

Week of December 11, 2011

Receive God's Gift

Passages Outline:

1. **Confront Your Fears** (Matt. 1:18-20; Luke 1:28-31)
2. **Ask Your Questions** (Luke 1:34-37)
3. **Obey in Faith** (Matt. 1:24-25; Luke 1:38)

What Our Study Is About:

This session is about Mary and Joseph's faithful obedience despite their fears and questions.

How Can This Study Impact Your Life:

This lesson will challenge you to obey God despite our fears and questions.

Matthew 1:18-20

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

Luke 1:28-31

²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.

1. **Confront Your Fears - Matt. 1:18-20; Luke 1:28-31**

- A. Birth announcements normally call for great celebration and joy. Sure, there are times when the news of an unexpected pregnancy might cause different emotions, but even in those circumstances, concern usually gives way to congratulations. For Mary and Joseph, this announcement brought many complicating factors.
- B. Matthew and Luke are the only Gospel writers to include the birth narrative of Jesus.
 - i. Matthew focused on Joseph, while Luke took interest in Mary's account.
 - ii. Both are remarkably similar in describing *how* the two received the news, *their reaction* to the announcement, and *the obedience* each showed in following God's will for their lives.
 - iii. The common word in both accounts is the word *fear*. They had to confront this emotion before they could move forward in faith.
 - iv. Similarly, believers often experience fear when first sensing God's calling. We can greatly learn from their experiences.
- C. Matthew says that at some point, **it was discovered Mary was pregnant**. Matthew reports three pregnancy complications regarding the upcoming birth of Jesus.
 - i. Joseph became aware Mary was pregnant **after** she **had been engaged to Joseph**. In New Tes-

tament times, Betrothal was treated much more seriously than our engagement.

- Most marriages were arranged by the parents. Once betrothed, this engagement would last around one year, but the couple was considered married. Only death or divorce could dissolve the betrothal. A wedding ceremony climaxed the engagement, when the husband would take his bride into his home and consummate the marriage.
- During the betrothal the couple was not sexual active.
- So, did Mary tell Joseph she was pregnant or did Joseph notice the morning sickness and eventual “baby bump” of his fiancée?

- ii. This news arrived **before** the couple **came together**. No sexual intercourse had taken place between the couple, so Joseph’s natural assumption was that Mary had committed adultery.
- iii. Mary’s pregnancy was **by the Holy Spirit**. What could this mean? The Greeks believed their gods would have sexual relations with human women, but this was far different. Here Luke specifically mentions the Third Person of the Trinity as being involved in the conception of Jesus in Mary.

D. Joseph must have really loved Mary. The normal response to such a situation would be to expose the woman publically. According to the Old Testament Law, and if proved unfaithful, the woman would be killed by stoning (Deut. 22:13-21). But Joseph did not want **to disgrace her publicly**, and so had **decided to divorce her secretly**.

- i. Joseph had paid the dowry, the Bride Price, in order to be betrothed to Mary.
- ii. The Bride Price was the equivalent of one year’s wage. This is why men often married when they were much older – it took that long to get the money together.
- iii. If Joseph handled this matter publically, and if proved Mary was unfaithful to Joseph, the dowry would be returned. But unfortunately, Mary would also die.
- iv. If the matter were handled secretly, as Joseph had intended, Mary would continue to live, but Joseph would have to forfeit the dowry.

E. At just the right time, however, **an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared to him in a dream**. In the midst of the most-troubling time in his life, God changed Joseph’s course of action, from fear to faith.

F. The angel told Joseph three things:

- i. The angel brought the encouraging and familiar words, “**don’t be afraid.**”
- ii. Joseph was told to take **Mary as his wife** despite his questions. Following God is never easy, but Joseph was challenged to show obedience to God.
- iii. Joseph could go through with the marriage because the baby **conceived in Mary was by the Holy Spirit**. No ordinary man was responsible for his fiancée’s pregnancy, but the Holy Spirit Himself. This was a declaration of astounding proportions.

