

# IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH

**SERIES: GOD WITH US (CHRISTMAS)**

**LESSON: GOD PREPARES US FOR WHAT HE HAS PREPARED FOR US**

**MATTHEW 1:18-25; LUKE 2:22-35**

**12/6/20**

## MAIN POINT

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God prepares us for what he has prepared for us.

## CONTEXT

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Throughout the Old Testament, God gave prophecies that a Messiah would come. Some of these prophecies are subtle and other prophecies are clearer and more direct. For example, subtly, in Genesis 3:15 God says, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel." God spoke these words as he cursed the serpent for tempting Adam and Eve. In these words, God subtly hints that the offspring of a woman will crush the serpent's head. In fulfillment, Jesus is the offspring of a woman who will crush the serpent's head. This is one of many examples.

A clearer and more direct prophecy comes from Isaiah 7:14: "Therefore, the LORD himself will give you a sign. Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel." In fulfillment, Mary is a virgin who gives birth to Jesus.

When the time came for God to "send forth his Son" (Gal. 4:4), it appears that some people were hopeful and expectant that the Messiah would be born. Simeon, a man who we will look at in our story today, was one person who was anticipating a child to be born. God would use Simeon to encourage Joseph and Mary, preparing them for what God had planned.

## INTRODUCTION

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As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Have you ever had an experience when you thought God was leading you to do something but felt unsure? What is that experience like for you? How long do you typically ponder about it? How do you search for discernment? What feelings do you have?**

In our story today, we are going to look at the birth of Jesus from the perspective of Joseph. As you can imagine, Joseph found himself in a very unique situation. His fiancé is pregnant and he knows that he is not the father. In coming to the conclusion that he should quietly end his relationship with Mary, God intervenes. God asks him to have faith and prepares him to embrace the challenge.

## **EXPLANATION // ...believe Jesus is the Christ...**

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Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 1:18-21**

**Goodness! Try to place yourself in Joseph shoes. What would be going through your mind?**

While there are a lot of elements that we could discuss in the story (the perspective of Mary, the fulfillment of prophecy, and the future role of Jesus as Savior), we'd like to focus directly on the perspective of Joseph.

We can sympathize with Joseph when he comes to know Mary is pregnant and he is not the father. Yet, despite feeling betrayed, Joseph still responds as a just man. He does not desire to harm or shame Mary. He resolved to divorce her quietly.

What is also impressive about Joseph is that he does not appear to make a rash decision. Verse 20 points out that "as he was considering these things." Perhaps, we can sympathize with those who might lash out in anger at a similar circumstance to Joseph's. However, to Joseph's credit, he seems thoughtful rather than reactive. He wisely chooses to consider what is best for him; and yet also what is best for Mary. And while we do not learn much more of Joseph's life from the Gospel accounts, one might wonder how such a willingness to think and consider would have been helpful as he was an earthly father to Jesus, the Son of God.

Fortunately (and just in right time), God intervenes and reveals his plan to Joseph. An angel appears to Joseph in a dream. The angel explains that Mary is pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit and that God desires him to marry her.

Wow! Talk about a roller coaster of emotions. A few days ago, Joseph believes his fiancé is pregnant and he is not the father. Now, he discovers that he is being asked to adopt the Son of God who will save people from their sins!

**Similar question to before. Try to place yourself in Joseph's shoes, what would be going through your mind when you hear that you are to continue in your marriage to Mary and adopt the Son of God?**

**Do you think there is any reason why God chose not to tell Joseph about Mary's pregnancy before he discovered that she was pregnant? Why do you think God waited? (A: We can only guess why, but perhaps by waiting it allows Joseph to prove he is worthy of the role. He shows himself to be just and ultimately kind-hearted to Mary).**

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 1:22-23**

Verses 22-23 quote Isaiah 7:14, a clear prophecy about the coming of Christ. As this verse pertains to Joseph and how God prepares us for what he prepares us for, I think there is an important point to make as it pertains to discernment.

One of the Bible's principles for discernment is that we should test a vision, dream, or Spirit's inclinations with Scripture. When we sense something from God, it is good to ask ourselves, "Is God's Spirit leading me to do something that is confirmed in Scripture?" If it is found in Scripture, then we have the confirmation we need.

