



# *The King's Ransom*

Matthew 20:28

---

Text

Matthew 1:18-25

Topic

We see the outstanding character of Joseph as he submits to The Lord by marrying Mary and becoming the legal father of Jesus

Title

*"There's Something About Joseph"*

Introduction

There's every reason to assume that Joseph and Mary were in love and excited about consummating marriage at the end of their year-long betrothal.

Joseph would have been busy with the duties of the bridegroom, which included the preparation of the home he and Mary would occupy. Being a carpenter, even though poor he would certainly be cutting, carving, and building some very special custom items for their enjoyment.

In fact, a "carpenter" in those days was essentially a stone mason who also worked with wood and metals. I'm sure he had a few things to surprise Mary.

How devastating to discover the woman he was to marry was with child. It was without doubt life-shattering.

*Hang in there, Joseph!* An angel has been dispatched to tell you in a dream that your wife is the blessed virgin prophesied by Isaiah to conceive and bear and give birth to the Messiah.

This angelic announcement about the virgin conception and birth of Jesus, do you think it ended the very human drama Joseph and Mary were involved with?

Not at all; it only intensified things for them.

- For one thing, it accelerated their wedding plans as it seems that Joseph married her pretty soon after the angel visited him.
- Mary's pregnancy made for a more difficult journey to Bethlehem when the decree went out to return to their hometown for the Roman census.
- Next they would find themselves fleeing for Jesus' life to Egypt when King Herod was slaughtering toddlers.

While looking at God becoming human in the person of Jesus in order to save a lost race of men, we don't want to overlook the human drama in the life of one godly man from our lost race, Joseph.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 From Heaven You Are Enlightened About The Doctrine Of The Conception Of The God-Man, and #2 On Earth You Are Delighted By The Drama Of The Obedience Of A Godly Man.

## #1 From Heaven You Are Enlightened About The Doctrine Of The Conception Of The God-Man

(v18; 21-23)

Matthew has just given us the genealogy of Jesus Christ. He presented Him as "the son of Abraham, the son of David."

Toward the end he alluded to an abnormality in Jesus' parentage when he said He was descended from "Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ" (v16).

If Joseph wasn't Jesus' natural father, who was?

Mat 1:18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.

Joseph and Mary were "betrothed." We would call this an engagement, but it was so much more than that to the Jews. You'll notice that, though only betrothed, Joseph is already called Mary's "husband" in this account, and she will be called his "wife."

A formal betrothal occurred at least a full year before the marriage ceremony itself. This betrothal involved a contract with payment of a bride price, and thus it constituted a binding legal agreement. This contract could only be broken by a divorce. The death of one of the partners caused the other to be labeled a widow or a widower.

One of the reasons for the long betrothal was to show the sexual fidelity of the parties. Sexual infidelity was considered adultery and subject to the legal penalties of adultery in that society.

At the end of the betrothal period a wedding ceremony and feast took place, after which the couple consummated their physical relationship and began to live together as husband and wife.

There had been no sexual contact between Joseph and Mary. Joseph discovered her pregnancy "before they came together." In verse twenty-five you are told they practiced abstinence even after they were formally married until Jesus was born.

We'll take a closer look at Joseph's dilemma and drama in a moment. For now let's act as though we've never heard such a thing before - that a virgin could conceive and bear a child. How was it possible?

"She was found with child of the Holy Spirit." As we make a few comments on this, let us remember the reverent perspective of the apostle Paul, who said, "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh" (First Timothy 3:16).

How did human life begin in the womb of Mary apart from human male fertilization?

Some scientists point to a natural phenomenon called *parthenogenesis* by which an egg can, in fact, develop life without fertilization.

However, because of the chromosomes missing from the male, if an unfertilized human egg did develop into life, *it would always be a female!*

If it was according to any natural law, the virgin conception of Mary would have produced a daughter, not a son.

The virgin birth of Jesus is a biological miracle and, as such, it is not capable of, nor does it require, biological proof. It comes to us as a revelation from God. Its proof is historical and theological.

Jesus wasn't simply created in Mary's womb. She was not merely a surrogate mother. It was Mary's egg from which Jesus was conceived. It must be from her in order for Him to be a real human being literally descended from, and connected to, the Jewish people.

After reading a bunch of stuff, I like this simple explanation by Robert Gromacki: "There is no indication that God fertilized the egg of Mary through the work of either the Father or the Spirit. Rather, she conceived without human or divine fertilization when God the Son not only entered her womb, but also the egg in her womb, under the superintending ministry of the Holy Spirit."

