



The Birth of Jesus Christ: Joseph, Betrothal & Fulfilled Prophecy

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The birth of Jesus Christ is recorded in Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 2:1-20, each offering a unique perspective on the event.

This study focuses on Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus Christ. The narrative centres on Joseph: his encounter with the angel, the divine nature of Jesus' conception, and the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy.

Examining these details highlights Matthew's emphasis on Jesus' identity, the fulfilment of prophecy, and the significance of His birth.

Joseph and Mary's Betrothal

Matthew 1:18-19 tells us, "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily."

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The Jewish customs for marriage were twofold.

- **Kiddushin:** the betrothal process, in which the couple were legally bound in marriage, often arranged by their parents. Though not yet living together, they were considered husband and wife, and separation required divorce.
- **Nissuin:** the stage, often about a year later, when they came together formally. This involved a wedding banquet, after which the groom would take his wife home to the place he had prepared.

The Jewish marriage pattern, with betrothal first and the groom later bringing the bride home, points to Christ and the Church. Just as Joseph prepared to take Mary as his wife, Christ has betrothed the Church (2 Corinthians 11:2), prepares a place for His people (John 14:2-3), and will one day return to be with them (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

In Matthew 1, Mary and Joseph are in the period of kiddushin. They were legally husband and wife, but had not yet come together. So when Mary was found to be pregnant, Joseph would naturally have assumed unfaithfulness.

The text does not tell us whether Mary explained what had happened, because the focus is on Joseph's response.

Joseph would likely have known that unfaithfulness whilst betrothed was treated as adultery under the Law, with severe prescribed punishments (Deuteronomy 22:23-24). By deciding to divorce her quietly, he seeks to spare her from public shame and potentially death.

The Angel's Message

Matthew 1:20-21 states, "But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins."

This clearly echoes the words of Isaiah who in Isaiah 53:12 states "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the

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transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

The text does not tell us which angel this is, though some have speculated it could have been Gabriel, who appeared to Mary in Luke 1:26-27.

The angel addressed him as “Joseph, son of David,” emphasising Joseph’s Davidic lineage and drawing attention to the royal line of King David, through which Jesus is presented in Matthew’s account.

Matthew 1:22-23 adds, “Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.”

This is a direct reference to Isaiah 7:14, confirming the prophetic fulfilment.

This is the first of four angelic visitations Joseph receives in Matthew, all in the form of dreams: first, to take Mary as his wife (Matthew 1:20); second, to flee to Egypt (Matthew 2:13); third, to return to Israel (Matthew 2:19-20); and fourth, to withdraw to Galilee (Matthew 2:22). In each case, Joseph simply does as he is told.

Joseph’s Response

Matthew 1:24-25 records, “Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.”

Joseph woke from his dream, took Mary as his wife, and did not have relations with her while she was still pregnant with Jesus. The Greek word translated “until” (ἕως, *heōs*) does not itself imply that relations occurred afterward.

We know from scripture that Jesus did have brethren (Matthew 13:55-56), however, the text here does not address anything beyond the virgin conception, so it is best not to press the passage beyond what is written.

In Matthew’s account, Joseph emerges as a model of righteousness and faithful obedience. His careful response to a situation that could have brought public shame, combined with trust in God’s guidance through the angelic dream,

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highlights the divine orchestration of Jesus' birth. Through Joseph's obedience, the fulfilment of prophecy is affirmed, and the narrative sets the stage for Jesus as the promised King to Israel from David's line (Matthew 1:1) and the Saviour of His people (Matthew 1:21).