

# The Wisdom of Joseph

Matthew 1:18-25

Just imagine, you're going about your daily life . . . a life filled with the usual routines . . . a life that is safe and secure . . . you've got hopes and dreams for the future . . . and suddenly the world you thought you knew is turned upside down! Can you imagine what it's like to have your life changed in an instant . . . for life suddenly to be out of your control . . . where do you turn? What do you do?

I was imagining this week what it must have been like for Joseph. I imagined something like this . . .

Hi . . . I'm Joseph. You know . . . the carpenter! Mary's better half . . . it's all right, I can say that, she's not here.

I don't get much of a look in when it comes to Jesus' story . . . and that's okay . . . I just think it's a little ironic that I'm the outgoing one . . . I don't mind a bit of the limelight and I get mentioned twice and then pretty much forgotten. But Mary . . . put her in front of people and she goes to pieces . . . shy as a field mouse . . . always thinking and pondering. She doesn't like the attention . . . ha! And what does she get? Mary this . . . Mary that . . . she even gets a mention in the creed! Statues of Mary, prayers to Mary, and who knows what else?!

But, anyway, thanks for the opportunity to tell my side of the story.

So, look . . . this is how it happened . . . Mary and I were engaged, right? Back in our time that meant we were as good as married . . . everyone knew it. They say opposites attract and, well, we sure are opposites. She's a thinker . . . I'm a doer. But, anyway, she was all right. It was all arranged . . . I was looking forward to it.

But, then the bombshell! I tell you, I couldn't believe it! She comes to me and says: "I'm pregnant!" Just like that. At the time I didn't hear anything else. I was in shock . . . yes, shock. I wasn't even angry. I just couldn't believe it. This was Mary after all! *My Mary!* Pregnant!

When I look back on it, I was surprisingly calm . . . I even took some time to think about everything that was going on. One thing was immediately clear to me . . . we would have to get a divorce . . . it was the right thing . . . it was the only thing! She had broken the law . . . God's law. I couldn't live with my conscience if we continued on. By rights, what she'd done was a capital offence . . . I could have dragged her before the courts . . . she would have been stoned. Well, my honour was at stake . . . my family's honour. But, what would that have achieved? She wasn't a bad person . . . that's why what she'd done didn't make any sense. But, what would be the point of exposing her to public humiliation? So, I decided we would do it quietly . . . no fuss . . . let her go . . . let her live her life. I didn't know how we would do it, but I knew that's what we'd do . . . it would be the best for Mary.

Now, you might be thinking: "What a good bloke" And, I guess it was the decent thing to do. But, that's how I was brought up. God's law was there for a reason. God's law is good and I tried my best to live by it, but I also know that God desires mercy . . . it says that somewhere . . . and, the letter of the law is not always the spirit of the law. So, I thought I had a good plan . . . good for everyone . . . but, it turns out God had a different plan!

Boy, did he have a different plan!

Well, first I found out I had it all wrong. Mary hadn't done anything wrong . . . this pregnancy was God's doing! How amazing is that! The Holy Spirit was at work and this child – our child – was going to be the promised Messiah! Suddenly all the things Mary had been saying made sense . . . well, kind of.

But, you know what this taught me? Something even more amazing. I thought God's law was everything. I thought you couldn't do much more than be a good and decent human being, but I realized there's so much more. There's more to God's plan than just obeying his law and being a good person . . . what God wanted from me was for me to trust him. That's the biggy! Trust that it was him at work in our lives. Trust that what he was telling me was true. Trust that he was even able to work in a way that seemed to go against his law.

When the angel of the Lord revealed that to me I was really surprised, but I've come to realize God is full of surprises and with him I should expect the unexpected. And, he hasn't let me down either. Oh, there's been plenty of times when my trust has been put to the test, but he's always come through. Well, just look at my son! Look at Jesus. Look what we went through with him! But, it's all good! God knew what he was doing there too . . . surprised me again!

Of course, Mary knew all that already! She had already put her trust in God's plan . . . but, then, she was always a bit more sensible . . . it just took me a bit longer to get with the program. And, Mary's right . . . as she'll tell you, it's always good not to rush into things . . . take the time to reflect and think about what God might be saying and doing . . . don't just assume that you know straight-away. And, that's true . . . but, there's something else I want you to know . . . and this is why it's great we are opposites, Mary and I. All that listening and pondering is a good thing, but somewhere along the line you have to do something. That's what this trust is all about . . . not just sitting there *thinking* how great God is, but trusting that he is great enough so you can get out there and get amongst it!

Look, there was a lot to be afraid of . . . what would people say about Mary? . . . about me?! What would it do to business? What did it mean that Mary was pregnant by the Holy Spirit? What did it mean for us? But, I don't know if you've ever had an angel appear to you, but it's pretty convincing! "Don't be afraid" And, when I thought about it, I realized the angel was right! Why should I be afraid? Why let fear decide how we live? Why should fear win the day? God was with us. God was using us. God had a plan.

So, I did it! I didn't worry about how it looked. I didn't worry about what people said. I just did it. I took Mary to be my wife just as the angel said. And I don't regret one moment of it! God is good!

But, look, I've probably gone on long enough . . . thanks for listening and if you forget everything else I said this morning, I'll understand, because people tend to forget me – I'm only Joseph after all – but, I hope you won't forget these two things that I have learned:

First, trust is the most important thing. Trust in God. Trust in his plans. They may be surprising, but he knows what he's doing.

Second, trust is not just a passive, doing nothing kind of thing. Trusting God means being *involved* in his plans! Doing something. Getting out there! Living! Without fear.

So, where do you start? Well, how about starting where I started, with the angels words: "Don't be afraid, Joseph . . . don't be afraid!"