

HOLIDAY MESSAGES 2020

STUDY TWO

Let's Witness a Troubled Romance in Nazareth

Matthew 1:18–24

There is no courtship more intriguing, more fascinating than the one between Mary and Joseph of Nazareth—unique in every way! It's easy for us to forget that as we think of the Christmas story. We imagine it's all placid and simple and flowing so easily, but not so for this couple who were engaged to be married.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

AT times, the Lord gives us assignments we would not have chosen for ourselves.

Perhaps that assignment is something others don't understand or wouldn't affirm. Perhaps the assignment defies logic, lacks common sense, or runs against conventional wisdom. But because it comes from God, it's His will, so it's the right thing to do. Therefore, we do it . . . even if we never anticipated it . . . we do it.

We do so because God's hand is in it. He has selected us to take on that assignment and walk that path, and it's in those moments when we sense a special awareness of God's presence as well as His goodness and faithfulness. It's in those moments when we truly learn the value of obedience—just as Joseph had learned it.

If we aren't careful, we might overlook that fact as we relive the Christmas story. So, in this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we'll take time to explore the courtship of Mary and Joseph—with an emphasis on Joseph. As we do, we'll come to appreciate afresh the value of obedience.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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Matthew 1:18–24



PREPARE YOUR HEART

True obedience overflows from the heart. God looks beyond our footsteps and words into the deep recesses of our human spirit. God's Spirit empowers us to obey God from the heart by molding our character to reflect God's character. That's why King David received God's commendation for being a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14).

We today long for the exact same commendation from the One whose opinion matters most. To align our heart with God's, we must be people of prayer. Deep prayer. Consistent prayer. In a spirit of prayer always. For that reason, pray now for God to help you in this study and strengthen you in your pursuit of holy obedience to God Almighty.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

We know very little about Mary and Joseph. Aside from Matthew's and Luke's genealogies, we know nothing of either's parents or grandparents. Occupants of Nazareth called Jesus the "carpenter's son" (Matthew 13:55). John tells us Mary's sister accompanied her at Jesus' crucifixion (John 19:25). Snippets like these, however, don't tell us what's most important.

In Luke 1:27, we read that Mary "was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph." Before the angel appeared to Mary and before she conceived a child by the power of the Spirit, Mary and Joseph loved each other. They pledged their lives to each other. They anticipated a lifelong marriage full of children, a common routine with few adventures—if any!

But God had other plans . . .



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Observation: A Man Named Joseph

During observation, we read the biblical text slowly and let each word make its way into our imagination. We avoid taking any word for granted. It's like we're taking in every petal of a vibrant red rose.¹

Begin by reading *Matthew 1:18–24*.

Note below what we know of Joseph from this passage.

You and I are on this earth to fulfill God's way, to go His direction. God is in charge and He's leading us to do His will, His way, in His time, for His purpose. The Christmas story teaches us that life isn't about us. If we learn that by the time we are placed in our burial site, we will have reached true adulthood. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: True Obedience

Your imagination unlocks the door of understanding. For observation, you use your imagination to engage the senses, to transport you to the biblical author's time and place. During interpretation, however, we sharpen, or even correct, our imagination. We fill in the blanks by researching relevant geography, history, culture, theology, human nature, etc.²



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Now, we'll do that with Joseph. Based on Matthew 1:18–19, what thoughts streamed through Joseph's head once he learned of Mary's pregnancy? How did Joseph prove himself a good man based on these verses? What action specifically displayed that righteousness? You might want to use [commentaries](#) or other resources to research the nature of their engagement.

Before Joseph could follow through on his plan, an angel appeared to him in a dream. What did the angel reveal to him, and what did the angel command him?

After Matthew commented how Jesus' conception fulfilled prophecy (Matthew 1:22–23), he recorded how Joseph responded to the dream. How did Joseph respond? What does his response reveal about his character? Why are those traits special traits of character in the eyes of God, and what can we learn from them?



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You may be facing a tough, life-altering decision. It's one that calls for sacrifice just like Joseph had faced even though the details are different. Should you follow the Lord in doing this? Or should you hold back? I urge you to follow Joseph's model and do it. Do the hard thing. Yes, it might be life-altering tough. Regardless, do it. It's a matter of obedience to the living God who made you and loves you. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: A Prayer of the Obedient

Psalm 26 gives us an intimate peek into the soul of one touched by a good and faithful God who simply wants to walk in a way pleasing to Him. Psalm 26 is a prayer of the obedient.

Take a moment to read and reflect on this *psalm*. How does this prayer inspire you to trust God in the path of obedience? How does it instruct you to walk on that path of obedience?

God's mercy and faithfulness put our feet on solid ground. The stormy winds of life batter us, but God keeps us upright and strong as we forge ahead on the path He has chosen for us.



Application: The Value of Obedience

To help you integrate the truths of Scripture into your life, Pastor Chuck Swindoll offers four encouraging principles to help you obey your Father in heaven.

- 1) *Are you facing a tough, life-altering decision? DO IT!* Yes, God often calls for sacrifice. But the sacrifice is only temporary. Remember that His goodness lasts eternally.
- 2) *Are you running the risk of being the brunt of others' criticism if you obey God? GO THERE!* One second's worth of God's approval is better than thousands of years' worth of the world's approval.



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- 3) *Are you being forced to stand alone or become forgotten these days? STAND ASIDE!* You don't want to be the star of the show if God does not want you there.
- 4) *Are you about to fill a new place of quiet service or help for another? HUMBLE YOURSELF!* Jesus defines greatness by how we serve others. Someone the world has overlooked might need your attention.

Which of Pastor Chuck's four principles speaks to you in your current season of life? Why? What might God be leading you to do during this Christmas season?



A FINAL PRAYER

Psalm 26:6–7 states:

*I come to your altar, O LORD,
singing a song of thanksgiving
and telling of all your wonders.*

No doubt, obedient Joseph sang a few songs of thanksgiving for all the wonders God worked in His life. Let's end this study with a song celebrating the greatest wonder God has worked on behalf of us all.³ Sing it. Pray it—and let celebration fuel your obedience.



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O Come, All Ye Faithful

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant!
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem!
Come and behold him, born the King of angels;

O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ, the Lord!

God of God, Light of Light eternal,
Lo! he abhors not the Virgin's womb;
Son of the Father, begotten, not created,

O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ, the Lord!

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,
Sing, all ye citizens of heav'n above:
"Glory to God, all glory in the highest!"

O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ, the Lord!

Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning;
Jesus, to thee be all glory giv'n;
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing;

O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ, the Lord!

ENDNOTES

1. To review Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, visit the website sts.insight.org or grab a *copy* of the book for your library. Pastor Chuck also uses *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*. It's one of his favorite Bible study tools.
2. Check out Constable's Notes at Netbible.org or the IVP New Testament Commentary on Matthew offered for free on Biblegateway.com.
3. John Francis Wade, attr., "O Come, All Ye Faithful," trans. Frederick Oakeley, Hymnary.org, https://hymnary.org/text/o_come_all_ye_faithful_joyful_and_triumph.

