hard it was for Mary to make that trip when it was just about time for her baby to be born. And if you had been preparing housing for Joseph and Mary would you have let all of the comfortable facilities be filled to capacity so that "there was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7)? I doubt if there were any hotels with presidential suites in which guests could stay, but surely if the Son of God was to be born, He should have had better accommodations than Joseph and Mary were

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about to find. Joseph and Mary were learning about how different God's ways can be from our ways. Truly His ways and our ways are different, but when you read about the birth of Jesus Christ, can you say that His ways are better than what we would have done for that very special, and very godly, couple? Yes, it has to be true. And I think that it is to the credit of both Joseph and Mary that we don't read of a single word of complaint against the Lord.

The Apostle Paul has given us some help in thinking about the ways of the Lord, and it even has to do with the fact that most Christians are like Joseph and Mary as far as this world is concerned. We don't have a name in this world. For the most part, we are nobodies! Let me read to you what the Apostle Paul gave as the reason why the Lord has saved us. You will find his words in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31:

- 26 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:  
27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;  
28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:  
29 That no flesh should glory in his presence.  
30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:  
31 That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

Even look at the apostles. Would you have chosen men like they were to teach and train to carry on the work of the Lord after you went back to heaven if you had been the Lord? Probably not. We just don't think like that! And that may be the reason that churches and even governments get into so much trouble. God always works for His own glory. And you can't find many even among the Lord's people that think that way. He wants all of the glory. And He deserves all of the glory because He is God!

But now let us go to our text in Matthew, chapter 1. We know that Mary knew what was going on, but up to this point Joseph did not know. They were a very godly couple, and although providentially God had led them together, yet from a purely human perspective I think we can say that

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Joseph fell in love with Mary because of her godliness, and that Mary had fallen in love with Joseph for the same reason – because of his godliness. But before Mary had spoken a word to Mary about the angel Gabriel’s announcement, we read that “she was found . . .”

Alexander Maclaren, in his sermon on this moment expressed Joseph’s feelings in these words:

The shock to Joseph of the sudden discovery, crashing in on him after he was bound to Mary, and in what would else have been the sweet interval of love and longing before they came together, is delicately and unconsciously brought out in verse 18. ‘She was found’ – how the remembrance of the sudden disclosure, blinding and startling as a lightning flash, lives in that word! And how the agony of perplexity as to the right thing to do in such a cruel dilemma is hinted at in the two clauses that pull in opposite directions! As a ‘just man’ and ‘her husband’ [to be], Joseph owed it to righteousness and to himself not to ignore his betrothed’s condition; but as her lover and her husband, how could he put her, who was still so dear to him, to public shame, some of which would cloud his own name? (pp. 7, 8).

You can see the terrible position that he was in. He knew that he could not go ahead with the marriage, but he loved her too much to make her a public example. So he planned to put her away “privily” – privately, or secretly.

What the Law actually said is found in Leviticus 20:10:

10 And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.

Evidently while an engagement in Bible times was tantamount to marriage, yet Joseph evidently felt that the engagement could be broken without putting her to death. And even the Lord refused to pronounce judgment on the woman in John 8 whom men said had been taken in the very act. There are things that we don’t know about Joseph’s idea, but we need to believe that, as a just man, he felt that he had to do God’s will, and not go on with the marriage.

Or, it may be that verse 19 was his immediate thought, but while he was deciding finally what to do, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. How important it is for us to think like Joseph did, before we act. And a most surprising announcement was made to Joseph. In those days

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before the Scriptures were completed, God spoke in dreams. And then Joseph was given the revelation that we read in verses 20 and 21. (Read.)

Now nothing like the angel of the Lord had ever taken place before, nor has it ever happened since then. Why Mary had not told Joseph before this, we cannot say. But it came to Joseph probably with just about as amazing effect as the discovery that Mary was pregnant. All of this was new to Joseph.

But then Matthew went on to tell why all of this was done. And I think that as Joseph considered the angel's message, the Spirit of God brought to his mind a very amazing Old Testament prophecy – in Isaiah 7:14. Joseph must have known this Scripture, but as much as a man of God he looked ahead to the fulfillment of this prophecy, he had no idea that his beloved Mary had been chosen to be the mother of the Messiah. And instead of being guilty of sin, he realized that his beloved had been chosen to be the mother of the Savior of all of the people of God. Truly she was blessed above all that any woman was ever blessed.

So what did Joseph do? Having been given the angel's message, and having had it confirmed in his own mind by the Word of God, from overwhelming sorrow which had been turned to unspeakable joy, he took Mary to be his wife. Their marriage was performed, but he did not have any physical relationship with her until after the Jesus was born.

Mary's part was, "she shall bring forth a son"; Joseph's part, "and thou shalt call His Name JESUS, for He shall save His people from their sins."

JESUS is defined here as meaning *Saviour*, "for He shall save His people from their sins." But it is interesting that the Spirit of God led the Apostle Matthew to say JESUS, when the verse of which it is a quotation in Isaiah says, IMMANUEL. Thus the Spirit of God has made JESUS, IMMANUEL, and IMMANUEL, JESUS. Both are names of the same Person. IMMANUEL means God with us, the Son of God incarnate, and ever with us, on our side, and JESUS, our Savior.

**Concl:** Before we leave our text for the morning, let me point out that our Lord was named JESUS, "for He shall save His people from their sins." He came to pay the penalty of sin for "His people," meaning, His elect. We are to proclaim the Gospel to all because we do not know who the elect are. But we preach it knowing that God has provided a full

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salvation for all whom He has chosen. Man is so depraved in his sin, that he would never, on his own, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ which is absolutely necessary for salvation. So if God had not taken the initiative in choosing those who will be saved, it could be possible that Christ would die and no one would be saved. But the doctrine of election teaches us that God has chosen His people, and that all of them, without exception, will surely come to Christ, and be saved. The Lord Jesus by His death has done the Father's will in dying for those whom the Father has given to Him.

Joseph knew this, and believed it. And knew that his beloved Mary had been sovereignly chosen to be the mother of the Savior. How different are the ways of God, but how perfect!

J. C. Ryle has given us a concluding word which we all need to believe:  
Let us take care that we clearly understand that there was a union of two natures, the divine and the human, in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a point of the deepest importance. We should settle it firmly in our minds, that our Savior is perfect man as well as wholly God . . . If we lose sight of this great foundation truth, we may run into fearful heresies (pp. 7, 8).

As the Son of God He was without sin, and could be our Substitute, but He had to be a Man for His death to be a sacrifice for us.