

When the word “father” is brought up in the conversation of Jesus it is most often a reference of the Holy Father God. It is understood that the most crucial figure in the life of Christ was indeed God and a life pledged to serve him in faith was the most important direction of Jesus. It is, however, essential to remember that Jesus had another father. Joseph’s story is an important inclusion in the gospel of Christ. It provides examples of what a man of God should be, what a faithful husband should be, and what a Father is required to do.

Background:

- Joseph was a poor carpenter in Nazareth

Joseph was a descendant of King David and historians believed that he may have lived in Bethlehem but had moved to Nazareth as either a boy or for work as a young man.

- Joseph had a back-breaking job as a carpenter. Translated from the Greek “tekton,” Found in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament). This word translates to a carpenter, craftsman, and tradesman leading some historians to believe that Joseph did not only work with wood but could have also been responsible for building wells, crafting wagons and wheels, and working with metallurgy. This was not a job of privilege and would have required great skill to succeed.

Joseph’s Acceptance of Jesus

Matthew 18: 18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.

Marriage was a legal two-step process in Jewish culture. The first step was a betrothment that could have taken place many years before. This made the marriage legal and binding as if the couple would have been already married. The second part of the marriage process was more traditional with the wife being accepted into the home and the marriage consummate.

Matthew 18:19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

The scripture tells us four crucial items in this short verse.

- Joseph was slow to anger
- Joseph was a follower of the law
- Joseph loved Mary
- Joseph cares about the reputation of Mary even if it meant he couldn’t be with her

The scripture uses the word divorce showing that the legal process of betrothment had already been established. Under Jewish law, Mary would have faced imprisonment or even public execution for having been “unfaithful” during betrothment. Despite Mary’s presumed attempts to explain what had happened to Joseph, he must have wrestled with his thoughts and feelings, not understanding what had happened to his beloved wife-to-be. God sees this struggle and sends Joseph a message.

Matthew 1:20 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, [f] because he will save his people from their sins.”

Joseph was no doubt astonished by this news but the joy he must have in the validation of Mary’s story was truly a gift from God.

Matthew 1:22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel (which means “God with us”).

Joseph who was well-versed in Jewish law would have understood the prophet being spoken of as Isaiah. The Angel is confirming that this child is not of adultery but an intentional fulfillment of the word.

Joseph is being given both a responsibility and a gift.

- Joseph is being told to take Mary into his home this fulfilling that latter part of the Jewish law and to raise Jesus
- Joseph is being given the gift of having God in their presence “Immanuel”

The remarkable thing about Joseph is he does not hesitate to follow God’s command.

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

Joseph puts his reputation on the line by marrying a woman who will clearly appear pregnant before the people of the town. This would no doubt elicit rumors, whispering, and backbiting but Joseph is willing to take this on for the fulfillment of God’s plan.

Joseph shows respect to both Mary and God by waiting to consummate the marriage until Jesus is born. Joseph did not make this process about him but gave the glory to God. Joseph honors God one more time by naming the baby Jesus which means, “Yahweh saves.”

Joseph’s real test of faith will come after the birth of Jesus.

Luke 2: In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2 (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 And everyone went to their own town to register. 4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in clothes and placed him in a manger because there was no guest room available for them.

Joseph is introducing Jesus to the world outside of Nazareth for the first time. He is met with a long trip, and terrible lodging and is reduced to having his son laid in a manger. Joseph is understanding that life is going to be rough taking care of God’s miracle but he stays faithful. King Herod seeks to kill the newborn Jesus by pinpointing that the child is in Bethlehem and orders that all male babies be killed. Joseph is now thrust into the role of being a fugitive.

Matthew 2: 13 When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him. 14 So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, 15 where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son.

This would have been an understandable time for Joseph to question why God was putting them in this situation and why God wouldn't just protect them from Herod without having to flee to a foreign land but instead, Joseph quickly gathers his family and leaves. Joseph Obeys! Herod eventually dies and Joseph receives the word from an angel to return to Israel. Again Joseph obeys.

Matthew 2:19 After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt 20 and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead." 21 So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, 23 and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Joseph's life as Jesus's father was one of constant uncertainty and movement. It would have been so hard to establish yourself in a town, find work and create a safe environment for your family only to be told to get up and move everything to start over but Joseph understood his calling, to be a father, and that requires sacrifice. God would, however, allow Joseph to see a glimpse of Jesus becoming the Messiah without knowing it.

Luke 2:45 When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. 46 After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47 Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. 48 When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." 49 "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" [f] 50 But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

Joseph is only mentioned in the bible in a few passages yet in that short record we can see all the examples of what a father should be.

- Joseph was slow to anger and was understanding Matthew 18:19
- Joseph cared more about others than himself Matthew 18:19
- Joseph was a respecter of the law Matthew 18:19
- Joseph loved his wife Matthew 18:19
- Joseph obeyed the Lord's command Matthew 2:14
- Joseph was responsible for his family Matthew 1:24-25

In all of scripture, Joseph never utters a word but instead shows his faithfulness through his actions. His name translates as "Jehovah shall increase" and Joseph shows us that God will increase our lives in both faithfulness and grace when we obey immediately. Joseph was rewarded for his patience and virtue with several other children. Perhaps Joseph's greatest lesson is that we all have a part to play in God's plan. Most historians and theologians believe that Joseph died long before the events of Christ's death, but he laid the foundations of respect, honor, hard work, and faithfulness that would carry Jesus through to his adult years. Whatever role God gives us in his kingdom, we must act as Joseph and obey.