

What If Joseph Left the Christmas Story? | Matthew 1:18-25 Sermon Discussion Leader Guide

Purpose of Discussion: To live in the Christmas Story in some intentional way.

Icebreaker: What is a meaningful way you try to celebrate Christmas amidst the busyness of the holiday season?

Discussion:

Read:

Matthew 1:18-19 (NIV)

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. 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.

1. Why did Joseph want to break off the engagement?
2. Dave made the point that Joseph wanted out of the Christmas story because it was too hard and he didn't understand. What's hard for you about staying in the Christmas story (about being a Christian)?

Read:

Matthew 1:20-21 (NIV)

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, because he will save his people from their sins."

3. Why do you think God let Joseph sit in this hurt and confusion for awhile before sending the dream to explain?

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4. What has God done to keep you in the story when it gets hard or confusing?

Matthew 1:22 (NIV)

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").

Note: Back in verse 21, they are to call him "Jesus." Yet, here Matthew quotes Isaiah that they will call him "Immanuel" (God with us). The point in Isaiah isn't to actually be his name, but to tell us the nature of who Jesus is.

5. In light of that, what does the fact that Jesus is Immanuel mean for us?

Digging Deeper: Dave read a section of C.S. Lewis' *Surprised By Joy*

"I was now teaching philosophy (I suspect very badly) as well as English. ...There was, I explained, no possibility of being in a personal relation with [God]. ...I could no more 'meet' Him than Hamlet could meet Shakespeare."

Later he realized...

"...My own analogy, as I now first perceived, suggested the opposite: if Shakespeare and Hamlet could ever meet, it must be Shakespeare's doing. Shakespeare could...make himself appear as Author within the play, and write a dialogue between Hamlet and himself.

"The Shakespeare within the play would of course be at once Shakespeare and one of Shakespeare's creatures. It would bear some analogy to Incarnation."

What's helpful about Lewis' own realization?

Read:

Matthew 1:24-25 (NIV)

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.

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6. What would still have been hard for Joseph as he chose to stay in the Christmas story?
7. What is a way you can lean in to living in the Christmas story?

Sharing and Prayer:

If time, either have each person pray for the person on their left about the way he or she wants to lean into living the Christmas story or have people pray silently for what they shared, then close with this prayer from Canyon Road, by Kari Kristina Reeves:

“Lord when we become disoriented by the clash between circumstances and the reality of your word, sustain us.

Lord, when we become confused by the fulfilment of your promise, renew us.

Lord, when we become impatient in our lack of understanding, give us strength to endure.

Lord, when we become dismayed by the frustrations of this world, give us perseverance.

Lord, when we become hardened to the leading of your Spirit, soften us again.

Lord, when we become afraid, give us comfort.

Lord, when we become uncertain, give us surety.

Lord, when we become perplexed, give us peace.

Lord, be our all. Into your hands we commit our spirits again.

Amen.”