

A Line in Time, Mary and Joseph
Matthew 1:18-25

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There has never been an event in the history of man that has so defined human history as the birth of Jesus. That event has defined time, nations, and history.

In the past, when we spoke of any event in the course of history, of any nation, we defined it with the letters BC, Before the birth of Christ, or AD, Anno Domini, In the Year of the Lord.

Today, scientists and historians have adopted an alternative dating system. They refer to BC as BCE which stands for Before the Common Era, and refer to AD as CE, which stands for Common Era.

This change was made to mask the Christian basis for the dating system in a bid to accommodate non-Christians and maintain political correctness.

Yet, in Biblical times time was usually divided by who the ruler of the day was. Do you remember the way the Christmas story starts?

The Bible tells us that the birth of Jesus was dated by the fact that most of the known world was ruled by Caesar Augustus who died in 14AD, In the Year of the Lord.

33 years later Jesus was crucified under the authority of Caesar Tiberius who died in 37AD, In the Year of the Lord.

Even today, in spite of the change in how history is labeled, AD or CE, history still divides time into two sections: things that happened before Jesus was born and things that happened after Jesus was born.

In fact, there wasn't one person who was there that first Christmas that could've imagined the impact that event would have on the world. The world was changed because of the birth of Christ.

It made a difference in the way the poor are viewed, how education is viewed, how the sick are viewed, even how we view each other.

It was almost as if someone had dragged a stick through the sand; drawing a line that said this was then and this is now.

Because, 2000 years ago in a stable in a small village, a young woman gave birth and nobody knew that this birth would create a line in time.

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The main players that day were a young woman named Mary and her husband Joseph. Long before the birth of Christ changed the world, it changed their world.

You know the story. We've heard it told over and over again until the wonder has gone and it has become as mundane as a Christmas card, yet it was anything but ordinary.

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."*

Did you catch what it said, *"but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant."* That's not the way things normally happened in Biblical times.

In Luke's account, when the angel Gabriel visited Mary with the news that she was going to have a son, she made this statement.

Luke 1:34, *"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"*

There was no hesitation in her voice. She knew there was only one way to make a baby and that that hadn't happened. This was why she told Gabriel that she was a virgin.

In fact, there are people who, this time of year, say that the virgin birth was impossible. There are even preachers who say that the virgin birth isn't important.

But while it might be impossible, and I don't try to argue that, even the angel Gabriel didn't argue that point, he simply put it to rest in Luke 1:37 when he said, *"For nothing is impossible with God."*

So, while it may be impossible, at least in the natural scheme of things, it's of the utmost importance.

This is the human birth of God's son! Why shouldn't it be special? He was conceived outside the laws of nature, not because the ordinary way was wrong, but because it was ordinary.

It's amazing how many people can accept the resurrection but have issues with the virgin birth.

Think about it. If one can accept the resurrection of Christ, they should be able to accept the virgin birth.

In fact, if you don't believe in the resurrection, then it really doesn't matter if you accept the virgin birth or not.

1 Corinthians 15:17, *"And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins."* In other words, if there was no resurrection, you're backing the wrong horse.

If Mary wasn't a virgin, then who was Jesus' father? Joseph? I don't think so, after all Joseph was upset when he found out that his fiancé was pregnant.

So, if it wasn't Joseph, do you really think that God would send His son to be born through immorality, conceived through adultery and betrayal.

To get a better appreciation of what's happening, you need to understand the Jewish tradition of marriage. Mary and Joseph were in what was called the Betrothal period of their marriage contract.

In that particular culture, most marriages were arranged by the families when the participants were only children.

The philosophy was that marriage was too serious of an endeavor to be left to the dictates of the human heart.

The last part of the marriage contract or engagement period was the Betrothal.

It lasted for one year and was absolutely binding, the participants were considered husband and wife in all matters except they didn't live together, and the marriage hadn't been consummated.

The Betrothal could only be broken through the formal proceedings of divorce and then only if one of the parties had been unfaithful. Which is what Joseph planned on doing.

Matthew 1:19, *"Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly."*

Now that may seem a little harsh, but at this point in Mary and Joseph's relationship, Mary would've been legally committing adultery. The only other option, under Jewish law, was stoning.

I'm sure Joseph felt more than a little betrayed at this point. But he too was visited by an Angel.

Matthew 1:20, *“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.”*

Think about what was happening to their lives. One day life was normal for Mary and Joseph and then everything changed.

They were happily planning a wedding and a life together, and then it was almost as if someone had dug a stick through the sand drawing a line that said; this was then and this is now.

So, how was that first Christmas a defining moment for Mary and Joseph? Besides the obvious, they were to become parents.

I think most of us, who're parents, would agree that becoming a parent is life changing, especially if it wasn't expected, and this definitely wasn't expected.

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Christmas also changed other's perceptions of Mary and Joseph.

If you're familiar with the story of Christmas you know that it began not in Bethlehem but over a hundred kilometers away in an obscure little village called Nazareth, and by obscure, I mean it really wasn't much.

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.”*

Frank Zindler, past editor of *American Atheist Magazine*, claimed that Nazareth didn't exist when Jesus was born. He says that all evidence suggests it was established 40 years after Jesus died.

Seriously? If at some future date archeologists study Fort Worth and only discover material dated from the early 1900's would that mean that Fort Worth didn't exist in 1849, or would it mean that they missed something?

A while back, a TV news station did a weeklong special called, "*A Road Less Traveled.*"

It looked at towns that had once been thriving communities that no longer exist. Even some people who lived in proximity to these ghost towns were unfamiliar with them.

Nazareth is mentioned time and time again in the New Testament and Jesus is referred to numerous times as "Jesus of Nazareth."

