

Ministry of Grace

Matthew 1

¹The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham: ²Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, ⁴and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶and Jesse the father of David the king. And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, ⁷and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, ⁸and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, ⁹and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, ¹⁰and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, ¹¹and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

¹²And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, ¹³and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, ¹⁴and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, ¹⁵and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, ¹⁶and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

¹⁷So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

¹⁸Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

²⁰But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

²²All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ²³"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).

²⁴When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Notes

Matthew 1:1

¹The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham:

“**genealogy**” – If the following list is compared to the genealogy given by Luke in **Luke 3:23-38**, we see a significant difference. First of all, Matthew begins with Abraham and proceeds forward to Joseph who is declared to be the husband of Mary of whom Jesus was born. Luke, however, begins with Jesus and proceeds backward all the way to Adam. In comparing the two lists it appears that there is disagreement regarding who Joseph’s father is. Matthew says:

and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ. (**Matthew 1:16**)

Whereas Luke says:

Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli, (**Luke 3:23**)

There has been much discussion as to the significance of these differences. Before we look at the two most plausible explanations, however, it should be noted that during the first century there were many detractors of the Christian faith who were both intelligent and learned. If there was a real discrepancy in either of these genealogies it is reasonable to expect that the discrepancies would have been pointed out by those (especially Jews) who were opposed to Jesus being the Messiah. Yet, in the first century or two of Christianity there appears no writing to indicate such an objection was ever made.

Now, there are two reasonably plausible explanations as to why these genealogies differ as they do. The first is the belief that Matthan (the son of Eleazer, of Solomon’s line) married a woman named Estha who bore him Jacob. After Matthan died, Matthat (the son of Levi, of Nathan’s line) married Estha who then bore him Heli. Thus Jacob and Heli were brothers but with different fathers. Heli married a wife but died before having any children. Jacob then married Heli’s widow who bore him Joseph. By Jewish law this would mean that Joseph was legally the son of Heli and not of Jacob. Although his was the explanation suggested by many of the early Christian writers, it is not without its problems (see the explanation of the prophecy regarding Jeconiah below).

The second plausible explanation is seen by the fact that Matthew is very careful to point out that Joseph was the husband of Mary, not the father of Jesus. And, it is fairly obvious that Matthew is tracing the lineage of Joseph. Luke also points out that Joseph was not really the father of Jesus but was supposed so by others. If we look carefully at Luke’s writing we see that Jesus was supposed to be the son of Joseph, but the construction of the sentence also says that he (Jesus) was “of Heli.” Thus, it is believed by some that Luke is tracing the ancestry of Mary (the daughter of Heli). This explanation seems to fit better with the prophecy regarding Jeconiah (Coniah) who is in Solomon’s line:

Thus says the LORD: "Write this man down as childless, a man who shall not succeed in his days, for none of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David and ruling again in Judah." (**Jeremiah 22:30**)

Thus, Solomon’s line (Jeconiah) was declared to be childless without a descendant sitting on the throne. But if Jesus is to be the son of David as declared in the Old Testament, then he must be a physical descendant of David which would have to be through Mary’s lineage.

It should also be noted that the Hebrews never permitted women to enter into their genealogical tables, whenever a family happened to end with a daughter, instead of naming her in the genealogy they inserted her husband, as the son of him who was, in reality, only his step-father. Thus it seems that the second plausible explanation given above that Matthew is tracing the lineage of Joseph while Luke is tracing the lineage of Mary is the best explanation of the apparent contradiction.

“**Christ**” – Greek *christos*, from the verb *chriō*, meaning “to anoint with oil or ointment.” Hence, *christos* means “anointed one.” It is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *meshiach* or Messiah. In the Old Testament this anointing applied to kings, prophets, and priests. However, because of passages like **Psalms 2:2** the term has become synonymous with the promised redeemer of the Jews:

The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, , (**Psalms 2:2**)

Since both the terms Messiah and Christ are adjectives, they are normally preceded by the definite article (the). However, after the resurrection, the term Christ became widely used as a proper name, thus dropping the definite article.

