

Fear Not, Just Obey  
Matthew 1:18-25

**Slide 1**

This is week three of our Fear Not series. In week one, the Angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah while he was preparing the incense in the temple and told him in Luke 1:13, *“But the angel said to him: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John.”*

My message that week was *“Fear Not, Just Believe.”* Last week we looked into Luke 1:30, *“But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God,”* and my theme was *“Fear Not, Just Trust.”*

This week we’re going to look at Joseph’s story. He’s always the forgotten one at Christmas.

We remember the Christ child. How could we forget Him, even in the shopping malls they sing about the birth of Christ.

His name is even included in the very word Christmas. Without Christ there would be no Christmas.

Then, there’s His mother, Mary. The song says, *“Round yon Virgin.”* After all the virgin birth was spectacular. It wasn’t an everyday occurrence.

In fact, we’re still talking about her faith to trust God for the miracle that He promised.

Even the bit players are remembered. You know: the shepherds, the Wiseman, and the Inn Keeper who got a speaking role and he’s basically the villain of the piece.

We cast them in Christmas pageants and talk about how lucky they were to be a part of the first advent. So, who's forgotten?

Joseph, Mary's husband, the man who would raise Jesus the Son of God as Jesus the son of Joseph.

## **Slide 2**

Now, we don't know a lot about Joseph other than he was a carpenter who lived in Nazareth, and that his family was originally from Bethlehem.

Then, in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus, we learn that his father's name was Jacob, and that he was a descendant of David.

We know that it was Joseph to whom the Angels came in a dream warning him about King Herod looking for Jesus, and how he was instructed to take his family to Egypt.

We know when Jesus was 12 years old, Joseph took him to Jerusalem for the Passover feast, and we know that Joseph taught Jesus his trade.

After that, we don't hear anymore from or about Joseph. We presume that Joseph died before Christ was crucified, because at His crucifixion Jesus asked John to care for his mother.

In Mark 6:3, Jesus is identified as Mary's son and his brothers are named but there's no mention of Joseph. It's not that much of a stretch to presume that Joseph died before Christ began his ministry.

Finally, we know that Joseph was considered to be the Father of Christ by the people of Nazareth, he was engaged to a young girl from Nazareth named Mary.

Historically and culturally, we can assume that they had been engaged from childhood.

We don't know how long they had been engaged but we do know that they had entered into the last stage of their engagement, which was known as the Betrothal.

Now Betrothal was more serious than today's engagement. It lasted for about a year and was a legally binding contract, which could only be broken by death or divorce.

I don't know exactly how she broke the news to him, but at some point, in all of the wedding arrangements she must have done a, *"I'm so excited about this, and what with Rachel coming for the wedding, and Martha, and Elizabeth, did I tell you that Elizabeth was pregnant? I did, that's such a neat thing. You know I'm pregnant too, maybe the boys will play together when they grow up, do you think we ought to have fish at the reception as well as the beef?"*

I can see Joseph where he does a *"Whoa, what did you just say?"* and Mary would respond and say, *"Do you think we ought to have fish at the reception as well as beef? You know in case there are vegetarians there?"*

*"No, not that, the other part." "Oh, you mean about Rachel coming down, didn't I tell you?"*

Seriously I don't know how Mary did it. How do you tell your fiancé that you're pregnant and he had nothing to do with it. Maybe she read him the Christmas story out of Luke.

However she did it, it must have left him completely stunned. How could she possibly have betrayed him, and then expected him to believe that entire line about her still being a virgin and the Father, the Holy Spirit. Right.

The conversation must have ended with Joseph feeling betrayed and Mary feeling hurt because not only did he not believe her, he doubted her integrity.

But what could Joseph do? He had trusted her. He wanted to spend the rest of his life with her. It just wasn't right. So, what was he to do?

Well, there were a couple of options. First, he could've had her stoned to death. According to the law, that was the punishment for adultery and during the betrothal period it would be considered adultery.

The other option was to simply break off the engagement, but remember, by this time it could only be done with a formal divorce.

The Bible tells us that Joseph was a just man, so he decided on a quiet divorce so Mary wouldn't be disgraced publicly. That way he could get on with his life, but life is never that simple.

So, that night, as he fell into a trouble sleep, something remarkable happened... an Angel appeared to Joseph.

Let's pick up the story in Matthew 1:20-21, *"But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.'"*

Here is the *"Fear Not"* for today, *"Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife."* It's kind of interesting what happened here. Perhaps you've never noticed it, or if you have then perhaps it didn't bother you.

If we go back to the scripture it says in Matthew 1:24, *"When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife."* You say, *"Okay, what's the problem?"*

Well, no problem but in Luke, Chapter 2 we're told how Joseph had to go to Bethlehem to take part in the Census.

Listen to what it says in Luke 2:5, "*He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.*"

Kind of beat that one around for a while. Matthew says Joseph took Mary home as his wife, but Luke says Mary "*was pledged to be married to him.*" In other words, Joseph's fiancée.

I wonder if Mary had to live with Joseph and his family until the wedding because her parents wouldn't let her stay when they found out she was pregnant?

I wonder if the wedding was perceived to be what is known as a shotgun wedding.

