



READ: Matthew 1:18-25 (ESV)

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. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. 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. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

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

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

ENTER THE STORY:

Have you ever struggled to fall asleep at night because you were struggling with a really difficult decision? I imagine that's what it was like for Joseph when he first found out Mary was pregnant.

We are not privy to the conversation they had where she explained what happened and how she got pregnant. We also don't know Joseph's initial reaction, but there were really only two options: Either Mary had cheated on him with another man and was lying, or she was telling the truth, and she really was carrying God's Son. It's obvious from the story that Joseph assumed it was option one, but in the midst of his decision to divorce her, we learn something important about him. He was a humble and kind man, and he chose to handle the situation in a way many others in that time would not have; a quiet divorce, to spare Mary from further shame.

It's important to remind ourselves that these are real people walking through an incredibly difficult situation. One no other couple in the history of the world has ever had to navigate. If we're honest, it's easy to relate to Joseph. Mary's story seems absurd, and most of us probably would have responded exactly the same way, or worse. Yet, God steps in and shows immense patience and grace with Joseph in the midst of his doubts.

An angel came to him in a dream and confirmed Mary's story. The baby in the womb of Joseph's soon-to-be-wife, was conceived not in infidelity, but in holy fidelity by God himself. More than that, the incarnation of Jesus would be God's irrevocable pledge of fidelity to all mankind. In Jesus, God bound himself to us forever. This is why Isaiah called Jesus "Immanuel - God with us."

Joseph didn't need to be afraid. God chose him to be Jesus' earthly father. Joseph would act as a rescuer of sorts, by taking Mary as his wife and restoring her reputation. And when their baby was born, they would do exactly as the angel had told them and name him Jesus, which means "Yahweh saves" because that is exactly what Jesus came to do...to seek and to save the lost.

PRAY: Heavenly Father, we so often feel alone and empty in this world, afraid to step out in faith and trust that you will be protect us and provide for us. Remind us this Christmas season that your presence is always with us through your Son, Jesus - who is our Immanuel!