“**Son**” – The Greek word *huios* (whee-os), meaning “son” is often used interchangeably with *teknon*, meaning “child.” However, Jesus is never referred to as *teknon*, only *huios*. While in *teknon* there is commonly implied the passive or dependent relation of the children to the parents, *huios* fixes the thought on the person himself rather than on the dependence upon his parents. For this reason perhaps, Jesus is always referred to as *huios*.

Matthew 1:2-6a

²Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, ⁴and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶and Jesse the father of David the king.

The purpose of the genealogy is to show that Jesus was a direct descendant of both Abraham and of David. God promised Abraham that all people would be blessed by his descendant (seed):

and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice." (**Genesis 22:18**)

He also promised David that one of his descendants (seed) would reign as king forever:

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. (**2 Samuel 7:12-13**)

“**Judah and his brothers**” – Although Judah was not the oldest, he was the one through whom the blessing would come. In Revelation, the Lamb of God is referred to as the lion of the tribe of Judah:

And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."
(**Revelation 5:5**)

This is in fulfillment of the blessing that Israel (Jacob) blessed Judah with just before his death:

"Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. (**Genesis 49:8-10**)

“Perez and Zerah by Tamar” – It is fascinating to see the women who are mentioned in the line of the Messiah. Tamar, for instance, was the wife of Judah’s son. However, due to some unusual circumstances, Judah had children by his daughter-in-law. This is described in Genesis chapter 38.

Tamar is one of five women mentioned in the lineage of the Messiah, which is unusual in that the Jews never mentioned women in genealogies. Two of the women mentioned here, Rahab and Ruth, are Gentiles (perhaps Bathsheba was as well since she was the wife of a Hittite, not a Jew). Three of them Rahab, Tamar, and Bathsheba, are known for their illicit sexual activity; Rahab was a harlot, Tamar had children by her father-in-law Judah, and Bathsheba engaged in sexual activity with King David while she was still married to Uriah. Of the five women identified in this genealogy, only Mary and Ruth are shown as righteous women. The inclusion of these five women is perhaps a subtle suggestion that the coming of Christ would bring salvation to sinners, grace to Gentiles, and that in Him, barriers of race and sex would be torn down.

“Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab” – Another of the women mentioned is Rahab, the harlot, who protected the Jewish spies when they went in to spy out Jericho. You can read about Rahab in Joshua chapter two. Rahab is listed here as the great-great-grandmother of David. While this is possible, it is likely that there are some generations omitted since there is a period of about four hundred years between Rahab and David.

“Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth” – Of all the women mentioned in the lineage of Jesus (other than Mary, of course), Ruth is certainly the most noble. The entire book of Ruth was written about her.

Matthew 1:6b-11

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah,⁷ and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph,⁸ and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah,⁹ and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,¹⁰ and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah,¹¹ and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon. (Matthew 1:6b-11**)**

“And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah.” – This woman is Bathsheba, who was still the wife of Uriah the Hittite when she first became pregnant by King David. However, she was legally David’s wife when Solomon was conceived and born.

Matthew 1:12-16

¹²And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,¹³ and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor,¹⁴ and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud,¹⁵ and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob,¹⁶ and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

“Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel” – There are two things of note here. First, is the fact that Zerubbabel appears to be Shealtiel’s grandson, not his son (see **1Chronicles 3:17-19**). The second is the fact that these two names are mentioned in this order in both Matthew’s and Luke’s genealogies. It is believed by some that the genealogies joined at this point and then diverted again. This has several problems, though, not the least of which is the fact that Jeconiah (Shealtiel’s father) was reckoned as childless by God and would not have a descendant to reign on the throne of Israel. It is more likely that there were two separate instances of people named Shealtiel and Zerubbabel (in Luke Shealtiel is listed as the son of Neri, but Matthew’s Shealtiel is listed as the son of Jeconiah).

