

# The Forgotten Figure of Christmas

Matthew 1:18-25

Pastor Eddie Ildefonso

How were you raised to regard Christmas? How are you raising your children to regard the holiday? There was once a family that celebrated Christmas every year with a birthday party for Jesus. An extra chair of honor at the table became the family's reminder of Jesus' presence. A cake with candles, along with the singing of "Happy Birthday" expressed the family's joy in Jesus' presence. One year a Christmas afternoon visitor asked the five-year-old girl, "Did you get everything you wanted for Christmas?" After a moment's hesitation, she answered, "No, but then it's not my birthday!"



**Christmas is all about Jesus**, yet many of the essential figures of the nativity are still recognizable, well maybe, except for Joseph.

The cast of characters associated with the story of Jesus' birth is colorful and memorable. We recognize them by their unique speaking parts. With dramatic lines, the Angels take center stage to announce the birth of the Savior. They appear to Joseph to announce that the name of the child would be Jesus. The arch angel Gabriel makes the unforgettable announcement to Mary. An angelic choir interrupts the shepherds, singing Glory to God in the highest.

The Virgin Mary, whose Divine selection humbles her, offers her beautiful hymn and thanksgiving in **Luke 1:46-48**: "**My soul magnifies the Lord, And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.**"

The wise men are desperate in their search to find the newborn king and prepared to divest themselves of treasures to present Him with gifts of worship. In **Matthew 2:2...** "**Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.**"

The shepherds became early evangelists! In **Luke 2**, the shepherds hasten to find the baby Jesus after the announcement of the angelic choir. Upon finding Jesus, Luke says, "**Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child (v. 17).**"

Oddly enough, **only Joseph has no speaking part**. He is the lone silent member of the cast and often forgotten. Angels bring heavenly greetings. Mary sings a praiseful solo. Wise men worship. Shepherds preach. Joseph is silent. No notable lines are attributed to him. No sound bites. No quotes, only silence.

However, while Joseph is the forgotten figure of Christmas, he is irreplaceable in the story of Jesus' birth. His importance cannot be overstated. Through Joseph, God protected the unborn life of Jesus and preserved human life for the Savior.

God protects the “**unborn purposes and promises of Christ**” in our lives. In your life now, there is an aspect of His will yet unknown, a promise yet to be fulfilled, a word yet to be manifest – a ministry, a loved one saved, a move – but faithfully watched over and protected by God to be realized for His glory in your life.

Joseph’s life teaches us 3 lessons - a lesson in **righteous mercy**, in **redemptive faith**, and in **ready obedience**. Each are important to preserve and realize God’s purpose and promise in our lives.

### 1) A Lesson in Righteous Mercy 18-19

**We are introduced to Joseph in the middle of an unwelcome nightmare.** Having become engaged to a beautiful young girl in the Jewish tradition, he has worked hard to establish an income to support his new bride and begin a family. He is in love. He is committed to Mary. He believed she loved him, until the news that his precious bride is pregnant.

**Heart-broken and betrayed, how should he respond?** Should he publicly shame her and serve her with a certificate of divorce? Should he surrender her to a public stoning? Her explanation of the pregnancy was unbelievable, even profane, and did nothing to ease Joseph’s emotional pain.

If Mary would not have been stoned on the charge of adultery, she could have been stoned on the charge of serious blasphemy. However, Joseph chooses the path of mercy...

**V. 19 - Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.**

It is response born of solid character. Before any divine explanation, Joseph chooses mercy. **No malice. No explosion.** Certainly words would have been appropriate here. How could you do this to me? Who’s the father? Tell me his name. But, no words are recorded, only tenderness. He might be the talk of Nazareth. Friends might distance themselves with snide comments, but he would not hurt Mary, no matter what he thought she had done to him.

**That’s a just man! That’s a merciful man.** When he could have demanded a bitter justice, he chose a righteous mercy.

Joseph’s mercy stands in stark contrast with his ancestor Judah in **Genesis 38:24-26**... Judah demanded justice, being blind to his own sin.

