



Joseph Compassion for Mary

Living in the Image of God
Module 03 Session 02

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Living in the Image of God

- God creates every person to represent him in interactions with others
- Be for others what God would be for them if he lived with us in human form
- He provides resources for people to perform the responsibilities and blesses those that do
- Program seeks to understand the meaning, resources, and human responsibilities and benefits of *Living in the Image of God*

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What We Will Learn

- Joseph's fiancé Mary pregnant without him
- Joseph decided he would not seek enforcement of adultery law against her
- Would divorce her quietly instead
- His compassion bought him time to hear God
- Angel informed him in a dream later
 - Mary did not commit adultery
 - What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit
- Matthew 1:18–24 and Leviticus 20:10

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Mary Pregnant

- Mary was engaged to Joseph
- Became pregnant without Joseph
- Her pregnancy was from the Holy Spirit
- But inexplicable to people
- Joseph had to make a decision
 - His love for Mary
 - Allegiance to Jewish law
- Matthew 1:18

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Matthew 1 (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.

- “Holy Spirit” explanation not immediately acceptable
- Joseph was expected to refer matter to Jewish authority

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Leviticus 20 (NIV)

10 “If a man commits adultery with another man’s wife—with the wife of his neighbor—both the adulterer and the adulteress are to be put to death.

- Joseph was respectful of the law
- He was expected to refer matter to the Jewish authority
- Instead he would divorce her quietly

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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.

- Joseph cared about Mary
- Recognized her need for kindness and mercy
- He would not expose her to public disgrace
- He would divorce her quietly instead

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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.

- Joseph’s compassion for Mary bought him time as he considered the matter
- Provided to himself opportunity to hear God
- And understand God’s purpose

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- “Time to hear God” is real
- God chooses how to communicate
- He sent angel in human form to Mary
- But sent an angel to Joseph in a dream
- Joseph had “time to hear God” because he allowed himself time to sleep over the matter
- Impulsive reaction would have “stolen” his opportunity to hear God

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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.

Matthew 1:25 But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

- Accepted dream as message from God
- Took Mary home as his wife
- Cared for her based on the message

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- Joseph’s compassion for Mary
- Based on his love and care
- Sensitivity to her need for kindness and mercy
- Compassion allowed him time to hear God
- Understood his marital and parental responsibilities to Mary and the child
- Highlights responsibilities and benefits of *Living in the Image of God*

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Joseph Compassion for Mary—Opportunity to Hear God

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Humanly inexplicable pregnancy of Mary raised dilemma for Joseph that he resolved by compassion: recognizing a person in need and doing what you can to alleviate the need. Further, the interactions illustrate the value of allowing reasonable time to understand events and consider response. Joseph's compassion for Mary bought him time and provided him opportunity to hear God and understand God's purpose regarding his marital and parental responsibilities to Mary and the child.

We discuss interactions between Mary and Joseph, the human parents of Jesus; regarding Mary's pregnancy with Jesus and Joseph's response to the pregnancy and a Jewish law that appeared relevant. Joseph was engaged to be married to Mary but became aware that Mary was pregnant and he had nothing to do with getting her pregnant. The only human conclusion regarding the development was that Mary committed adultery.

That was a problem, because Jewish law prescribed severe punishment for adulterers. A man and woman that committed adultery were to be put to death. Joseph was expected to refer the matter to the Jewish authority in order to initiate judgment and punishment. However, we will see that Joseph decided he would not seek enforcement of the adultery law against Mary. He would divorce her quietly instead. The word "quietly" is a key part of his decision. It meant he would not expose her to public disgrace in any case.

As he contemplated his intentions, an angel visited him in a dream and explained the circumstances of Mary's pregnancy. Through the dream, Joseph understood God's purpose regarding his marital and parental responsibilities to Mary and the child. He woke up from the dream, took Mary home as his wife, and began living his responsibility as Mary's husband and human father of the Son of God. That is, Joseph's compassion for Mary bought him time that provided him an opportunity to hear God and understand God's purpose.

Mary's Pregnancy

Mary was engaged to Joseph but they were not married yet. Therefore, she was not expected to be pregnant: "...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 angel Gabriel had visited her and discussed the pregnancy in detail [Luke 1:34–35]: "How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.'"

Her community had difficulty understanding the pregnancy. She was the only person that understood that her pregnancy was from the Holy Spirit. She must have tried to explain to others, but her explanation was inadequate. Her pregnancy was inexplicable to people. The only human conclusion regarding the development was that Mary committed adultery.

Joseph became aware of the pregnancy and also believed that Mary committed adultery. He knew he needed to make a decision. He loved Mary. Also, he was aware and respectful of the Jewish law regarding adultery and his responsibility under the law.

Dilemma for Joseph

Joseph understood he was expected to refer Mary to the Jewish authority, because Jewish law prescribed severe punishment for adulterers: “If a man commits adultery with another man’s wife—with the wife of his neighbor—both the adulterer and the adulteress are to be put to death” [Leviticus 20:10]. Joseph was respectful of the law and understood his responsibility under the law. Also, he loved Mary and did not want to expose her to public disgrace.

Decision Based on Compassion

Joseph decided he would not seek enforcement of the law against Mary. He would divorce her quietly instead: “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” [Matthew 1:19].

His decision was based on compassion for Mary: He cared about Mary and, in his care, recognized she needed kindness and mercy in her predicament. That is, he recognized her need, cared about her (the needy), determined what he could do to alleviate the need, and began to contemplate how to implement his decision.

Compassion Buys Time to Hear God

Joseph’s compassion for Mary bought him time as he contemplated his intention. By giving himself more time, he provided to himself the opportunity to hear God: “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’” [Matthew 1:20].

COMMUNICATION WITH GOD: “Time to hear God” was real for Joseph. God determines how to communicate with each person in a given situation (see more details under **Human Interaction with God**). He sent Angel Gabriel in human form to talk to Mary. In contrast, he sent an angel to meet Joseph in a dream. Therefore, Joseph allowed himself “time to hear God” by giving himself reasonable time to contemplate his intention. His time to contemplate included sleeping over the matter, which provided him an opportunity to be visited by an angel in his dream. An impulsive reaction would have prevented his opportunity to hear God.

Joseph accepted the dream as message from God and took Mary home as his wife: “When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife” [Matthew 1:24]. Furthermore, he recognized his wife was pregnant with the Son of God and cared for her accordingly [Matthew 1:25]: “But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.”

Summary of What We Learned

Interactions between Joseph and Mary (human parents of Jesus) that occurred early in their relationship illustrate compassion: recognizing a person in need and doing what you can to alleviate the need. Also, the interactions illustrate the value of allowing reasonable time to understand events and contemplate response. Joseph’s compassion for Mary bought him time and provided him opportunity to hear God and understand God’s purpose regarding his marital and parental responsibilities to Mary and the child.