

Joseph's Dilemma

Shortly after Mary learns that she is to be pregnant by the Holy Spirit, she travels to see her cousin Elizabeth and stays there for three months. Likely she is there when John the Baptist is born. Then she returns to Nazareth. She is now into her second trimester of the pregnancy, which means that she is beginning to show her condition.

In a culture where everyone knows everyone else and being nosy is common it is not long before her condition is discovered. To the shock of her family, neighbors, and Joseph, she is pregnant. The question on everyone's mind is: "Who is the father and why would she commit adultery when she was espoused to Joseph".

Accusations run rampant through the community. "She has committed adultery, she should be stoned." "She doesn't deserve a man like Joseph." "Why was she gone for three months and why did she commit this grievous sin?" "Why didn't her male protector prevent this."

Even Joseph has questions and is grieved over the situation. "Should he follow the Law of Moses, and have her stoned?" "Should he just give her a bill of divorcement?" "What about all of the preparations he has made for them to be a family?" "Why would she treat him like this?" "Is he not good enough for her?"

I am sure all of these and more questions went through his mind.

In our culture this happens so frequently that it has become more or less accepted in some circles, and for many it is no big deal. So as we read this story it doesn't have the impact on us that it should have. But it did have great impact on those living during these earlier times.

Mary's honor is completely destroyed within the community and Joseph's is weakened. In their culture Honor is everything. It defines who you are. Shame is to be avoided at all costs, but shame is written all over this situation.

It is no wonder that the community and individuals are thinking these thoughts. They are missing one important piece of information and adding in its place their suppositions as to the cause of the pregnancy.

The missing element: Namely that this pregnancy is unique – caused by God to produce a Son of Man who is equally the Son of God.

Joseph was "on board" with the rest of the community until an angel, who explained the situation, visited him.

Because Joseph (Yosef) her husband was faithful to the law, and was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

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 (Miryam) 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 (Yeshua), because he will save his people from their sins." {Jesus is the Greek form of Yeshua (Joshua), which means Adonai (LORD) saves.}

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). {ref. Isa 7:14}

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. Matthew 1:19-23

All of Israel was waiting for the Messiah but the promise and the conditions surrounding that promise is shrouded within the story in Isaiah about King Ahaz and an army seeking to destroy Judah. It is no wonder that most people did not recognize the signs of the Messiah being born.

Read Isaiah 7 to see if you would understand this prophecy if you were reading it before this happened. Much of prophecy is not clear to us until it happens. Then one can say "Oh that's what God said would happen".

Joseph as well as Mary needed divine direction and understanding before they were able to do what God desired for their lives. The fact that they were willing to follow God's direction shows their spiritual maturity and commitment to following God in spite of the circumstances that might follow such actions.

Cornerstone Community Church