In the kingdom of Christ and from many others personal experience, people broken over the personal sin of sexual immorality are often more ready and capable of extending grace and mercy to others, who have committed similar sin.

The mystery of Jesus birth, that He sunk Himself into our flesh and became like us, is beyond all human understanding. The mighty God takes on the weakness of a newborn. It is the righteous mercy of Joseph, which preserves the life of Mary and preserves the unborn Christ. This merciful carpenter would raise a merciful Savior.

When people deserve the sentence of justice, choose a righteous mercy, which extends patience, grace, encouragement, prayer, empathy...

## 2) A Lesson in Redemptive Faith 20-23

**The unborn plans of God are also protected by faith, redemptive faith.** In other words, when we trust God – we will arrive at His promises.

We see this in Joseph's faith, his willingness to believe God. Joseph intended to serve a certificate of divorce, end his engagement with Mary, and handle the matter quietly. Now the Lord is ready to let Joseph in on the plan. He was ready to call him to faith, to believe. Joseph's eyes were opened to the glimpse of the Divine plan.

In Joseph's dream, God reminded Joseph of His God-given identity. God's angelic messenger addressed Joseph with a unique title, "**Joseph, Son of David.**"

The God that watches over His plans and purpose for your life wants you to know who you are in Him.

**Ephesians 1:18-19** the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power...

Do you understand that in Christ, you have a special identity as a member of His family and that God knows who you are? With that recognition, we come into the confidence of His working through our circumstances to perfect His purpose.

Next, God assured Joseph that he did not have to be afraid. Fear is the enemy of faith and steals our hope. Joseph could take stock of his dilemma and afford hope even when it seemed impossible.

Third, God gave Joseph direction. He was to take Mary as his wife and be a father to the child, whom he would give the name – Jesus. Be teachable and allow His instruction.

Finally, God assured Joseph of His divine involvement. God's message to Joseph was the confirmation that this was God's doing. Joseph now had a different perspective.

Faith is believing according the promise of God's Word. As He informs our faith, our hope is strengthened to trust Him in our circumstances.

## 3) A Lesson in Ready Obedience 24-25

**Obedience followed Joseph's faith.** He did as he was commanded. The Bible defines faith with obedience and obedience with faith. In other words, they are two sides of the same coin.

**You cannot have one without the other.**

With an informed faith to trust God, Joseph would now obey. He would take Mary to be his wife and suffer the caustic remarks of a child conceived prior to their wedding. He would obey in spite of the fact that this child of divine promise would be born under a cloud of adultery.

He would also obey by giving this child the name given by the Angel, the name JESUS – a name declaring the God, who saves – Yahweh is salvation. Joseph hears and obeys. His is a ready obedience. Men of God obey.

We need to consider the places of obedience. Herod was out to destroy the next successor to the throne of Israel. **Matthew 2:13-15**...

Egypt holds a special significance. In the OT, Joseph was sent to Egypt after the betrayal of his brothers. Over time, the people of Israel were turned into slaves. Memories held it as a place of oppression.

Places of oppression are not welcomed places of refuge. As unwelcome and Egypt is, it has often been a place, where obedience leads godly people in Biblical history...

Moses was commanded to return to Egypt and face Pharaoh to set the Israelites free and endanger his own life in the process. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are condemned to a fiery furnace in Babylon. Daniel, likewise, faced the lion's den.

**Places of obedience are not always the most comfortable.** Joseph takes Mary and the infant Jesus to Egypt. He leaves behind an established carpenter's trade and business. He leaves family, friends – to obey God and go to Egypt.

Herod can't destroy you in a place of obedience. God's promises are preserved in places of obedience.

**Conclusion:** Mercy. Faith. Obedience. Each are important to preserve and realize God's purpose and promise in our lives. Are you waiting on a particular promise? Are you looking for a soon answer to hopeful prayer? Continue in mercy, faith, and obedience.