

# Joseph Accepts Jesus As His Son

## Matthew 1: 18-25

**DIG:** How could Mary possibly explain her pregnancy to Joseph? How would you feel if you were in Yosef's place? What would you say to your family and friends? To God? What were his options? What reasons does Matthew give as to why Jesus was born? Apart from fulfilling prophecy, why was Jesus' virgin birth necessary?

**REFLECT:** How have you experienced Yeshua ha-Meshiach as Immanuel in your life lately? What do you learn about faith from Joseph? What lessons can you learn from Joseph about submitting to the big purposes of ADONAI? When has the LORD seemed the most real, the most tangible, the most near to you?

Having verified that Yeshua's lineage met the criteria for Him to be the Messiah, Matthew now turns to the actual events of His birth in Isra'el some 2000 years ago. Interwoven into Mary's story is another story waiting to be told. In religious artwork as in real life, Joseph and Jude are two of a kind (see my commentary on [Jude Ae - Jude, a Bond-Slave of Jesus Christ](#)). His famous brother James, and his half-brother Jesus eclipsed Jude. Joseph stands in the shadows next to Miryam, who, along with her baby is highlighted on Christmas cards. He seems to always get mixed up with the shepherds. Like Jude, he knew what it was like to be the warm-up band for the real star of the story. The forgotten man in the margins, however, looms large in Mary's story.

He was an incredible man. He and Mary had entered **the first stage of the marriage ceremony** (see [Al - The Birth of Jesus Foretold to Mary](#)). They had exchanged public vows, taken the first cup of wine under the *huppah or canopy*, and had entered the one year *engagement* period. In the eyes of the community they were "married" - but with no sexual contact. His response on learning the shattering news of Mary's pregnancy proved just how extraordinary he was. Based on the facts, Miryam had betrayed him and broken her vows. Under the circumstances, Joseph had a legitimate right to be furious, or become vindictive, even bitter. He had a legal right to bring her to justice. But, as we shall see, Yosef wasn't that kind of a man. ADONAI had done a work in his heart. He was a righteous man, intent on doing the right thing in God's eyes, no matter what it cost him.<sup>88</sup>

Matthew tells the story from Joseph's perspective. 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

**(Matthew 1:18)**. The emphasis is on the **virgin birth** because **Mattityahu** is trying to solve the problem of Jeconiah (see **Ai - The Genealogies of Joseph and Mary**). On three different occasions the **virgin birth** is emphasized. In **Matthew 1:18** the inspired human author records: **before they came together**; in **Mattityahu 1:22-23** he quotes **Isaiah 7:14**, saying: **the virgin will be with child**, and thirdly, in **Matthew 1:25** he says that there was no union **until she gave birth to a son**.

So when **Mary** arrived back home in Nazareth, **she** saw **her husband-to-be**. More than likely **he** was not happy that **she** had chosen to be away from **him** for three months and, if **he** knew the secret, **he** hid it well. **He** had heard from **Miryam's** mother that Elizabeth was pregnant, but surely there were other women in **her** town that could have taken care of **her**. The young girl did not argue with **Joseph** about it. **She** probably decided, from **his** attitude, that **he** knew nothing of the great secret. But without a doubt, **she** promised **herself** that **she** would not marry **Yosef**, if **he** would have **her**, without telling **him** of **her** pregnancy. So **she** decided just to do it. If **he** didn't believe **her** explanation, **he** wouldn't be a suitable stepfather anyway. There could not be any better way to find out than this. So **she** told **him**.

"I'm going to have a baby," **she** said. This must have shaken **Joseph** to the core. **She** seemed so loyal and innocent. **A virgin** conceiving a child without having sex? Unbelievable! What had **he** missed? **She** had gone away for three months and came back **pregnant!**

It would be impossible to imagine the depths of sorrow in both of these young lovers' hearts. **He** looked at **her** tenderly, but **she** offered no explanation. In all likelihood **she** looked away from **him** and wished that **she** could tell **him** everything. The baby was going to need a stepfather - who better than the man **she** loved, the gentle, dedicated and patient **Joseph**? Who knows, **he** might have been chosen for the role for these very reasons. Anyway, **he** would be the perfect guardian for **her Son, the King**. The question that had to be eating at **her** was this, "Why? Why had **he** not been told?" But **hers'** was not to question, **she** was to trust and obey. **She** would not sit on **her** doubt.

