

**December 25, 2011**  
**The Forgotten Figure of Christmas**  
**Matthew 1:18-25**

How were you raised to regard Christmas? Was the emphasis on how many presents you got or if you got that special present you wanted? How are you raising your children to regard Christmas?

One family celebrated Christmas every year with a birthday party for Jesus. An extra chair of honor at the table became the family's reminder of Jesus' presence. A cake with candles, along with the singing of "Happy Birthday" expressed the family's joy in Jesus' presence. One year on a Christmas afternoon a visitor asked five-year-old Sally, "Did you get everything you wanted for Christmas?" **After a moment's hesitation, she answered, "No, but then it's not my birthday!"**

**Christmas is all about Jesus**, yet many of the essential figures of the nativity are still recognizable, well maybe, except for Joseph.

The cast of characters associated with the story of Jesus' birth is colorful and memorable. We recognize them by their unique speaking parts. With dramatic lines, the Angels take center stage to announce the birth of the Savior. They appear to Joseph to announce that the name of the child would be Jesus. The arch angel Gabriel makes the unforgettable announcement to Mary. An angelic choir interrupts the shepherds singing, Glory to God in the highest.

The Virgin Mary, breaks into her beautiful hymn and thanksgiving in

**Luke 1:46-48: "My soul magnifies the Lord, And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed."**

The wise men are desperate in their search to find the newborn king and prepared to divest themselves of treasures to present Him with gifts of worship. In

**Matthew 2:2... "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."**

The shepherds became early evangelists! In **Luke 2**, the shepherds hasten to find the baby Jesus after the announcement of the angelic choir. Upon finding Jesus, Luke says, "**Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child (v. 17).**"

**Oddly enough, only Joseph has no speaking part. He is the lone silent member of the cast and often forgotten. Angels bring heavenly greetings. Mary sings a praiseful solo. Wise men**

**worship. Shepherds preach. Joseph is silent. No notable lines are attributed to him. No sound bites. No quotes, only silence.**

However, while **Joseph is the forgotten figure of Christmas, he is irreplaceable in the story of Jesus' birth.** His importance cannot be overstated. **Through Joseph, God protected the unborn life of Jesus and preserved human life for the Savior.**

**God protects the “unborn purposes and promises of Christ” in our lives. In each of our lives now, there is an aspect of God’s will yet unknown, a promise yet to be fulfilled, a word yet to be manifest – a ministry started, a loved one saved, ---- but faithfully watched over and protected by God to be realized for His glory in your life.**

Joseph’s life teaches us 3 lessons - a lesson in righteous mercy, in redemptive faith, and in ready obedience. Each are important to preserve and realize God’s purpose and promise in our lives.

#### **A Lesson in Righteous Mercy**

We are introduced to Joseph in the middle of an unwelcome nightmare. Having become engaged to a the girl of his dreams, according to the Jewish tradition, he has worked hard to establish an income to support his new bride and begin a family. **He is in love. He is committed to Mary. He believed she loved him, until the news that his precious bride is pregnant.**

Heart-broken and feeling betrayed, he considers how he should respond? Should he openly shame her and serve her with a certificate of divorce? Should he surrender her to a Jewish authorities for stoning? **Her explanation of the pregnancy was unbelievable, and did nothing to ease Joseph’s emotional pain.**

*If Mary would not have been stoned on the charge of adultery, she could have been stoned on the charge of serious blasphemy. However, Joseph chooses the path of mercy...*

**- Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.**

It is response born of solid character. Before any divine explanation, Joseph chooses mercy. No malice. No explosion. **Joseph could have ask Mary, demanding to know: How could you do this to me? Who’s the father? What’s his name.** But, no words are recorded, only gentleness.. He might be the talk of Nazareth. Friends might distance themselves with rude comments, but he would not hurt Mary, no matter what he thought she had done to him.

**That’s a just man! That’s a merciful man. When Joseph could have demanded a bitter justice, he chose a righteous mercy.**

**This merciful carpenter would raise a merciful Savior.**

When people deserve the sentence of justice, choose a righteous mercy, which extends patience, grace, encouragement, prayer, empathy...

**Joseph gives us A Lesson in Redemptive Faith**

The unborn plans of God are also protected by faith, **redemptive faith**. **In other words, when we trust God fully and completely – we will arrive at His promises.**

We see this in Joseph's faith, his willingness to believe God. **Joseph intended to serve a certificate of divorce, end his engagement with Mary, and handle the matter quietly.** Now the Lord is ready to let Joseph in on the plan. **God was ready to call him to faith, to believe. Joseph's eyes were opened to the glimpse of the Divine plan.**

**In Joseph's dream, God reminded Joseph of His God-given identity. God's angelic messenger addressed Joseph with a unique title, "Joseph, Son of David."**

The God that watches over His plans and purpose for your life wants you to know who you are in Him.

**Ephesians 1:18-19 “the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup> and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power”**

Do you understand that as one born of Christ, you have a special identity --- you are a member of His family and God knows every detail of who you are? That's an amazing fact, from God's Word.

**Next, God assured Joseph that he did not have to be afraid. Fear is the enemy of faith and steals our hope. Joseph could take stock of his dilemma and afford hope even when it seemed impossible.**

**Third, God gave Joseph direction. He was to take Mary as his wife and be a father to the child, whom he would give the name – Jesus. Be teachable and allow His instruction.**

**Finally, God assured Joseph of His divine involvement. God's message to Joseph was the confirmation that this was God's doing. Joseph now had a different perspective.**

## **Joseph give us a Lesson in Ready Obedience**

**Obedience followed Joseph's faith.** He did as he was commanded. **The Bible defines faith with obedience and obedience with faith.** In other words, they are two sides of the same coin. You cannot have one without the other.

**Now With an informed faith to trust God, Joseph would now obey.** He would take Mary to be his wife and suffer the caustic remarks of a child conceived prior to their wedding. **He would obey God in spite of the fact that this child of divine promise would be born under a cloud of fornication in the eyes of many.**

**Joseph would obey by giving this child the name given by the Angel, the name JESUS – a name declaring the God, who saves – Yahweh is salvation.**

**\*Listen the Herod's of this world cannot destroy you – when you are in a place of obedience. God's promises are preserved in places of obedience.**

Lesson from the forgotten figure are for us today; Lesson of **Mercy. Faith. Obedience.** Each are important to preserve and realize God's purpose and promise in our lives.

Are you waiting on a particular promise? Are you looking for an answer to hopeful prayer? **Continue in mercy, faith, and obedience.**