It was just a small village, with little or nothing to call attention to itself, until a young couple became parents to the One who would change the world.

Even Jesus' contemporaries weren't that impressed with the community. Nazareth hadn't even made much of an impression on Nathanael.

John 1:45-46, "*Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip.*"

Regardless, Mary and Joseph came from a small community and there are no secrets in small communities.

Mary was probably known in the community as a “Good Girl.” She was engaged, not married, but engaged to Joseph who was described in the Bible as a good man.

Good people are annoying to bad people because they’re good. Their goodness is a reminder of what others could be if they wanted to.

Then, all of a sudden, Mary, the good girl, was pregnant, but she was engaged, not married. You can imagine how people’s opinions of her and Joseph changed.

Think about what they said about them behind their backs. Even if they tried to explain, who would believe them?

But an Angel came to Mary and told her in Luke 1:30b, *“Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God.”*

There’ll be times in your life when doing the right thing and following God’s will for your life will change the perception people have of you.

Jesus knew that. He didn’t sugar coat it, in fact He was pretty up front about it.

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Matthew 5:11, *“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.”*

Jesus didn’t say, *“If people lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers.”*

He said, *“When people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.”*

When you choose to follow the One who was born on that first Christmas, people's perceptions of you will change, but not always in a bad way.

Even though popular opinion in Nazareth may have cast Joseph and Mary in an unfavorable light for a while, that opinion ultimately changed.

For millions of people, over the next two thousand years, Joseph the Carpenter would be thought of as Saint Joseph and would have hospitals, universities, and cities named after him.

According to The National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, the Spanish version of his name, San Jose, is the most common place name in the world.

Joseph's wife would be known as Saint Mary, the blessed Virgin, the Holy Mother. She would cause countless debates through the years.

Because we serve Jesus, people will form opinions about us, sometime for the good, sometimes not. Either way understand that your purpose in life is not to conform to the opinions of others.

Author Lawana Blackwell writes, *"Patterning your life around other's opinions is nothing more than slavery."*

Ultimately you need to remember that you play to an audience of One, and that One is God.

You may not be able to avoid the negative perceptions of others, but you don't have to accept them, you don't need to make them a reality.

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Another thing that happened on that first Christmas was Mary and Joseph changed their perception of themselves.

This often happens when the first child is born. Suddenly Mary and Joseph became Mommy and Daddy.

They began thinking of themselves differently than they had, which isn't uncommon. A part of you becomes a part of them and the other way around.

But more than that was the affirmation that Mary and Joseph received from God. We need people to speak good into our lives. People who'll tell us that they believe in us and that we're awesome.

Often those people who have the most influence in our lives are our parents and ourselves. You can't control one, but you can most certainly control the other.

Self-talk can be incredibly helpful or incredibly dangerous. Depends on what we're saying to ourselves.

Sidney Madwed, known as the Poet for the Business World, wrote, *"Our subconscious minds have no sense of humor, play no jokes, and cannot tell the difference between reality and an imagined thought or image. What we continually think about eventually will manifest in our lives."*

What we tell ourselves about ourselves is usually defined by what others tell us about ourselves.

It takes someone special who can rise above being constantly put down and belittled. It can be done, but it's tough. It's a lot easier when those you love speak encouragement into your life.

So, you can imagine the positive impact on Mary and Joseph's life to hear the angel talk about how they had found favor with God.

God Who spoke everything into being. God Who created the universe. God Who shaped and molded us into what and who we are.

But more than that, they had been affirmed, not just through words, but through action.

God not only spoke into their lives declaring them righteous, but He said, *“I believe in you so much I’m going to entrust my one and only son to you.”*

Understand, the same God who spoke favor into the lives of Mary and Joseph also speaks favor into our lives every day. He loves us so much He sacrificed His one and only Son for us.

1 Thessalonians 1:4, *“For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you.”*

God chose us. We aren’t a mistake or an accident or an oops, we’re a wonderful, beautiful chosen one. Do you believe that? Can you believe that?

Galatians 4:4-5, *“But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.”*

When we realize just how much God loves us, it’ll change the perception we have of ourselves.

Think of the words that are used in the Bible to describe us, Chosen, Loved, Adopted, Redeemed, Favored, Special. That’s what God Almighty thinks of us.

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The fourth thing that happened to Mary and Joseph that first Christmas was it changed their priorities.

This is the reality for most of us when we have children. It changes how we socialize. It changes how we budget, or at least it should. Our purpose goes from being “Me” centered to being “We” centered.

It’s amazing how things that were so important before you became a parent take a back seat after you become a parent, things like a full night’s sleep.

Mary didn’t find out she was pregnant by a pregnancy test she bought at Walgreens, an Angel told her. He outlined Who the child was that she was carrying and what He would accomplish.

Luke 1:30-33, “But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

A very similar announcement came to Joseph.

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.”

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Conclusion

In a time when childhood mortality rates were high, in a land occupied by a foreign army, and ruled by ruthless men, God entrusted His Son to this young couple to raise as their own.

They were chosen to keep Jesus safe and healthy. They were to raise Him in a Godly home where He was to know and love His heavenly father.

We don't know a lot about Jesus' childhood, but we get a snippet in Luke 2:40, *"And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him."*

The next time we see them, they have their Son at the Temple. You see their responsibility with the Son of God is the same as our responsibility when we're given children.

They were to keep Him safe and bring Him up in the ways of God.

As a child of God our priorities need to be different than they were before we became children of God. The line drawn by Christmas should help define who we are, children of God, chosen, and adopted.

Our priorities should no longer be "me" centered but instead should be "we" centered, embracing God and what His will is for our lives, which is being a part of God's family and loving the world the way that God loves the world.

If Christmas hasn't made a difference in your life, it can.