



GROW.PRAY.STUDY

Weekly Study Guide



Unexpected Journey: An Unexpected Disclosure

December 9, 2018

Scripture:

Matthew 1:18-21, 24-25 (NRSV)

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

Introduction to the Study

During this second week of Advent, we are looking at Jesus’ earthly Father, Joseph. We know from last week that Mary received an unexpected announcement from one of God’s angels, named Gabriel. But it isn’t until after she tells Joseph she is pregnant by the Holy Spirit that he in turn is visited by God’s messenger, who tells him it’s all going to be OK. Can you imagine what it would have been like to be Joseph? Would you feel betrayed by your future wife? Would a visit from an angel, even in a dream, frighten you? How would you respond to these events? These, as well as other questions, are some that we will consider this week.

Daily Study Guides

MONDAY 12/10/18 “A Good and Decent Father”

Read Matthew 1:18-25

The 2006 film *The Nativity Story* showed Mary washing Joseph’s feet as he slept, worn out from the strain of their trip to Bethlehem. To the

unborn Jesus she said, “You will have a good and decent man to raise you.” That’s a fine summary of Matthew’s portrait of Joseph. He obeyed God, and nurtured and protected his bride (pregnant, but not by him) and her child.

- Matthew identifies the child three ways. It’s the story of the birth of “the Messiah [God’s anointed one]” (verse 18), named “Jesus [Greek for “Joshua”—“God saves”] because he will save his people from their sins” (verse 21) and they will call him “Immanuel (which means ‘God with us’)” (verse 23). Which of these three ways of identifying Jesus speaks most deeply to your heart this Advent season?
- Luke 1:38 showed Mary saying, “I am the Lord’s servant.... May your word to me be fulfilled.” Matthew 1:24 says Joseph “did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him.” What is God calling you to do or be this Advent season?

Prayer: Holy Lord, as we continue our journey through this Advent Season, as we consider Joseph and the unexpected news—the Unexpected Disclosure—that Mary shared with him, help us to respond to your command, as Joseph did, by saying “yes” to you. Amen.

TUESDAY 12/11/18 “A Devoted Believer ”

Read Matthew 1:18-20, Deuteronomy 22:20-24

In Israelite culture, a betrothal was as binding as marriage. Mary’s pregnancy led some (like Joseph at first) to the “obvious” belief that she had been intimate with some other man. Some must have condemned her (and Jesus as illegitimate—see John 8:41). It was even possible that she might be stoned to death (see John 8:3-5), as the law in Deuteronomy said.

- What would you have felt if you had been Joseph when Mary told you she was having a baby—but by the Holy Spirit, not another man? Whatever Joseph felt, Matthew says he “did not want to expose her to public disgrace.” What do you learn about Joseph’s inner qualities from his measured response (“he had in mind to divorce her quietly”)?
- The *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* says Joseph was “a devout Jewish man willing to give up what was often perceived to be a Jewish father’s greatest privilege—siring his first-born son—in order to obey God’s will.” What cherished dream have you had to give up? How are you and God working to bend that loss to produce good results?

Prayer: God of grace, we are grateful for Joseph’s devotion to you. Help us to be as devoted as he was, willing to give up something in order to be part of your much greater plan for the world. Through Christ, Amen.

WEDNESDAY 12/12/18 “Unlikely People Doing God’s Work”

Read Matthew 1:1-17

The way Matthew started Jesus’ story feels strange, even boring to most of us. But family records were of critical importance in Jesus’ day. King Herod the Great, despised by most Jews because he was half Edomite, actually destroyed official registers so that no one else could prove a purer ancestry than his own! In verse 1, Matthew said three significant things about Jesus: he was “the Messiah,” the “son of David,” and the “son of Abraham.”

- The Hebrew word “Messiah” meant **anointed one**. (“Christ” meant the same in Greek, by the way.) What do you believe made Jesus’ link to Abraham and King David so key for Matthew? In what ways does it matter to you that God kept God’s ancient promises?
- In an unusual move for his time, Matthew named five women (including Mary) in Jesus’ genealogy. Scholar R. E. Brown suggests that Matthew chose the other four because, like Mary, God used each of them although they faced obstacles, even scandal, in their lives. Does God still work through unlikely people? What is God doing through you?