Rather than ask "How?" when discussing the conception of Jesus we ought to ask "Why?" At least two profound reasons are given by Matthew.

First, as a race we needed saving from sin.

Mat 1:21 And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins."

Simply put, to provide salvation for mankind from the penalty, power, and presence of sin, God the Son had to be born to acquire a true humanity.

There had to be a mediator who could bring God and the human race together. The only true mediator must be both God and man at the same time.

That man, however, must be sinless. Through His conception superintended by the Holy Spirit Jesus Christ was fully human but free from sin.

I again fall back on Gromacki: "When [Mary] conceived, she passed on her human nature... but she was prevented by the Holy Spirit from transmitting a sin nature. The end result was that Jesus was one person with two natures - divine and human - apart from sin and human flaw... If Jesus had not been virgin born under the overshadowing ministry of the Holy Spirit, then He could never have been free from the sin that mars every human soul."

There's another reason Matthew gives for the virgin birth:

Mat 1:22 So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying:

Mat 1:23 "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD, AND BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which is translated, "God with us."

The prophecy is from the Book of Isaiah. Critics maintain that Isaiah passage is at best an analogy and not a prophecy. They say it doesn't really say there will be a future virgin conception. Without going into it in detail, let me just say this.

The Isaiah passage speaks of "**the**" virgin - a specific virgin. Further, the best translation of the words from Isaiah read, "Behold, **the** pregnant virgin is bearing a son and she calls His name Immanuel."

The sign is that "**the**" virgin is *still* a virgin both during her pregnancy and at the time she gives birth.

You would never describe a woman as "still a virgin" after she became pregnant, certainly not after she gave birth, unless this was something supernatural - which indeed it was.

Matthew knew what he was talking about. Mary was **THE** virgin, "the pregnant virgin is bearing a son and she calls His name Immanuel."

Back, now, to the second reason for the virgin birth. God became a man in order to reveal Himself to us. In becoming a man He is God with us.

Since God is a Spirit, and invisible (First Timothy 1:17), how could we ever truly experience Him? Only if He came as a man and dwelt among us.

Jesus is "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15). John wrote, "No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18).

Here is something we don't always dwell upon long enough. Jesus became human, God with us, and He will remain that way throughout eternity.

He died in a body and then He rose again in a new, glorified but human body as the firstfruits of all those in the human race who, believing in Him, will be resurrected or raptured in similar glorified bodies.

Jesus said that if you've seen Him, you've seen the Father. How would you ever determine God was compassionate if you had not seen Jesus weeping at the tomb of Lazarus? Or weeping over the fate of Jerusalem?

It's common for people to misunderstand the activities and attitudes of the person they call "the God of the Old Testament." You might even think that God the Father has to be convinced by His Son to not be so mean to us poor human beings.

Those ideas are errors. Jesus was the express image of the Father. When you see Jesus, you are seeing exactly what God the Father is like. You can look at Jesus, listen to Him, and determine that God is compassionate, loving, searching for mankind, ready to forgive and to save.

Jesus Christ is the son of Abraham, the son of David; **and** He is the Son of God. Not two persons, but one person with two natures, human and divine, in a union we can never understand but which redeems lost mankind and restores fallen creation.

## #2 On Earth You Are Delighted By The Drama Of The Obedience Of A Godly Man

(v19-20 & 24-25)

Joseph isn't the focus here; he's not the most important person. Jesus is.



But when God came in human flesh He did so in a way that greatly affected Joseph and Mary.

As to Joseph, he was in a spiritual and social dilemma.

Mat 1:19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.

Joseph was a "just," or you could say, a "righteous" man. He endeavored, in a right way, to live for God by keeping the Law of Moses. He didn't eat unclean food. He didn't keep his carpentry shop open on the Sabbath to make a few extra drachmas.

Finding out Mary was pregnant, as a righteous Jew, he could not continue the legal betrothal into a lasting marriage.

He did have choices, however. According to Deuteronomy twenty-two there were public procedures for determining exactly how a virgin betrothed to a husband became pregnant. Knowing he was not the father, the consequences upon Mary of such a public proceeding were severe - some say even leading to her being stoned to death as an adulterous, although that was unlikely since the Jews, under Roman rule, could no longer legally carry out the death penalty.

