

THE CHARACTERS OF THE CHRISTMAS STORY

#2 "JOSEPH"

notice...

II. WHAT KIND OF CHARACTER JOSEPH DEMONSTRATED AND WHY WE SHOULD FOLLOW HIM AS A SPIRITUAL ROLE-MODEL

A. Joseph was a loving and compassionate man who showed mercy in the face of being wronged (Matt. 1:18,19).

1. When it appeared that he had been defrauded Joseph was unwilling to do what the law gave him the right to do.

According to oriental customs regarding marriage there was a nine months betrothal period in which a couple was legally espoused. During this time if a woman was found to be unfaithful her espoused (or engaged) husband had the right to have her stoned as a public example (Deut. 22:13-21).

Notice even though Joseph had this right legally, he wasn't going to exercise it. This is the same kind of love and compassion that Hosea demonstrated with his unfaithful wife Gomer, and what God asked him to do is a picture of how God dealt with His unfaithful people (Hosea 3:1-5).

2. When it appeared that he had been defrauded Joseph sought a way to show mercy (Matt. 1:19).

Notice Joseph was going to put Mary away privately instead of making an example of her apparent wrong-doing. The love and compassion that Joseph demonstrated was sadly lacking in the Pharisees. When they caught an adulterous woman they brought her before the Lord Jesus and cited what the law presented (Dt. 22:22; Jn. 8:3-11). It was love and compassion that moved the Lord Jesus to show mercy upon this woman.

Oftentimes when a person is wronged he goes about to get even and is spite-working toward the person who has wronged him. Notice the Lord would have us to be more like Joseph in this respect (Mark 12:28-33; Matt. 23:23).

I have known some folks who have an unforgiving attitude. Since others have been unfaithful to them, they could never forgive them. Such persons would do well to read Matt. 18:23-35.

B. Joseph was a man who showed great faith in the face of human impossibility (Matt. 1:20-25).

1. What Joseph was asked to believe was a special revelation (Matt. 1:20,21).

Notice while Joseph was thinking on the situation concerning Mary and her apparent unfaithfulness, God sent an angel to speak to him in a dream. This dream was a special revelation which God gave to him and it was one of the ways God used to speak to men in times past. Notice some other examples of how God spoke this way

(Gen. 15:12;28:11,12). It is important to realize that God doesn't speak to men in this way in our day (Heb. 1:1-2). Today we have the completed revelation of God's Word in the Bible and He speaks to us through it (II Tim. 3:16,17).

2. What Joseph was asked to believe was against all reason.

It was humanly impossible and against all reason for a woman to have a child not having known a man. Yet Joseph was asked to believe it. What God told Abraham and Sarah was against all reason (Gen. 18:1-15). What God revealed to Joshua was against all reason (Jos. 6). What God revealed to Gideon was against all reason (Jud. 7). And that a virgin would conceive was against all reason but that's what Joseph and Mary were asked to believe and that's what happened (Lk.1:34,35; Matt. 1:20).

There are many today who do not believe the Biblical account of the virgin birth of Christ and for the same reason - it is against all human reasoning, but if Jesus is not the virgin-born Son of God then He could be no one's Saviour. He would have the inherited sin nature of Adam and be a sinner like everyone else. But the Bible tells us He is the seed of a woman who not only fulfilled Scripture but who is absolutely sinless (Gen. 3:15; Matt. 1:22,23; I Pet. 1:18,19). It is only through the virgin birth that this is possible.

Notice just as Joseph was asked to believe God's revelation against all human reason so are we. We are asked to believe in the virgin birth of Christ, His sinless life, His vicarious sacrifice, His atoning death, His bodily resurrection, His ascension and His coming again for His bride, the church.

- C. Joseph was a man who showed obedience to God in the face of opposition (Matt. 2:13-23).

1. When the threat from Herod arose, Joseph obeyed the angel from God and fled (Matt. 2:13,14).

Notice herein we find a certain principle concerning a Christian's obligation to civil authority. Christians are to be model citizens and obey the law as long as the law is not in conflict with what the Word of God says (Rom. 13:1-5; Titus 3:8).

An example of this is given in Acts 4:13-19; 5:27-29. When Peter and others were forbidden to teach in the name of Jesus they obeyed God rather than man.

2. While the threat from Herod remained Joseph obeyed the angel from God and stayed in Egypt (Matt. 2:15).

I think there's one application we can make as we view this setting and Joseph's obedience. Oftentimes we fail to see that God has a divine time-table by which He

does things. We see this in His judgment upon the Amorites (Gen. 15:16) and especially in the earthly ministry of Christ. He said on several occasions, "Mine hour is not yet come." (Jn. 7:8; 12:23; 13:1; 17:1).

Sometimes it may not appear that God is at work, but for those who are in step with Him His timing is always right.

3. After the threat of Herod was gone Joseph obeyed the angel from God and returned to Nazareth (Matt. 2:19-23).

Notice as Joseph obeyed the Lord he was greatly used of the Lord. He was used to protect the Christ-child from the devil's servant.

Joseph presents a good spiritual role-model for us to follow. Because of his love, compassion, faith, and obedience he was greatly used as we view him and his part in the Christmas story. If we follow his example we too will be greatly used of the Lord.