Prayer: O God, we know from the stories we read in the Bible that you use unlikely people to accomplish your will. I am also one of those unlikely people, so use me as you will. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

THURSDAY 12/13/18 “What’s In A Name?”

Read Genesis 37:1-11, 39:6-10, 41:39-43

Joseph was named for a great man in Israel’s history. The first Joseph was the patriarch Jacob’s favorite son (born to Jacob’s favorite wife, Rachel). His story filled Genesis chapters 37-50. Known for his integrity and faithfulness, he eventually became first minister of Egypt. In that role, he saved Egypt (and Jacob’s family) from a great famine. And, like the later Joseph, he recognized God’s messages to him in dreams.

- In Bible times, parents usually chose names that captured the character they hoped and prayed their child would develop. What traits from his great namesake in the Hebrew past could a humble working man like Joseph emulate and live into?
- Do you bear a name associated with some admirable person, either in your own family or from history? If so, what qualities does that name suggest to you? What qualities is God working into your character through the challenges and opportunities you face in life? In what ways do you want your “name” to be remembered?

Prayer: Lord, we don’t always realize how important our names are, especially when they add meaning to the ways we are meant to serve you.

Regardless of what our names are, however, help us to recognize the ways you have called us to do your work here on earth. Amen.

FRIDAY 12/14/18 “Safe Keeping” Read Matthew 2:13-16, 19-21

Joseph did far more than stand by the manger while the shepherds worshipped the baby. Matthew said Joseph kept Mary and baby Jesus safe from Herod’s murderous paranoia. Herod killed some of his own sons who were potential rivals for his throne. He certainly didn’t flinch from murdering boys in Bethlehem to try to wipe out the promised Messiah.

- In Jesus’ day, the population of Alexandria, Egypt was probably about one-third Jewish. There were also other Jewish communities in Egypt. This made Egypt a safer refuge for Joseph, Mary and Jesus than it would be in today’s conditions. What people or places have given you safety or comfort in times of trouble in your life?
- God used dreams to guide Joseph (as he did the Old Testament Joseph before him). Many Christians believe it makes sense that God can communicate directly with our brains, without the need for sounds or visual cues. When have you sensed an “inner nudge” from God? Are you open to receive God’s direction, however it arrives?

Prayer: Gracious God, help me to pay attention to your nudges and whispers in our lives. Help us respond as Joseph did. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

SATURDAY 12/15/18 “In My Father’s House”

Read Luke 2:41-52

This is the last time we see Joseph in Jesus’ story. When Jesus began his public ministry, 18 years

later, Joseph was apparently no longer living. Here he and Mary were worried parents. And we sense the unique challenge Joseph faced. Mary said “your father and I,” meaning Joseph. Jesus, while valuing and obeying (verse 51) Joseph, said being in the Temple meant being in *his Father’s* (God’s) house. And Luke says Joseph and Mary struggled to understand.

- Jesus taught, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy... everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Matthew 5:7, 7:24) How might we see the effect of merciful Joseph, a wise and careful carpenter, in Jesus’ teaching and life? Who has shaped your life for the better, through example and actions? Are there people who, given that chance, let you down and hurt you? Whose lives are you seeking to shape for the better?

Prayer: Lord God, we are thankful for the parents in our lives, as well as other adults who shaped us into the people we are today. We know their actions were inspired by you, and by some of the people we read about in our Bibles. Help us to always be thankful for your influence on

them, and help us to listen to your voice when we are called to bless others. Amen.

SOMETHING EXTRA: A Family Activity

Joseph was the name of Jesus' earthly father. He was named for a great man in Israel's history. Discuss the first, middle and last names of each person in your family. How was each person's name chosen? What is the family history or connection, if any, behind each name? Explore the meaning of each name by looking on the website www.meaning-of-names.com. Discuss how each description "fits" each person. Do the meanings of any of the names challenge anyone to embody his/her description more fully? If so, how?

Thank God for your name. Ask God to help you live out and honor the positive meaning of your name. Thank God for Joseph and for his willingness to honor his name.

Prayer: Lord God, "like a father [Joseph] was strong and kind and good.... But it wasn't his child; it was God's child," says a Skip Ewing song lyric. I'm grateful for that carpenter, for his kindness to Mary when he discovered she was with child, for his strength and faithfulness in being a dad to your Son Jesus. Help me learn from him the importance of listening for your direction, no matter how challenging or unexpected. Amen.

