

# Crisis of belief

Matthew 1:18-25

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*<sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. <sup>20</sup> But 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. <sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." <sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:*

*<sup>23</sup> "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). <sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, <sup>25</sup> but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.*

As one seeks to understand these verses it helps to know more about the culture of their day. Mary was betrothed (engaged) to marry Joseph. This was quite different than today. Mary and Joseph's families had very likely met together and formalized an agreement that Mary and Joseph would be married. Joseph probably paid a dowry to Mary's father. Joseph now would return home to build on an additional room to his parent's house so that he and Mary could live there. The betrothal usually lasted about one year. This agreement was so binding that if one chose to break it, they would need to file for "divorce" to be freed from the agreement that had been made. During this time of betrothal the bride and groom would have no sexual relations.

It was during this time that the angel Gabriel came to Mary and informed her that she was going to have a baby. But how was this possible? She was a virgin.

We see in these verses how Joseph responded once he heard the news. He was a just, righteous man and because of this he did not respond with rage or revenge. Legally he had two ways he could respond. The first was to make a public example of Mary. He could charge her publicly in court with having committed adultery. He could have brought her to trial, where she would have been convicted publicly. Her reputation would have been ruined and he would have had his revenge.

Joseph's other option was to handle it in a quieter manner. This was how Joseph considered responding. In this procedure the two parties would be brought together with two or three witnesses. They would write out a bill of divorce. There would be no judge or public proceedings. No public knowledge. One did not even have to give the cause for the divorce. This is how Joseph was planning to respond.

As Joseph considered this option an angel appeared to him in a dream. The angel spoke to Joseph, reminding him that he was a son (descendant) of David. This was important, because the Jews all knew that the promised Messiah would be born into the lineage of King David. The angel was preparing Joseph for the news that would follow.

Mary was telling the truth. The child that was conceived in her was truly from the Holy Spirit, just like the prophet had said in Isaiah 7:14. Joseph was not to fear, but to take Mary to be his wife and to name the child Jesus, "the Lord saves." So that is what Joseph did.

In these verses we see many of God's provisions in the middle of a story filled with "unknowns." Can you imagine the overwhelming emotions that Mary must have felt when she realized that she had been chosen to be the mother of the Messiah? The excitement, the joy, the responsibility. Surely she wanted to share it with Joseph, the most important person in her life, but how could she? How would he ever believe this story? We see in these verses that after hearing her story Joseph intended to divorce her. What emotions do you think Joseph must have felt? Betrayal, hurt, sadness and loneliness. And what about Mary? She was serving God with her life, being obedient, choosing to believe by faith, and now this. Did God not see this coming? Did He not plan ahead? Was He not in control of the situation? Could God be trusted with the details of life?

The questions probably continued for them throughout the Christmas story. Could Mary travel safely all the way to Bethlehem during her pregnancy? What would people think when it appeared that Joseph and Mary had become pregnant before they were formally married? Where would they stay in Bethlehem with so many people? How would they be safe from Herod, the king who wanted Jesus dead? Where would they live? So many questions with so few answers. But yet they trusted God as He led them one step at a time.

We can see from the Old Testament prophecies that God had already worked out the details centuries ahead of time. We see it all throughout scripture. When God calls us to obedience, a step of faith, an unknown future, or something that seems impossible, He will do it. Whenever God calls, He will provide. He will never call us to something where He has not already answered all the questions of who, where, when, why or how. We serve an orderly God who will continue to orchestrate our lives and our world to its final end.

But why doesn't God just call us and provide everything for us before hand? Wouldn't it be easier? Easier maybe, but we would never be drawn near to God on a daily basis. God knows that life will only be experienced to its fullest as we walk with Him. It is only in the midst of desperate dependence that we will cling to Him and come to truly know Him on a continual basis.

That is the key. Mary and Joseph did not choose to begin an intimate relationship with God once they were called to a divine task. They were already walking with God before the angel Gabriel ever came. Because of this they were ready to hear and obey what they were called to do.

From these glances at the Christmas story we are reminded that God is the orchestrator of life. He can be trusted. But how does this impact each of us today? Take a moment and think through the following questions:

- **What are you wishing you had more details about?**
- **What are you having a difficult time waiting for?**
- **What is God calling you to that scares you, worries you, angers you, or seems unfair or impossible for you?**
- **What "unknown" is bothering you?**
- **What responsibility are you refusing to accept?**
- **What Word from God are you turning your back on?**
- **What has God already told you to which you are refusing to respond?**

In Matthew 1:18-25 we find Joseph faced with a crisis of belief. A crisis of belief occurs anytime God invites us to join Him in what He is doing. It is an opportunity to either believe, obey and experience God, or doubt, turn away and miss out on the divine opportunity.

We see it in the lives of so many biblical characters. God said one thing, and the logical circumstances said something else. Adam and Eve tempted by the serpent. Noah building the ark. Abraham having to believe that he would be the father of a great nation. Joseph believing that God was still with him. Moses and the parting of the Red Sea. David fighting Goliath. In each of these stories the person was called to believe and experience God.

Crises of belief are part of our lives as well. God calls to us to join Him in what He is doing and it is an invitation to experience Him. Jesus talks of this in John 5. Jesus speaks of how God is always working. He then tells that He, Jesus, only does what He sees the Father doing. Jesus was constantly sensitive to and joining with what God was doing. We also see that Jesus consistently took time to draw near to the Father through prayer.

That is the key. Like Mary and Joseph, are we walking with God in such a way that we are open to trust Him and obey? When faced with a crisis of belief, do we obey by faith or turn away because the details are unclear? When faced with the unknown, we should wait on Him and

trust Him with the details. In Him are all the answers and the direction that we will ever need. As Jesus says in John 14:6, He is truly “the Way, the Truth and the Life.”

It is similar to a child who is going on vacation with his parents. The child doesn’t need to know where they are going to sleep, where they are going to eat, or how they are going to pay for it. There only responsibility is to stay with their parents. Their parents are “the way.”

In the same way, Jesus is not our spiritual road map or a spiritual GPS. He doesn’t point us towards the way, He is the way. As we walk with Him we will continue in the center of God’s will. Christ is our destination.

The same God of Joseph and Mary still reaches out to His people today. He is the God who saw you before you were ever born and knows your days before they ever happened. Today trust, rest, and walk hand-in-hand with the God who can be trusted with the crisis of belief and the details that will bring it to pass.

In closing, we need to consider these four ideas:

**Whose son is Jesus?** People have been wrestling with this question for centuries. The scriptures declare that Jesus Christ is the son of God. He is Immanuel, God with us. He is fully God and fully man, the only One who can pay for our sin, because He knew no sin. If we refuse the truth of the virgin birth, then Jesus is nothing more than a son of Joseph and Mary. This will mean that Jesus was born with a sin nature and is not able to die on the cross and pay for our sin as our God and our perfect sin sacrifice. Choosing not to believe in the virgin birth has huge implications theologically. Christ then cannot be our Savior.

Joseph was a just and righteous man. Because of this he lived rightly before God. This will always be true. If one is just and righteous before God, then their life will bear fruit that is just and right with their fellow man. If this is not the case, then one must evaluate their relationship with God.

As we walk with Christ consistently we are prepared for what lies ahead. We don’t know the future or what lies ahead, but we can join with Jesus as he prayed in Matthew 6:11, “*Give us this day our daily bread.*” As we trust God with each new day we will find that his provision will be enough and his grace will be sufficient for our every need.

May we join with Mary and Joseph. May we walk with God each day, trusting that He will prepare us to respond faithfully when a crisis of belief comes our way. Then we will come to know Him like never before.