

**What Child is This?**  
**Part Two - Joseph: Faith in the Dark**

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**Matthew 1:18-25**

**I. Faith in the Dark**

God could have given Joseph a heads up. He could have sent the angel to Joseph prior to this discovery. God could have let Joseph in on it at the same time as Mary. But God doesn't.

There's a *gap*. Enough time for Joseph to have to wrestle through these options, and to come to the conclusion that he didn't want to expose her to public disgrace.

**What is this pain for?**

In what I can only imagine is pain and sadness, **Joseph chooses compassion**. He makes a choice to preserve the dignity of this woman he loves, and who – at least for all appearances – has betrayed him; lied to him; disrupted their future. And he chooses to preserve her dignity. To be kind.

Here's a picture for us of what faithfulness to God looks like. It looks like compassion. Looks like deep kindness. **And it's beautiful because it looks a lot like how God treats us.**

**The "Gap", the "Dilemma" Becomes a Test**

God is asking Joseph to act out his faith in another challenging painful way. I wonder if this "gap" was a way for Joseph himself to be tested – not for God to see if he could "pass the test" but **so that Joseph knew that he really could do what he was being asked to do next**. To reveal to Joseph as much as anyone else, that he was ready for the next task. The **big task** God had been preparing him for.

**Implications:**

Sometimes we don't know what we are capable of, by God's grace, until the test comes – until we feel the weight, until the pressure is actually on; until we are pushed beyond what we thought possible.

**We find that God's grace is sufficient for us to do that thing we feel totally insufficient for.**

**God's big ask will mean Joseph will now have to bear the public disgrace.**

Mary is pregnant – probably four months pregnant at this point. To the rest of the community, it doesn't look good. Either...

- A) It looks like Joseph is the biological father of this child, and simply lying, thus exposing himself to public disgrace and bearing the consequences of that stigma for the rest of his life;
- Or...
- B) It looks like he is being unfaithful to the law by not divorcing Mary, and thus condoning her sexual act outside of marriage.

In either of these cases, for those who do not believe what they surely have said about the miraculous situation, he looks the fool or the charlatan. But that's what God is now asking him to do.

**Joseph will bear the disgrace of misunderstanding out of love for God.**

And the misperception sticks:

"They [the Jewish leaders] said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph [and they mean *biological son* here], whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven?'" – John 6:42

In the ancient world a person's "honour", their reputation, was the most valuable thing to them. Social approval – how you are viewed by your family, your village, your tribe – would carry incredible weight. And what God was asking of Joseph and Mary to partner with him in had the potential to be very costly to their honour.

**Implications:**

1. We live at a context where being associated with the Christian faith – like, where really following Jesus – is not always viewed kindly; or is at least deeply misunderstood. Identification with God and his backwards kingdom will lead to being perceived as backwards ourselves at times.
2. Not every *Christian* person will be able to perceive what God is calling you to do.
3. Maybe God is doing something in someone's life we can't see right away, and so rather than jumping to conclusions we would do well to be patient. Be curious. Be ready to consider what you might not have before.

**II. Faith as Enacted Trust**

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

Faith is "trust" in something or someone, and that includes what we "think" with our minds. But faith in the story of scripture is the whole thing – not just a set of 'internalized beliefs' but turning into action. It's like, faith has feet.

As James will say so clearly: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." – James 1:22

Or, as he says later in the book, "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead." – James 2:26

And what Joseph is demonstrating is that faith is that trust in the living God worked out with actions of obedience to God. To what God is calling us to.

**Joseph becomes a picture of what it looks like to be faithful to God in the hard things. To be faithful and obedient even when it is costly.**

God will ask you, like Mary and like Joseph, to give your "yes" to a life that will be, at points, deeply misunderstood, perhaps maligned, and that leads you to do hard things. But – and I know this to be true

in my life – you will find no greater joy than when you say “Yes” to the good, sometimes hard, sometimes confusing life of obedience to God.

### **What Child is This?**

Jesus. The one who saves us from our sins. Immanuel. Really and truly God with us.

What child is this? The one who remakes our hearts.

What child is this? It is God himself come to be with us, even as he sends us to make him known in all the world.

We can live with this wild, audacious, often ‘making no sense to those around us’ faith.

Where is he calling you into that kind of enacted trust today?

## Life Group Discussion and Reflection

### Open Up

In your experience, what's the most challenging or frustrating part of being misunderstood? Why do you think that?

### Dig In

#### Read Matthew 1:18-25

1. In the message, we saw that God leaves Joseph "in the dark" for a time. He does not give him a heads up about the fact that Mary is pregnant by the Holy Spirit. How does Joseph respond in the midst of what must have been a very painful moment for him? Are there circumstances where you need to follow his example of compassion and grace?
2. As with Mary, Joseph was also given a very difficult task by God. His life would be wide open to misunderstanding as he's told to take Mary home as his wife, opening himself to the charge of being a charlatan, a fool, and certainly not faithful to God. Yet he obeys God anyways (vv.24-25).
  - a. What factors were at play for him to obey God immediately?
  - b. What do you find challenging about obedience to God? How does this story speak to you in this regard?
  - c. What misunderstandings might you be opened to as you seek to follow Jesus in the everyday circumstances of your life?
3. We have God's inspired Scriptures, that "make us wise for salvation," and that are "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training the person of God in right-living." (2 Timothy 3:15-17). **Read James 1:22.** What is the big idea in this passage? Are there areas that you are resisting "doing what" God has revealed in his word?
4. In the message we ended with these words: "We have all the reason we need to say "yes" to God. That he is the one who will – as the names of Jesus tells us – he is the one who will "save us from *our* sins." Here is Immanuel – the God who will be "with us" – and with us *always*." How does Jesus' saving work, and his ongoing presence give you reason to obey God, even "in the dark", and when it's very difficult?

### Prayer

Take time to pray for each other – especially in those areas where we need God's grace to do difficult things that may be misunderstood by those around us. Ask for the Spirit to enable a deeper sense of his presence living in us.