A story goes that a man received a call from his best who told him that he and his girlfriend were getting married. It was going to be a formal wedding since her father had painted the shotgun white.

We really don't know much about Joseph and Mary in the beginning. The scriptures tell us that she remained a virgin until Jesus was born. The children that Mary had after Jesus were Joseph's.

So that's the story, but what do we learn?

### **Slide 3**

First, we learn that Mary wasn't chosen to carry the Son of God in isolation.

When we're first introduced to her, we're told Matthew 1:18, "*This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was*

*pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit."*

Then we read in Luke's account in Luke 1:26-27, "*In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.*"

In both cases, who Mary was, was tied to Joseph. She wasn't unattached, she was engaged, and she wasn't engaged to Bob or Tim, she was engaged to Joseph.

It was never intended for Jesus to be raised in the home of a single parent because there would've been all kinds of challenges that Mary would've faced without a husband in that time and culture.

Now, you might be in the same camp as Australian journalist Irina Dunn, when she wrote, "*A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle.*"

Well, that might be true today, but it wasn't true 2000 years ago. As a woman, Mary would've been limited in how she could earn a living.

As a single mother, she would've been scorned and ostracized. The difference in how unwed mothers are viewed by society has changed radically in the last 50 years, imagine how different it would have been 2000 years ago.

Without a husband, Mary would've been at risk. Her situation would be compromised. She would've been seen as having loose morals and being easy prey, but not only did Joseph marry Mary, he treated her with respect.

Matthew 1:24-25, *“When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.”*

We don't know the full conversation between Joseph and the angel, but we know that Joseph understood that, until Jesus was born, Mary was to remain a virgin. Joseph respected that and respected Mary.

#### **Slide 4**

Next we learn, because Joseph obeyed, Jesus had a father

Again, in 2022 it's hard to imagine the stigma that would've been attached to not having a father. But there was a time, in the not too distant past, that was a reality.

To not have a father 2000 years ago, would've subjected Jesus to ridicule and distain. Plus, the emotional weight that would've been placed on him.

We know that Jesus came to an awareness of His heavenly father, but we don't know exactly when that happened.

The only story from Jesus' childhood happened when he was 12 years old.

You may know the story. His parents had taken Him to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration.

He got separated from His parents and when they finally found Him, He was in the temple in dialogue with the religious leaders.

We pick up that story in Luke 2:48-49, *“When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.” “Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?”*

Apparently, at that age, Jesus had an awareness of Who His Father actually was. I wonder if He just knew or if Mary had told him? That would’ve been an interesting conversation.

But, what about when he was 8 or 6 or 4, and needed a father in his life? It was Sigmund Freud who wrote, *“I cannot think of any need in childhood as strong as the need for a father’s protection.”*

That protection for Jesus came from a carpenter named Joseph, and it began very early.

If we go back to the Christmas story, we read in Matthew 2:13-15, *“When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.” So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”*

Again, I’m not sure if that journey was one that could’ve been made without Joseph. But it was more than simply needing a flesh and blood father in his life.

The poet and song writer Rod McKuen was an anomaly, not that he was born out of wedlock in the early thirties, that’s been happening ever since there were boys and girls.



The anomaly was that his mother chose to raise him as a single mom. Yet, it wasn't enough to know that he was loved by his mother, McKuen spent his life trying to learn about his father.

In his book, *Finding my Father*, McKuen talks about the need he felt to know who his father was, *"Every day of every year I thought about my father. To find out why it is I'm here and what brings me to each step in my life, to satisfy something that might be lacking in us both."*

Joseph was there to protect Jesus, and to provide him with the father figure who would educate Him, who would teach Him a trade, and to provide a stable home.

## **Slide 5 -** Conclusion

Obedience often comes with a price and because Joseph obeyed, he paid a price. Think about the time that Joseph spent in Egypt on the run with his family. I'm pretty sure that wasn't in Joseph's plans.

It would've made sense that after the census that he probably was planning on traveling back to Nazareth and resuming his trade as a carpenter.

But what about Joseph's reputation? It wasn't only Mary about whom the town gossips would've been talking.

Remember, the Bible tells us that Joseph *"was a righteous man"* or as the NIV translates it, *"Joseph her husband was faithful to the law."*

Both Mary and Joseph are described as good people so I'm sure that there were those who had a field day with their apparent indiscretion. Who would've believed their story? Sure, an angel told you that, right.

Sometimes we operate under the assumption that if we're obedient everything will be fine, but that isn't always the way it works.

Daniel was obedient, and he was thrown to the lions. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were obedient, and they were thrown into a furnace.

Paul was obedient, and he ended up in a shipwreck, but in all of those situations, God was with them. The bottom line is... What we have been called to do is to obey God.

Jesus reminded those who had chosen to follow Him of that expectation in John 14:15, 21 & 24, *"If you love me, obey my commandments. Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal myself to each of them. Anyone who doesn't love me will not obey me. And remember, my words are not my own. What I am telling you is from the Father who sent me."*

What is it that God's calling you to do, and of what are you afraid?

Maybe it's the first point of obedience which is baptism or maybe you've gone beyond that but are struggling with obeying Christ in other areas of your life. Maybe areas of integrity or morality.

So today, I would challenge you, just as God's messenger challenged Joseph, *"Fear Not, just obey."*