**Joseph** had to get away to think. **He** was beside **himself** and confused. How could this happen? **He** was so sure! **He** loved **her** with all **his** heart and **he** had visions of a long and fruitful life with **her**. But now **he** felt betrayed and **he** could not understand it. **He** kept the unspeakable news to **himself** while **he** figured things out.

What could **he** do? **He** could divorce **her** publicly by addressing the elders at the gate of the community. If **he** did that, they would ask **Miryam** if **she** was pregnant. If **she** said yes, **Yosef** would have to swear **he** was not the father. **The Oral Law** (see **Ei - The Oral Law**) specifies four kinds of death penalty in descending order of gravity: stoning, burning,

beheading and strangling (Sanhedrin 7:1). A man who has intercourse with a betrothed girl is subject to the same penalty as one who has intercourse with his mother, namely stoning (Sanhedrin 7:4). Someone who has sex with another man's wife is liable to death by strangling (Sanhedrin 11:1).<sup>89</sup> Of course, Jewish courts in this period dominated by Rome could not execute capital sentences, and by this time would not carry out the death sentence even if allowed to. Nevertheless, **her** premarital pregnancy would have likely ruined any chance of **her** ever marrying again. This was a horrible fate in an economically male-centered society where a woman's honor depended on **her** status in relation to a **man**.<sup>90</sup> However, there was another option. **He** could merely write **her a certificate of divorce** and send **her away from his house quietly (Deuteronomy 24:1)**.<sup>91</sup> It would be a private arrangement, not a public scandal. **He** really hated both options.

In contrast to most of modern Western culture, **Yosef** lived in a society where **he** had no option of giving **Mary** a second chance . . . even if **he** wanted to. The Oral Law demanded that **a man charge his wife** immediately on discovery that **she** had not been a **virgin**. In a world that considered adultery the ultimate theft - the stealing of another **man's** most precious possession, the undivided affection of **his wife**, the emotional response to adultery was often quite serious. Because a **wife's** adultery could imply the **husband's** inadequacy or **his** family's poor choice of a mate, it shamed **the husband** as well. Thus, **Miryam's** apparent betrayal had also brought **him** shame.<sup>92</sup>

**He** tossed and turned all night in bed. **He** couldn't stop thinking about it. What would **he** do? Exhausted, **he** finally made up **his** mind. Because **Joseph**, **her** "husband" under the terms of **the first stage of the Jewish wedding ceremony**, was a righteous man and did not want to expose **her** to public disgrace, **he** decided to divorce **her** quietly (Matthew 1:19). It would break **his** heart, but it would be just and, at the same time, merciful.

Within a few moments after the decision was reached, **he** was relieved. So relieved that **he** drifted off to sleep. **But after he had come to this conclusion, an angel of ADONAI appeared to him in a dream**, which was considered a sign of **God's** favor (Matthew 1:20a). **The rabbis taught that a good dream was one of the three things (the other two being a good king and a fruitful year) that marked the LORD's favor.** This belief was so popular that it developed into a popular saying: **If anyone sleeps seven days without remembering their dream for interpretation, call them wicked and unremembered by Ha'Shem.**<sup>93</sup>

This angel 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 (Matthew 1:20b).** Jesus had no human father, but **He** did have a human mother. Only then could **the Messiah** be the **God-Man**. This is the most natural and easiest explanation of the Incarnation (the word is

taken from a Latin term meaning *to enter into or become flesh*).<sup>94</sup> Apart from **Jesus'** being both human and divine, there is no *Gospel*. Our whole faith is built on it. The essence and power of the *Good News* is that **God** became **man** and that, **He**, being both wholly **God** and wholly **man**, was able to reconcile mankind to **God**. **Yeshua's virgin birth**, **His** substitutionary death on the cross, **His** resurrection, ascension and bodily return are all interwoven aspects of **His** deity. They stand or fall together.