It is also of note that from this point on the names in Matthew do not match the names given in 1Chronicles 3. This is most likely due to the fact that those who were born during the Babylonian captivity probably had two names, one Hebrew and one Babylonian.

“of whom Jesus was born” – In English this statement could be interpreted as applying to both Joseph and Mary. In the Greek, however, the word “whom” is expressed in the feminine singular, which could only apply to Mary.

Matthew 1:17

¹⁷ So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

“fourteen generations” – We know from looking at the family lineages in the Old Testament that Matthew occasionally skipped generations, calling a grandson or a great-grandson a son. His purpose was probably to intentionally keep fourteen generations in order to make the memorization of each list easier. There are some who believe that the name “David” in Hebrew numerology added up to 14, which is the reason for these divisions. However, this seems fanciful and contrived. Also, if you count carefully you will see that the fourteen from Abraham to David includes both Abraham and David. So, also does the fourteen from the captivity (Jeconiah) to Jesus include both Jeconiah and Jesus. But the fourteen from David to the captivity (Jeconiah) does not include David.

Matthew 1:18, 19

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

“betrothed” – Greek *mnēsteuō*, which is from the verb *mnaomai* meaning “to remember.” *Mnēsteuō* means “to ask in marriage.” Hence it is often translated as “engaged, betrothed, pledged or espoused.” In the first century BC the engagement was a fully binding agreement which could only be broken by a divorce. Though they were considered husband and wife, the man and woman continued to live separately for a period of time and only came together after the wedding ceremony. The betrothal was so binding, in fact, that adultery was punishable by stoning:

"If there is a betrothed virgin, and a man meets her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry for help though she was in the city, and the man because he violated his neighbor's wife. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. (Deuteronomy 22:23-24)

“before they came together” – Luke makes it clear that Joseph and Mary had not consummated the marriage when she was found to be pregnant. Also, in verse twenty-five, he makes it clear that they had no sexual relations until after Jesus was born (**and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son**). Thus, Jesus was truly born of a virgin:

“she was found to be with child” – Mary was told by the angel Gabriel that she would conceive as a result of the Holy Spirit coming upon her (Luke chapter one). She was then told that her cousin Elizabeth was already six months pregnant. It was about that time that Mary went to be with Elizabeth until after John the Baptist was born to her. So when Mary returned to Nazareth she would have been three or four months pregnant. Thus, it appears that “she was found with child” sometime after she returned from being with Elizabeth.

“her husband Joseph, being a just man” – One can only imagine the thoughts that must have gone through Joseph’s mind as he learned that his innocent, young fiancé was pregnant. Then, to have her claim that she was still a virgin, would have tested his love for her and his trust in her to the very limit. The word “just” is translated from the Greek word *dikaios*, meaning “righteous, one who always does what is right.” This implies that Joseph was one who wholeheartedly obeyed the Law of Moses. As such, he was bound by the Law to have Mary stoned to death.

“unwilling to put her to shame” – In spite of his being one who strictly followed the Law, Joseph was a compassionate person. His love and concern for Mary caused him to seek a way of dealing with the situation without resorting to having Mary stoned to death. The word translated “unwilling” is a form of *thelō*, meaning “determined will” as opposed to *boulomai*, meaning “desirous will.” Joseph was determined to not make a public example of Mary.

“resolved to divorce her quietly.” – Joseph’s solution was to quietly divorce her. Interestingly enough, the word translated “resolved” is a form of *boulomai*, which we just looked at. The words “put her away” are from the Greek word *apoluō*, which means “to unbind” or “to loose and send away.” It is a description of divorce. Thus, this section could have been translated: **“and her husband Joseph, being a just man, and having determined to not make her a public example, was willing to divorce her secretly.”**

Matthew 1:20, 21

²⁰But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

“as he considered these things” – Joseph was not a hasty man. He surely must have been deeply troubled by the news that his young betrothed was pregnant. There is no evidence that Mary had yet told him of her message from the Angel Gabriel, so Joseph could only imagine the worst about Mary. And being inclined to divorce her quietly, he apparently spent some time thinking about how he should accomplish what he felt he had to do.