This principle holds true in Joseph's story. The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, and that message is affirmed by Isaiah 7:14: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel." Such confirmations are sweet and satisfying to our souls! They give us confidence to obey.

**Have you ever had such an instance where Scripture provided you the confirmation you were looking for?**

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 1:24-25**

When Joseph wakes, he obeys. By faith, he took Mary as his wife. As I try to put myself in Joseph's shoes, I can imagine all the things people might think of me. I would wonder what rumors would circulate about the pregnancy, how honest should I be about the dream, would people understand, believe me, or shame me. Again, the indication we have from this story is that Joseph is an upright man and respectful. His character would have likely equipped him for the unique circumstance.

Furthermore, Joseph prioritizes God's plan. Joseph and Mary chose to remain abstinent in their marriage until Jesus was born. In integrity to God's plan for Jesus to be born of a virgin, they avoid sex. Again, their abstinence further emphasizes the character and self-control, and submissiveness to God's plan.

**Often times, we hope that God has great marvelous plans for us. But, be honest, on a scale from 1-10, do you think you have great and marvelous character to match the God-size plan you hope for?**

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 2:22-35**

Thus far, we have discussed how Joseph's character prepared him for God's plan. We also mentioned that an important principle of discernment is that we confirm in Scripture what we sense that God is leading us to do. Another helpful aspect of God preparing us is when he provides us with encouragement from others. In Joseph and Mary's case, Simeon provided such realistic encouragement so that they marveled.

In obedience to the Law (Ex. 13:1-2), Joseph and Mary went to the Temple in Jerusalem to present Jesus and offer a sacrifice. Once in the Temple, they are met by Simeon who is described as righteous, devout, and waiting on the consolation of Israel. Evidently, Simeon had received special revelation from God that before his death he would see the Christ. In faith, Simeon appears to be expectantly waiting for the Christ to arrive.

While in the Spirit at the Temple, Simeon picks up baby Jesus and blesses God. It is interesting to note, that Simeon's blessing caused Joseph and Mary to marvel on one hand and perhaps be somber on another.

On one hand Simeon says that Jesus is the people's salvation. He will be a "light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." Every parent loves to hear compliments about their children. Imagine how Joseph and Mary would have felt to hear someone else

confirm to them that their baby Jesus would be the salvation for Israel and the Gentiles. How special is that!

But just as special and marveling as this is, Simeon realized the price that Jesus would have to pay for salvation. Simeon also states forthrightly to Mary that baby Jesus is “appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, a sign that is opposed so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.” Furthermore, Simeon hints of Jesus’ death when he tells Mary, “A sword will pierce through your own soul also.” Such statements may seem odd or unusual to us. Most likely, Simeon is saying that although Jesus will bring salvation to many Israelites and even Gentiles, the somber reality is that there will be many Jews who reject him. Jesus’s life will force people to make a decision. If people believe in him, they will be saved. If people reject him, they will be condemned. Because of Jesus they will either rise or fall.

**What about you as a parent? Jesus’ life was going to be used to lead people to salvation. Would you want your son to spend his life bringing the good news of salvation to others?**

**Assuming that most of us would say yes to the previous question, what if by bringing the good news of salvation to others, it meant your son or daughter suffered in the process? How would you respond as a parent? Who you boast as a parent in your child’s suffering?**

## **APPLICATION // ...have life in His name.**

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Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**What encouragement might you give your sons or daughters if they started to experience suffering for living out their faith?**

**Can you think of another family, who can use encouragement as they think about their children living for Christ? What can you say to them?**

**Do you sense that God may be preparing you for something?**

**Do you sense that God may be preparing our church for something?**

## **PRAYER**

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Close in prayer, asking God to press this truth that was studied.

## COMMENTARY / RESOURCES

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Put resources that could benefit the teacher: videos, podcasts, sermons, etc.

### VERSE BY VERSE COMMENTARY

Matthew 1:19. It is interesting that Matthew records the perspective of Joseph and doesn't record Mary's experience with the angel. Perhaps a reason why is because Matthew emphasizes that Joseph is the descendent of David (Mt. 1:16) and he wanted to stress how Joseph became his earthly father.

Luke 2:25 – “Consolation of Israel.” The Greek word for “consolation” is *paraklesis* meaning comfort, gladness, or encouragement. A similar word is used to describe the Holy Spirit, the comforter, *paraclete* in John 14:16, 26.