**The virgin birth** should not have surprised those Jews who knew and believed in the TaNaKh. As a result of a misinterpretation of the phrase **a woman will surround a man** in **Jeremiah 31:22**, **many rabbis taught that the Messiah would have an unusual birth. They said that He would have no earthly father. They taught that the birth of the Meshiach would be like the dew of ADONAI, as drops upon the grass without the action of a man.** So even **many rabbis** assumed a unique birth for **Yeshua**.<sup>95</sup>

**She will give birth to a Son**, the angel continued, **and you are to give Him the name Jesus**, because **He will save His people from their sins (Mattityahu 1:21)**. The Hebrew word for **He will save** is *yoshia*, which has the same Hebrew root (*yud-shin-ayin*) as the name **Yeshua** (*yud-shin-vav-ayin*). Thus **Jesus'** name is explained on the basis of what **He** will do. Actually, the name **Yeshua** is a contraction of the Hebrew name *Y'hoshua*, or **Joshua**, which means *YHVH saves*. It is also the masculine form of the Hebrew word *yeshu'ah*, which means *salvation*.<sup>96</sup>

**When Joseph woke up**, he wondered what it meant. Dreams were important, yes, but was he merely fooling himself? But then he remembered that **his dream** fulfilled an old prophecy to the letter. **Isaiah** had said: **All this took place to fulfill what ADONAI had said through the prophet** (see my commentary on **Isaiah Cb - The LORD Himself Will Give You a Sign**): **The virgin will conceive and give birth to a Son (Matthew 1:22-23a)**. The fact that the definite article, **the**, is used before **virgin** shows that **Isaiah** had a specific **virgin** in mind - which turned out to be **Mary**. It wasn't just any **virgin** - it was **the** particular one!

The Hebrew word for **virgin** used by **Isaiah** is *almah*. It is used only seven other times in the Hebrew Bible (**Genesis 24:43, 24:16; Exodus 2:8; Psalm 68:25; Proverbs 30:19; Song of Songs 1:3, 6:8**), and in each instance it either explicitly means a **virgin**, or implies it, because in the Bible *almah* always refers to an unmarried woman of good reputation, or a **virgin**. Furthermore, **Matthew** here is quoting from the Septuagint, the first translation of the TaNaKh into Greek. More than two centuries before **Jesus** was born, the Jewish scholars of the Septuagint chose the Greek word *parthenos* to translate *almah*. Clearly, *parthenos* means **virgin**.<sup>97</sup> For example, Athena was the virgin goddess of Athens and her temple was called the Parthenon because *parthenos* means **virgin**.

And they will call Him Immanuel, which means "God with us" (Matthew 1:23b). Matthew quotes this from Isaiah (see above). But Jesus was not known by that name during His First Coming; rather, His name gave a hint at who He was by describing Him. He is God with us. Those who are His will experience the final fulfillment in the Eternal State (see my commentary on Revelation Fr - A New Heaven and a New Earth), when God will dwell with His people.

*Can a person be a believer and deny the virgin birth? You might accept Jesus Christ without knowing much about Him. But after you are saved and read your Bible you cannot deny the virgin birth of the Lord. Is that a little pushy? Well, I hope so because it's that important. I want a Savior who can reach down and save me. If He's just another human like I am, then He's not going to be able to help me very much. But if He's Immanuel, God with us, virgin born, then He is my Savior. Is He your Savior today? He took upon Himself our humanity in this way so that He could die on the cross for you and I.<sup>98</sup>*

No doubt Joseph felt like a thousand pounds were lifted from his shoulders. He was refreshed. Joyful. Happy even. The more he thought about his dream, the more clearly he saw the hand of God revealing a great truth to him. It was probably difficult for him to continue to work in his carpenters shop. More than likely it took everything in him not to run to Mary's house, yelling: I know! I know! But at the right time, they talked. Joseph was faithful and did what the Angel of the LORD, or Malach ADONAI, had commanded him to do. The following week they were married and he took Miryam home as his wife (Mattityahu 1:24). He knew there would be misunderstanding in the community and much gossip as well, but Yosef placed God's plan ahead of his own. Rather than make a name for himself, he made a home for Messiah.