Joseph chose, instead, to apply Deuteronomy 24:1, " "When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house..."

We don't know how Joseph found out about Mary's pregnancy. We can't for sure say she told him about her encounter with the angel Gabriel. But I think we can know that he was heartbroken.

Even so, he took the most gentle approach possible. One that might even cast suspicion on him as the father. You see, without a public inquiry into the matter, without a decision by the elders, Joseph would not be ruled out as having had sex with Mary.

Joseph's heart can minister to us. Do I always take the most gentle approach possible? God can lead me to take a more direct approach; that might be His will in a particular situation. But am I at least open to gentleness for the sake of being righteous?

Mat 1:20 But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

"While he thought" should be translated, "*after* he thought," meaning he had definitely decided to privately divorce Mary. Then he went to bed.

God often, in the Bible, spoke powerfully in dreams. An angel came to Joseph in a dream and revealed the supernatural conception of the baby in Mary's womb.

It's the first of a total of four dreams through which God will speak to, and direct, Joseph. Other than Daniel, no one is recorded as having more spiritual dreams than Joseph.

Calling Joseph "son of David" was a nice touch. It put Joseph on notice that the baby was going to be **THE** son of David prophesied in the Hebrew Scriptures - the Son of David who would sit on the throne forever.

"Don't be afraid to take to you Mary your wife" has at least two meanings.

First, Joseph should abandon his own plan to divorce Mary. Although it was a reasonable and righteous plan; although he was applying the wisdom of the Word of God with compassion, it was not God's will.

I want to say this carefully so as to not be misunderstood. We need to be careful, even when we are guided by biblical principles and seem to have the right attitude, to still seek the leading of God before making our decisions.

God will never lead me to contradict His Word, but He may lead me into something that I could not have understood by studying His Word without His leading.

Joseph could have refused. He could have divorced Mary. I'm sure some of his friends thought he should have divorced her. But he didn't have to, and, in fact, God wanted him to do something entirely outside the scope of his normal decision making. Something socially risky but spiritually rewarding.

Joseph was also being told to not be afraid to take Mary as his wife in a second way. After Jesus was born Joseph and Mary were to act like any other married couple and have children.

Joseph and Mary might have thought that, since her womb had held the God-man, she should remain a virgin. He might be afraid to treat her as his wife. In fact there are those who teach the perpetual virginity of Mary as if it is somehow more godly that she never had sex or other pregnancies.

That's not what the angel told Joseph; and it's not the testimony of Scripture.

Mat 1:24 Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife,

Ever wake up from an especially vivid dream? Joseph did; in fact, he was "aroused from sleep," woken up on purpose, so he could act upon the announcement.

I wish there were some record of Joseph going to Mary and telling her about his dream. What a rush of holy joy must have filled both their hearts - mixed with reverent fear and wonderment.

"Took to him his wife" means they accelerated their betrothal. They had the wedding feast and began living together.

What did people think? Did the couple tell others about the visit of Gabriel to Mary, or the dream of Joseph? We can't know, but we can understand that their lives would be greatly impacted by these decisions.

Mat 1:25 and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS.

Mary remained a virgin "till she had brought forth her firstborn Son." Afterwards they had a regular marriage relationship. They had other children - Jesus's earthly brothers and sisters who we will encounter later on.

"He called His name JESUS," not "Immanuel." "Immanuel is a description of Who Jesus is - God *and* with us, God *and* man, divine *and* human.

Joseph is prominent only in the accounts surrounding Jesus' birth, flight to Egypt, and return. He is mentioned in the story of Jesus and the Temple. Most scholars speculate he died sometime after Jesus at the Temple and before He started His public ministry.

One scholar wrote,

Joseph is known to us only as a dim figure in the background of the Gospel narratives, yet his whole-hearted reconciliation to Mary, even in the face of possible slanderings by his neighbors, his complete self-sacrifice, when he left all and fled into Egypt to save the infant Jesus, are indicative that he was not unworthy to fulfill the great trust which was imposed upon him by [God the] Father.

One of the stanzas of Charles Wesley's hymn, *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*, seems an appropriate summary and conclusion for us this morning:

*Christ, by highest heaven adored;  
Christ, the everlasting Lord;  
Late in time behold him come,  
Offspring of the Virgin's womb.  
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;*

*Hail the incarnate Deity,  
Pleased as man with man to dwell;  
Jesus, our Immanuel.*