“an angel of the Lord” – Although we are not specifically told, it is quite likely that this was the Angel Gabriel who also communicated to Mary regarding this child.

“appeared to him in a dream” – The Jews believed that Gabriel was the angel of dreams, thus giving more credence to the identity of this angel.

“**son of David**” – No doubt Joseph, like every other descendant of King David, was aware of his lineage. To be addressed so by a heavenly messenger would clearly set the stage for the message that was to follow.

“**do not fear**” – The form of the verb “to fear” is such that it is not a direct command (imperative mood) as it appears in the English. Rather it is in the subjunctive mood and should thus be translated as “you should not be afraid.”

“**that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit**” – This is essentially the same message that was given to Mary (**Luke 1:35**).

“**you shall call His name Jesus**” - Jesus is the Greek equivalent of Joshua (or Jeshua), which is contracted from Jehoshuah, meaning “Yahweh is helper” or “Yahweh saves.” Joshua was a type of Christ in the Old Testament, for it was he who led the people into the Promised Land just as Jesus leads His people into Paradise. The name Jesus is a transliteration of the Greek *Iēsous*.

“**He will save His people from their sins**” – Here the angel expounds on the meaning of the name Jesus. As “Yahweh Saves,” He is the one who will provide salvation for mankind. In the Greek text there is emphasis on the word “He” as if to say, “for He is the one who will save His people from their sins.” It should also be noted that He will not save all people from their sins, but He will save **His** people from their sins.

Matthew 1:22, 23

²²All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ²³“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).

Matthew now connects these events to the prophecy of **Isaiah 7:14** which is quoted here in verse twenty-three.

“**virgin**” – Greek *parthenos*, meaning “a young woman” or “an unmarried daughter.” The famous Parthenon, high up on the acropolis in Athens, Greece was the temple to the virgin Athena. So, in the New Testament the Greek word *parthenos* clearly carries the notion of a virgin. But what about the word translated “virgin” in Isaiah’s prophecy.

I heard a story of a Jewish Rabbi (not a believer) who claimed that the Scripture does not declare Mary to be a virgin because the Hebrew word in **Isaiah 7:14**, which is translated virgin (*almah*), simply means “a young woman or a girl.” When asked what Hebrew word means “virgin” the Rabbi responded that there is no word in Hebrew that means “virgin.” Then, when asked what word he would use to refer to a virgin, the Rabbi thought for a moment then replied, “I suppose *almah* is the only word we have in our language that could be used.”

“**Immanuel**” – This is a transliteration of the Hebrew word which literally means “with us is God.”

Matthew 1:24, 25

²⁴When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

“**sleep**” – Literally “the sleep.”

“**took**” – Greek *paralambanō*, which is made up of *para*, meaning “beside” or “near” and *lambanō*, meaning “to take.” Hence the notion is that of “taking to one’s side.” It does not convey the idea of taking sexually, but of taking emotionally.

“**knew**” – Greek *ginōskō*, meaning “to know” or “to come to know.” It implies an experiential knowledge. This is equivalent to the Hebrew *yadah*, which refers to intimate personal knowledge. It is clear from Matthew’s narrative that Joseph and Mary did not have sexual relations until after Jesus was born.

So What?

God is with us!

Neither you nor I will ever be called upon to go through exactly what Mary and Joseph went through. First of all, we are not Jews. And even if we were, the Messiah has already come. But that doesn’t mean that God will not use each one of us in some way to build up the body of Christ. God did not use either Joseph or Mary by accident. He had a carefully laid-out plan for them and they were individually chosen at just the right moment in time, in just the right place, as part of just the right family, and with just the right personal characteristics. There’s no reason to believe that God hasn’t also selected you or me for a very specific part of His plan. But, right now, for just a few minutes, let’s put ourselves in Joseph’s and Mary’s sandals.