*When God revealed the truth to Joseph, he immediately believed and obeyed ADONAI, as unbelievable as it seemed. His response revealed his deep trust in God. Yosef was convinced enough by the dream to believe what was on natural terms impossible. This should be an example for us to trust and obey the Lord, responding differently than those who do not know His Word. Joseph's obedience to Ha'Shem could have cost him his own reputation.<sup>99</sup> Yet, Yosef was right there with her no matter how dangerous or difficult her path. He was firmly committed to God's call on her life just as she was. Instead of privately putting her away, he publicly took her into his home and embraced her as his wife. Mary could have been unbearably alone, facing impossible odds to raise her son. But Joseph never let that happen.<sup>100</sup>*

We know nothing else of **Joseph's** life except **his** taking the infant **Jesus** to the Temple for dedication (**Luke 2:22-33**), **his** taking **Miryam** and the baby **Yeshua** to Egypt to protect **Him** from Herod's bloody decree and the return from Egypt (**Mattityahu 2:13-23**), and **his** taking **his** family to the Passover in Jerusalem when the young **Jesus** was twelve (**Luke 2:42-52**). We have no idea when **Yosef** died, but it could have been well before **Yeshua** began **His** public ministry. Obviously it was before **Messiah's** crucifixion because from the cross **Jesus** gave **His** mother to the care of the apostle **John** (**Yochanan 19:26**).<sup>101</sup> **He** is the forgotten man of the Bible.

But he had no union with her until **after** she gave birth to her firstborn son (**Matthew 1:25a**). **Joseph** had no sexual relations with **Mary** until **after** she gave birth. But in addition, the word **until** tells us that **she** did not remain a **virgin after** the birth of **Jesus**. Nothing beyond that was needed to safeguard the deity of **Christ** and the purity of **Mary**. The Catholic church's belief in the perpetual virginity of **Mary** is not biblical. Not only did **she** not remain a **virgin**, but we know **she gave birth** to at least six other children, four sons and at least two daughters.<sup>102</sup>

The priests in the Roman Catholic church make repeated references to "the Virgin **Mary**." They acknowledge that **Yosef** and **Miryam** were **husband and wife** and attempt to portray them as the ideal human family, but deny that they lived in a normal marriage relationship. But such an unnatural relationship is absurd on the face of it, and nowhere in Scripture is approval ever given for such an abnormal relationship. In fact, just the opposite is true. In Rabbi Sha'ul's letter to the church at Corinth concerning married life, he says: **The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband . . . do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time (not a lifetime), so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control (First Corinthians 7:3 and 5)**. Such an arrangement would have been contrary to nature and simply a frustration for both parties. The priests must give up the idea of **Mary's** perpetual virginity, or give up the idea that **Joseph** and **Mary** represent the ideal human family.<sup>103</sup>

**And she gave Him the name Jesus (Matthew 1:25b)**. The name had been revealed to **Miryam**, now it was revealed to **Joseph** as well. The name was to be given because **He will save His people from their sins (Mattityahu 1:21)**.<sup>104</sup>

There was only one thing that was troubling. Knowing the Scriptures as they did, they realized that **the King of kings** would be born in **Beit-Lechem, the City of David**. Their **Son**, however, would be born in Nazareth, a little place over ninety miles north of **Bethlehem** if they went through Samaria. **Mary** had no intention of traveling anywhere. In the summer

months, and the early fall, the older women of the town would have noticed that **she** was pregnant, and they probably counseled **her** to remain close to home. **She** would not go to see Elizabeth's baby, so why would **she** consider traveling to **Bethlehem**? **Joseph** nodded. **He** felt the same way. **Beit-Lechem** was too far away, and humanly speaking **he** had no intention of taking **his** pregnant **wife** on a donkey all that way to get there.

**Joseph** valued obedience to **ADONAI** above **his** own honor. As soon as **God** revealed the truth to **him**, **he** immediately believed and obeyed **His** will, as unbelievable as the truth might be. This revealed the depth of **Yosef's** trust, especially since the revelation was limited to a **dream**. This should, in turn, summon *us* to obey **the LORD**, responding differently than those who do not trust **His** Word. Because **he** alone received this revelation, others at that time would still think that **he** had gotten **Miryam pregnant** before the wedding. **He** would remain an object of shame in a society dominated by the value of honor. **Joseph's** obedience to **YHVH** cost **him** the right to value **his** own reputation. How much do you trust **God**?<sup>105</sup>