G. Luke records that Mary expressed the same shock when an angel announced her pregnancy. But unlike Joseph’s fear, Mary’s fear came primarily from the angel’s appearing.

H. Gabriel **came** to Mary with a stark and frank message: “**Rejoice, favored woman! The Lord is with you.**” Not only would any person experience fear when approached by an angel, but the kind of greeting would cause one trouble as well. Yet the Angel said **Rejoice** which would balance her fear with joy. Mary was also **favored**, not due to any works of her own or special merit, but simply because she was the recipient of God’s grace.

I. The Angel gave Mary the same comforting words that Joseph received: “**Do not be afraid.**” She had

found favor with God. The Lord had big plans for her and His grace would calm any of Mary's fears.

- J. But his message only exacerbated her concern. She would **conceive and give birth to a son**, calling **His name Jesus**. With the announcement that this young girl would give birth to a son without having sexual relations, the messages to both Joseph and Mary came full circle. Both experienced fear as a result of a troubling visit from an angel bearing a surprising announcement.

How will you deal with fear?

As Christ followers, we all have unanswered questions, doubts and troubles – and yes, even fear – with an assignment God gives us that calls us out of our comfort zones. Still, we are not to let our fear interfere with our obedience to God's plans and purposes for our lives. Here are some things we can do to avoid disobeying God because of our fear.

1. Decide beforehand that we will obey God regardless of how we may feel.
2. Share your fear with God.
3. Believe that God is greater than any of our fears.
4. God's plan for our lives is Very Good and there is no reason to fear.

Luke 1:34-37

³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, so the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For nothing is impossible with God."

2. Ask Your Questions - Luke 1:34-37

- A. How can this be? Being still in that betrothal time-period, Mary knew that her marriage to Joseph had not been consummated. Her question asserted not only had she not had sexual intercourse with Joseph, but any other man as well. It was a legitimate, honest, and heartfelt concern.

Do you "ask God questions" or do you "question God?"

As Christ followers, we should be assured God does not mind honest questions when we are confronted with situations causing us fear, doubts, or unanswered questions. On the other hand, we must be on our guard not to allow our questions of God to turn into questioning God Himself. There is a huge difference between the two. Asking God questions is faithful and trusting; Questioning God is just the opposite of that. Asking God questions challenges us to trust God's plan and power for our lives.

- B. The angel answered Mary, explaining her pregnancy would not be by human conception, but instead **the Holy Spirit** would **come upon** her and **the power of the Most High** would **overshadow** her. In short, the powerful, holy presence of God would miraculously cause her pregnancy. One should not think of the Holy Spirit in any sense “mating” with her, but simply being the conduit of God’s miraculous work.
- C. The result would be **the holy One to be born** of Mary would **be called the Son of God**.
- D. As confirmation of God’s ability to do such a great miracle, the angel told Mary to **consider** her **relative Elizabeth**. Elizabeth had two major strikes against her having **a son**. She was **in her old age** and **was called childless**. Still, God miraculously worked in much the same way as He promised Mary.
- E. The lesson Mary needed to be reminded of was that **nothing will be impossible with God**, even the conception of a child without a human father!

Matthew 1:24-25

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Luke 1:38

³⁸ "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

3. Obey in Faith - Matt. 1:24-25; Luke 1:38

- A. Both Joseph and Mary faced an incredible task and yet both obeyed the instructions of an angel.
 - i. Joseph got up from sleep and took Mary as his wife.
 - ii. Mary simply accepted God’s will for her life.
- B. We would do well to follow their examples.

Biblical Truths from Our Study

1. Christians should not be caught off guard when God’s calling causes fear, concerns, or unanswered questions.
2. God expects us to come to Him with our honest questions, trusting that He is open to and able to answer them or give us the strength to accept His will even if we don’t fully understand.
3. Obedience to God is the true evidence of faith in God’s gift of His Son and His desire for us to follow His leading in our lives.