Joseph was descended from David, the most famous of all the kings of Israel. Surely Joseph knew that David was his ancient ancestor. But this poor carpenter must have recognized that his lowly position had no resemblance whatsoever to that of the great king. Had he thought about it, he might have realized that David began as a lowly shepherd, perhaps not that different from a carpenter. But David had lived in a time when Israel was an independent nation, devoted to Yahweh, living under the leadership of their first king, Saul the son of Kish. The Israel of Joseph’s time, however, was not independent. The nation was under the thumb of Rome, not permitted to have their own king but ruled over by political puppets, most of whom were more concerned with their own wealth than the welfare of the nation of Israel. And though Joseph surely knew that he was descended from David, he also must have known that he was descended from Jeconiah. And Joseph knew that neither Jeconiah, nor any of his descendants, could ever rule over Israel because of Isaiah’s prophecy concerning his ancestral line.

Joseph was a simple man, but he lived his life open before God. He was not just an outwardly religious man but one to whom his faith was personal and real. We learn from Matthew’s testimony that Joseph was a righteous man. So, he must have kept all the observances prescribed by the law and dealt honestly with those around him. And, yes, I suppose he was in love. He was engaged to a lovely young girl who apparently was just as devoted to Yahweh as he was. So, in spite of the fact that he would never be king, in fact he probably would never be more than just a carpenter, Joseph’s life was going pretty well. True, he hadn’t seen his bride to be in three months, but even the anticipation of seeing her returning to Nazareth must have made his heart pound within his chest. Little did he know that he was about to undergo the most emotionally difficult time of his life.

When Mary finally returned home he may have noticed that she had begun to put on some weight. Perhaps he didn’t. He may have noticed that she was a bit pensive, not the happy-go-lucky girl she had been. Perhaps he didn’t notice this either. However, it wouldn’t have taken very long before he either figured out, or was told by Mary herself, that his fiancé was pregnant. Surely his heart must have stopped when he learned the horrible news! How could he ever look on her again with the same feeling of excitement about their future together? She had been unfaithful! Another man had known her the way that only he was supposed to! His mental roller coaster must have taken him through deep emotional hurt that Mary would do this to him, to disappointment that she was not the

type of girl he thought her to be, to rage that another man would steal his honor from him, to desperate consideration of the punishment that she now must face, to merciful compassion toward the woman he would have spent his life with, to questioning why God would allow this to happen to him, and finally to outright despair of what was to happen to both of them now.

Then, one night as he was tossing and turning in his bed, trying to answer all of his own questions, trying to make sense of the chaos he had been tossed into, trying to understand why Yahweh would allow this to happen, he had a dream! In his dream an angel appeared to him and revealed the truth that he had been unable to believe before. Upon opening his eyes, I'm sure he was immediately wide awake as he thought about what he had just been told. Mary had not been unfaithful! She was not pregnant by another man. In fact, she was the virgin spoken of by Isaiah so many years before. She was carrying the Messiah within her womb! The angel had told him that he shouldn't be afraid to take Mary as his wife. He would now gladly do so. But ... he knew it wouldn't be long before others assumed the same things about Mary that he had believed until now. He would defend her! He could set the record straight! But who would believe him? Who would believe Mary? Everyone knew how babies were created and it always involved a woman and a man. And, with Joseph defending Mary's honor everyone would assume that he was the father. They would assume that he had not been able to control himself and had stolen Mary's honor without waiting for the wedding day. He would be laughed at! He would be looked upon as an adulterer. They would both be treated as social outcasts. They would never have a normal life from that moment on. And this was all Yahweh's doing. But why?!

