

**Sermon Series: The Call of Christmas**  
**Joseph: A Call to Protect** - Matthew 1:18-25  
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Those who study and research sleep patterns and dreams suggest a person averages between four and six dreams each night. Each dream typically lasts in the range of five to twenty minutes. Over the average person's lifespan, that amount of nightly dreaming equates to six years of their life. Dreams and dream references have been written about and conveyed via art throughout history. Not only are dreams referenced over one hundred times in the pages of the Bible that include how God supernaturally communicated to people through this medium, but also people today convey stories on a regular basis of the same Divine communication. While research suggests 95-99% of a person's dreams are forgotten after they awake, some dreams both are unforgettable and life changing.

We continue our look at the Call of Christmas for the various participants in the story of Christ's birth. Today we look at the call of God to Joseph. It would be a call to protect not only Mary whom he would take as his wife, but also the Christ-child that would be born of his virgin bride by the power of the Holy Spirit. Matthew 1:18-25 tells the story of how the angel of the Lord gave this call through a dream in the night as Joseph slept.

It is interesting that throughout the Call of Christmas in the gospel accounts, the presence of angels only occurs in a dream in Joseph's situation here in Matthew. Zechariah, Mary and as we will see on Christmas Eve, the shepherds, all received their angelic call when they were awake as recorded in Luke's gospel. However, in each of the angelic accounts, the angel begins his message with a command not to be afraid. Emotions would have been running high for Joseph as he processed the reality that Mary, the one he was to take as his wife, was pregnant. Yes, fear would have been present. However, the emotions of anger, sadness, uncertainty, rejection, disappointment and a host of others likely coursed through Joseph's soul at this news. Verses 18-19 introduce this emotional reality to us. *"Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly."* Matthew 1:18-19

The betrothal in first-century Jewish culture meant more than merely being engaged. It meant this couple legally was married in the eyes of the law. However, due to the customs of the day, they were in a waiting period that would enable their love and faithfulness to be tested as Joseph prepared a home that would demonstrate provision and protection for his wife when they soon would live life no longer apart, but together. This waiting period was a time to prepare for intimacy and a cultural call for chastity as was the expected norm in that day. When Joseph found out Mary was with child, his eventual desire to protect included both Mary's well-being and his own.

Joseph's desire to keep Mary from public disgrace shows his bent-ness toward being a protector. While a loud and public divorce certainly was within Joseph's rights, the law also allowed for private divorce before two witnesses. Because the description of Joseph from verse

19 is one of a “just” man, he did not want to shame Mary publicly any more than she likely had and would continue to receive as her “baby bump” grew.

Joseph wanted to protect Mary as much as possible with a quiet divorce. Also, a divorce would protect his righteousness under the law, his reputation in the community, and still allow his compassion to remain intact all at the same time.

With his mind full and his plan in place, Joseph went to bed. That’s when the Call of Christmas would come as Joseph soon began to dream while he slept. *“But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).”*

Perhaps God communicated via the angel to Joseph in this Divine dream because He knew the only way to change his mind was by going to such extremes. Joseph thought he had so much to lose if not for the divorce. He soon would come to experience how much he was being entrusted with by God that the entire world would gain. God so loved the world that He was about to give Him into the protective custody of a young carpenter. What a responsibility! And the naming of the child held a calling beyond belief. The names that are referenced in the verses above for God’s Son help us understand the consequence of the Christ-child to come. The two names mentioned are “Jesus” and “Immanuel.”

While Jesus was a popular name that many boys had been given, on the contrary, no parent in their right mind would give their son the name Immanuel. It carried with it too much pressure and too much expectation. It would be like naming your child: “Messiah.” The name Immanuel means: “God with us.” Matthew lets his readers know up front that the child Mary is carrying inside her womb is to be the fulfillment of prophecy that lead to God being with us in the flesh.

The concept of God being with his people was rooted deeply in the mind of a Jewish person, and Matthew knew it as he wrote for a Jewish audience. He knew that the Jews who read his gospel would pick up on the nuances and references all throughout his work. This characteristic of God being with his people as Immanuel was no exception. These are the types of deep-rooted character traits that the Jewish people were looking for in their coming Messiah: A God who would save them (Yeshua, Jesus) and a God who would be with them (Immanuel.) Wright notes how the two names together, Jesus and Immanuel, express the meaning of the story. God is present with His people. God doesn’t intervene from a distance, but is always active, sometimes in the most unexpected ways.

