

WHEN ANGELS SPOKE STUDY TWO

When an Angel Spoke to Joseph

Matthew 1:18–25

My hope for you this Christmas season is that your commitment will go deeper. That your acceptance of God’s message will ring true in your heart. That your obedience to follow Him would be consistent, real, non-hypocritical, faithful, long lasting. That your patience will only add reality to your words of faith.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

EACH year, we read the Christmas story and marvel at all the amazing things God did through His people. Mary, who took on the role of giving birth to the Son of God. The shepherds, who welcomed Him to the world with great joy and celebration. The magi, who defied a king to protect the King of Kings. And of course, the star of the show, baby Jesus, who would be the savior of the world.

Of the cast of the nativity, no one gets overlooked quite like Jesus’ father . . . not His *heavenly* Father but His earthly *adopted* father, Mary’s husband, Joseph. No choir sings “Joseph, Did You Know?” And few plays move the spotlight away from Jesus in Mary’s arms to focus on Joseph.

Even the Scriptures have little to say about Joseph compared to the other figures of the nativity account. Nevertheless, Joseph’s perspective still has importance to the story and relevance today. In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, that young man of faith will take center-stage for a moment to reveal what God was doing in and through him as he anticipated the birth of the Son.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you prepare to learn about Joseph and glean from his example, use this prayer to set your heart right with God so that you can receive what He wants to show you today:

Father, thank You for the masterful way You've orchestrated and directed Your plan for Your creation. As I study these words You've preserved, please guide me so I can see You more clearly and love You more deeply. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In this series of Christmas studies, we are looking at how the angels fit into the story of the birth of Jesus Christ, focusing not on the angels' appearance or power but on their *message*. After all, the English word *angel* comes from the Greek word meaning “messenger.”

Pastor Chuck Swindoll describes angels as “*supernatural creatures sent by God with special messages to specific people for significant reasons.*”

Below, we'll explore Matthew 1:18–25 where we'll examine Joseph's dream in which he encountered one of these angelic messengers who brought him great *relief*.



Observation: Joseph's Encounter

According to the method Pastor Chuck uses for understanding and applying Scripture, good Bible study follows four steps: observation, interpretation, correlation, and application. In the first step, we will look at what the passage says, and according to Pastor Chuck, “This part of the process is absolutely foundational!”¹ Read [Matthew 1:18–25](#), and begin making observations.

According to [1:18](#), what was Joseph and Mary's relationship status when Mary became pregnant by the Holy Spirit?



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According to [Matthew 1:19](#), how did Joseph intend to respond to the news of Mary’s pregnancy? Why did he plan to respond in this way?

In your own words, summarize the angel’s message to Joseph in [1:20–21](#).

Occasionally, the biblical authors help their readers by including interpretive notes within their writings. Matthew provides a clarifying statement in [1:23](#) for his readers who might miss some details. What does Matthew say the Hebrew name “Immanuel” means?



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According to *Matthew 1:24–25*, how did Joseph respond to the angel's message after waking up from his dream?

Do you know that there is not one word Joseph spoke written in the Scriptures? We don't know his age. We don't know how he and Mary met. We don't know anything about his family life. We don't know how he wound up in Nazareth. But here he is—stable, solid as a stone, just, pure, a man of true integrity. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Joseph's Character

As you look back at your observations, you might still have questions about everything that's happening in this passage. In the next step, interpretation, you will look at what your observations mean.

Place yourself in Joseph's sandals for a moment. You've waited your whole life to find a beautiful, godly woman like Mary. You're betrothed to get married, and you've been faithful to her. One day, Mary comes to you with a look of apprehension in her eyes. You hold your breath, and she utters those shocking words: "I'm pregnant."

How do you think you would have responded to Mary? Would your first impulse be trust, betrayal, or a different emotion?