Now let's look at Mary for a few minutes. The young girl who was engaged to Joseph the carpenter. Imagine how she must have felt when the Angel Gabriel had appeared to her several months earlier. "Rejoice, highly favored *one*, the Lord *is* with you; blessed *are* you among women!" She could probably still hear those words for years afterward. Gabriel had told her that she would give birth to the Messiah. But how could this be?! She had been faithful to Joseph and to God. She was still a virgin! But, upon hearing the news from the holy messenger that she was to give birth to the Messiah and upon realizing that it really was going to happen, Mary was humbled. She was humbled and honored that God should choose to bless her in such a thing as this. And, having heard that her relative Elizabeth was also expecting, Mary made arrangements to travel down to Judah to be with her right away. But would Elizabeth believe her when she told her the news?

We learn from Luke's gospel that Elizabeth knew immediately as soon as she heard Mary's voice. What a time of praise those two must have shared. What a connection they must have had. Not only were they both pregnant at the same time. They were both pregnant in a miraculous way. The next three months must have been spent in long discussions about the changes both their bodies were undergoing, occasionally punctuated with, "Oh, feel this, he's moving again. I think it's his foot!" But their conversations surely also included the sobering discussions of what people would think of Mary when they found out that she was pregnant, for her marriage to Joseph had not yet been consummated. Would Joseph even believe her?! Mary and Elizabeth surely spent time in prayer together seeking guidance from Yahweh, asking Him to give Joseph an understanding spirit, asking Him to protect both Mary and Joseph from the wicked lies that would soon be told about them.

After the joyous arrival of Elizabeth's son, John and the miraculous reopening of Zacharias' mouth, perhaps the three of them sang Yahweh's praises together. That is, until the day came that Mary was to return to Nazareth. The journey must have seemed much longer on the way home. Not only did she have less physical comfort than when she left a few months earlier, but the closer she got to Nazareth, the more she struggled with what Joseph would say and what he would do when he found out. What apprehensive joy she must have felt to see Joseph's face once again, what guarded comfort just to be in his presence once more? But how long would it be before he sensed Mary's

apprehension? How long could she keep the secret from him? Surely he would notice soon. When Mary finally shared the truth with Joseph, he must have sat in stunned silence. Then his questions, his accusations, his anger, his tears! The following days were some of the saddest Mary ever felt, wondering what Joseph would do to her. Would he have her stoned? But he couldn't! She was carrying the Messiah, and she knew that Yahweh would protect her. Would Joseph divorce her publicly and expose her to public ridicule? Or, would he divorce her quietly and simply leave her to care for this child on her own. She had no answers, only questions ... and prayers.

Then one day Joseph came to see Mary. He was smiling and full of joy! He came inside and hugged her like he had never done before, patting her tummy as he whispered, "The Messiah is coming!" Then he shared with her the message he had heard the night before. He told her what the angel has said to him. In response, she poured out her heart, talking about her own message from Gabriel and all that she and Elizabeth had shared with each other during her months away. They may have then gotten down on their knees and prayed to Yahweh, giving Him thanks and asking for guidance as they were about to embark on a journey like no one else had ever taken.

OK, I know that this is a lot fanciful speculation, because we are not given this kind of detail in the Bible. But I think we can all see that both Joseph and Mary must have gone through some severe mental anguish as they tried to wrestle with the circumstances that God placed them in. The point is this ... We all have difficulties in our walk with God. Not every step of the way is filled with sunshine, flowers, and singing birds. Sometimes our walk with God is through bitter cold, pouring rain, wind, and darkness. But, if we are God's children then he has a plan for us and He is walking by our side. He knows what we're going through and He loves us, even when we're being disobedient. So, let's stay on the path that He has led us down. Let's keep our hand in His. Let's keep our focus on Him and do all that we can to give glory to Him. He has a plan for us. He will use us if we will make ourselves useful to Him. He knows the pain we feel and He shares our joy. Let's remember that our purpose in this life is not to get for ourselves, but to give to Him.

God didn't use either Joseph or Mary by accident; He had a well thought-out plan. And, He has a plan for you and me. All we have to do is humble ourselves before Him, be obedient to Him, be available to Him, and keep Him ever before our eyes.

Remember, He has promised that He will never leave us nor forsake us. For, God is with us!

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