Is there a situation you are going through this Christmas that desperately needs a God intervention in an unexpected way? Perhaps you have a desperate need for healing. Perhaps you have a desperate need for provision. Perhaps you have a desperate need for forgiveness.

God knows where you are and what your circumstances entail. He wants you to call on His name, ask, and keep on asking for Him to show up in your life. Will you be ready for Him to break in and break through to your situation? The chances are good that when He does, He will

ask you to do something you may not have thought to do on your own. That's what He did with Joseph through the dream.

Joseph was given this Call of Christmas through a dream; the angel conveyed he was to be given not only a son to raise, but also a wife to take as his own. He was given the responsibility and a call to protect them both. Joseph was to call the baby's name Jesus and he would be our Immanuel. He would save us and be with us always.

What a dream! What a call! What came next? *"When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus."* Matthew 1:24-25

What came next from Joseph was immediate obedience. The dream the Lord had given Joseph as he slept and the angelic call that came in the night resulted in immediate action. The betrothal season was ended by Joseph. He took Mary as his wife, and they moved in together. However, they did not consummate their marriage until after Jesus had been born. The fact that the gospels go on to state in multiple places that Jesus had siblings lets us know that Mary and Joseph did not remain abstinent after Jesus was born for long as some have suggested. They were a normal married couple with an abnormal call on their lives: be the parents of God in the flesh.

Joseph did the best he could; as did Mary. Joseph's call was to protect his wife and his newborn son. They were his responsibility. Joseph should be commended for his immediate obedience when he woke up from his sleep. He could have said, "It's only a dream." But God communicated to him in a way that gave him courageous faith and a call to protect this woman and child that would change the world. He did not forget this dream when he awoke. It was unforgettable and life changing!

John MacArthur suggests that such a call to protect and a responsibility from God to Joseph should indicate the depth of his godliness and character. We know Joseph took Mary and Jesus to dedicate their son in the Temple after he was born as recorded in Luke 2:22-33. Thus, there was demonstrated a deep devotion to the Lord and the practices of dedicating their family to serving and worshiping Him.

Again, Joseph heeded the call to protect his wife and son as the angel communicated through the dream when Herod vowed to kill all young males after the coming of the Magi to worship the newborn King. Once more we see the pattern of immediate obedience from receiving the call to obeying what he knew to do. It would not be the last time he responded to an angelic call through a dream.

The pattern of Joseph's heeding of the call to protect his family followed by immediate obedience is worth noting and practicing in our own lives.

What is it that God is calling you to do this Christmas...immediately?

Is there a habit that needs to be stopped...immediately?

Is there an addiction that needs to be admitted...immediately?

Is there a relationship that needs to be cultivated...immediately?

Is there a move that needs to be made...immediately?

When we hear the call of God on our lives, may we be people who respond with immediate obedience. Joseph did, and it impacted the way Jesus was shaped as his earthly father raised him. Joseph would resettle his family in Nazareth after living as refugees during the early years of Jesus' life and Joseph and Mary's marriage. Joseph would find his niche in Nazareth as the village builder and repairman. Not only did Jesus follow in his father's footsteps as a carpenter, but also we see Jesus deliberately adopt the name "Father" for God. It is not a stretch to suggest that the way Jesus viewed his earthly father, Joseph, had an enormous impact on how he related to His Heavenly Father. He called them both "Abba"... "Father"... "Dad."

What an incredible challenge to fathers everywhere! Dad, how you live your life, approach your work, engage in your worship, pray your prayers and connect with your family has a monumental impact, imprint and influence on your kids. The way your kids view you has a tremendous impact on how they will view God. And the way a person views who God is has everything to do with how a person relates to God.

A call to protect goes beyond safety, security, and provision for your family.

It also goes to the depths of helping give an accurate view of what a healthy and authentic relationship with God looks like.

May we demonstrate a life lived in such a way that we honor the God who saved us and the God who is with us: Our Jesus...Our Immanuel.

May we share Him with a world that needs to know Him and His everlasting protection. Amen.