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The Torah included a litany of laws addressing how to handle certain situations relating to marriage and divorce. Read *Deuteronomy 22:13–14, 20–21*, and summarize what could happen if a man found out the woman he married was not a virgin?

In light of this custom, what does Joseph's response to the news of Mary's pregnancy in *Matthew 1:19* reveal about his character? Notice the contrast between the public nature of the punishment in Deuteronomy 22 and Joseph's "quiet" response. See *Constable's Notes* at netbible.org for a detailed discussion of Joseph's response.

After his spectacular encounter with the angel, Joseph changed his already honorable decision of quietly divorcing Mary to an *even more* honorable choice of obeying the angel and going through with the marriage. What sort of social challenges would their family have faced throughout Mary's pregnancy and Jesus' upbringing? (See also *John 8:41*.)



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Nothing compared to Joseph's relief in that moment. He found a wife. He held her hand all the way through those embarrassing months as people noticed how soon she was pregnant. They came to all the wrong conclusions. They never did believe the truth. But Joseph knew because of a faithful angel who came just when he was needed and brought reassurance and relief. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: “We Will Call Him Immanuel”

In *Matthew 1:22–23*, the narrative includes an interesting aside: “All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet.” The prophet mentioned is Isaiah, and the message comes from *Isaiah 7:14*. Examining the context of this prophecy will deepen our understanding of the meaning of the angel’s appearance to Joseph.

Read *Isaiah 7:1–6*. What frightened Ahaz, king of Judah? (Remember: when Israel split, the southern kingdom was called “Judah,” while the northern kingdom kept the name “Israel.”)

According to *7:7–9*, what message of assurance did God give offer through Isaiah?



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According to *Isaiah 7:13–17*, what sign would God give to show that He would deliver Judah? How would the people know that God was with them?

This prophecy from Isaiah established a *pattern* that God would follow as He unfurled His perfect plan for His people. He would fulfill the prophecy in the *near* future by physically delivering Judah from the attacks of its enemies. *God is with us!*

And He would fulfill the prophecy again in the *far* future through the birth of His Son Jesus, who would spiritually deliver all humanity from the shackles of sin and death. *God is with us . . . literally!*

The good news is that God is still with us today! Through the presence of the Holy Spirit, God dwells among His people and changes lives to reflect His character. With this profound truth in mind, we move to consider application of Matthew 1:18–25.



Application: Joseph's Example

In his discussion of this passage, Pastor Chuck encourages us to consider those commendable characteristics Joseph showed despite his challenging circumstances. Specifically, Joseph's actions reflect three godly virtues:

1. *Acceptance*. Despite the costly sacrifice, Joseph *accepted* with open hands and an open heart God's plan that the angel delivered to him.
2. *Obedience*. Despite the likelihood of public ridicule, Joseph *obeyed* the angel's command and married Mary.
3. *Patience*. Despite his love for Mary, Joseph showed *patience* as he stood firm at Mary's side and kept her pure as they awaited the birth of the Savior.



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Have you truly accepted the message that Christ was born to offer salvation to *all* people? If you have not, what's holding you back? Take a moment to pray for those in your life with whom you're tempted to give up hope. With God, nothing is impossible. How can you share the love of Christ with them this Christmas?

If you have accepted the message, how do you sense God leading you to take the next step of obedience? Perhaps God is simply calling you to *wait*. How can you follow Joseph's example and remain faithful despite external pressures?

What began as a delivery of difficult news to Joseph ultimately resulted in a sigh of relief. Relief that Mary remained faithful. Relief that God was still with His people. Relief that He would save people from their sins. One beloved Christmas hymn resonates with Joseph's feelings of reassurance:

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 men to dwell,
Jesus, our Immanuel.
Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King."²



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A FINAL PRAYER

Use the space below to write your own concluding prayer. Ask God to use the example of Joseph to grow your character so that you might be more like Jesus.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 80.
2. Charles Wesley and George Whitefield, "Hark, The Herald Angels Sing," hymnary.org.

