

“As the Angel Commanded”

Scripture Reading: MATTHEW 1:18-25

-) **SLIDES 1-6.** Bible Jeopardy!
-) **SLIDES 7-9.** Read today’s Scripture text.
-) **SLIDE 10.** I have titled today’s message “*As the Angel Commanded*” (v24).
-) Since this is the Sunday before Christmas of 2021, I want to speak this morning about one particular event we find in the Birth Narrative. What is the Birth Narrative? It is the Scripture texts which tell us about the birth of Jesus Christ.
-) The Birth Narrative Scripture texts can found in MATTHEW 1-2, and in LUKE 1-2. The birth of Jesus is not recorded in the gospels of MARK or JOHN.
-) About 2,000 years ago there was a carpenter named Joseph who lived in the small town of Nazareth. He finds himself in a very difficult situation. The circumstances he finds himself are not his fault and are all totally out of his control. He just wants to do a good thing—marry his childhood sweetheart Mary. But the situation has changed and dictates otherwise. These are certainly trying times for Joseph.
-) Let’s define Joseph’s situation. Here’s the simplified version. The girl that Joseph is about to marry is pregnant. And the child she is carrying is not his. His plan to marry Mary, like any other Jewish boy’s plan, has now changed. What is the right thing to do in this situation?
-) First, let me share with you some historical facts about the Jewish marriage customs of that time. This is very interesting and it will help us relate to Joseph’s situation and the decision he needs to make.

-) Before the actual marriage, there was a period of time called a betrothal. We see this word used here in v18. Some Bible translations use the word betrothed, some translations use the word engaged, some use the word pledged. It's all one and the same.
-) This betrothal period lasted about a year. During that year the girl would prove her faithfulness by not giving herself to anyone else. This would prove her purity to her husband-to-be.
-) During that same year, the boy would be considered her husband. He would prepare a home for her, usually with an addition to his father's house.
-) Augustus, the emperor at that time, had set the minimum age for an engagement at ten years of age.
-) According to Roman law, the minimum age for girls to be married was twelve. For boys, who develop slower, it was fourteen. Jewish practice followed the Roman law, just as we follow the law of our land for marriages today. At that time most Jewish girls got betrothed and then married at this early age, usually around the time when they first reached puberty. So Mary could have been as young as 12 and Joseph 14.
-) A betrothal was a binding, legal relationship (contract) arranged by the parents. During this time, the husband-to-be would pay a dowry, a price to the father of the bride-to-be. The negotiated price would be what the father of the bride thought his daughter was worth.
-) This betrothal period lasted about one year. There would be no sexual relationship between the boy and the girl during this period of time. Also the couple would not live together during this time.
-) Since this betrothal contract was legal and binding, only death or divorce could sever the contract. And if the man died, the betrothed girl would be considered a widow.

-) At the end of that year when they were 13 or 14, there would be a wedding feast that usually lasted seven days when everybody came together and celebrated. Then at the end of the seven days the friend of the bridegroom would hand the groom his bride and everybody would go home. The marriage would then be consummated.
-) In JOHN 2, Jesus is at a wedding feast and they run out of wine. Why? Because the celebration lasted so long.
-) So Joseph finds himself in a legal and binding agreement with Mary's parents. And no doubt the entire town of Nazareth knows about this betrothal. And I'm sure they are all looking forward to the 7-day celebration.
-) But now his fiancée Mary is pregnant. Oh boy. Now what? According to DEUTERONOMY 22:13-29, she should be stoned to death for such an offense. What should he do?
-) **SLIDE 11**. MATTHEW 1:19. Joseph will do the best thing he can considering his circumstances. He will send her away secretly. In other words he will smooth things over. He will claim the child as his own but make up an excuse and not marry Mary. He will then quietly move out of the picture and she won't suffer the consequences of stoning. It's certainly the righteous thing to do in this difficult situation.
-) Actually it sounds like a great plan until an angel shows up in a dream to Joseph. The angel explains the situation to Joseph and tells him to take Mary for his wife. She's about to be the mother of the Christ—the long promised Messiah.
-) Can you imagine what Joseph is thinking? Option 1. I'll send her away secretly, then I'll leave town, and let the chips fall where they may. Yes, I may have a little egg on my face, but at least Mary will not be stoned to death. And this option will not disgrace her too badly.

-) Or option 2. Stick around, continue with the engagement to Mary, and be the step father, the foster father, the legal father of Mary's child, the Christ, the chosen One, the anointed One, the Messiah, the One who will save His people from their sins. (weigh options) Either way, people will talk. They always do.
-) We all encounter difficult situations. Joseph's fiancée was pregnant and he was not the father. Chances are you are or you will be in a difficult situation that you didn't cause; a difficult situation that is not your fault; a difficult situation you have no control over. The question is how will you respond?
-) Joseph had an angel appear to him in a dream. And because of this angelic dream (BTW he had four angelic dreams), he did as the angel commanded him.
-) Chances are we will not receive a visit from an angel of the Lord. So, what is our course of action? Prayer. Reading the Word. Prayer. Reading the Word. Prayer. Reading the Word.
-) God will answer our prayer and speak to us through His Word by the power of His Holy Spirit which indwells every believer. And if you seek your answer in this manner, you will find it. Ask, and you shall receive. Seek and you shall find. Knock and the door will be opened.
-) Lord, what do I do? We ask, we seek, and we knock through prayer and the reading of God's Word.
-) Question. When you or I encounter a difficult situation, will we seek God's plan before we initiate our own plan? And if we know we have received God's plan through prayer and reading His Word, will we go with it?
-) Joseph did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. And because he did, he got to witness the greatest event ever in human history—the incarnation of God in the form of a baby. And His name shall be called Jesus. And He will save His people from their sins.

-) Joseph knew that the plan of God as announced through the angel was far better than any plan he could devise himself.
-) Both he and Mary knew that God would walk ahead of them and turn difficult times into times that would glorify God.
-) What wonderful opportunities await us when we go with God's plan as we navigate through difficult times?
-) **SLIDE 12.** And we must remember that difficult times in our lives still fall under ROMANS 8:28 that God works all things for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. Joseph never heard that verse but he believed it. I hope we can all believe this too.
-) Difficult times. They happen to all of us. And when they do, it's the time for us to seek God's solution.
-) And Christmas, the day we celebrate the birth of Jesus the Christ. A child born of a virgin and raised by a man who did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. Jesus, a Savior to all who will trust in Him—trust in His life, trust in His words, trust in His death, and trust in His resurrection from the grave. Jesus, the One who will save His people from their sins.
-) Have you called upon the Name of the Lord today? Your eternity depends on it.

12/19/2021 at Beech Grove Christian Church