



An Angel Appears to Joseph

Isaiah 7:13-14; Matthew 1:18-25

BIBLE BACKGROUND
FOR LEADERS

Ancient Engagement

A Jewish pledge of marriage was a much more serious commitment than an engagement is today. It actually involved vows before witnesses, much as a wedding ceremony does today. When the bride and groom pledged themselves to be married, they were considered husband and wife. The difference between a modern marriage and an ancient Hebrew one is that in the latter a period of time elapsed between the betrothal ceremony and the wife's transition into her husband's home. It was during this interval between the exchange of vows and their consummation that Mary became pregnant. Since there had been no sexual relationship between Mary and Joseph, he knew that the child she carried was not his.

Joseph's Dilemma

Joseph faced a dilemma. No doubt he had looked forward to life with Mary. But because he was a righteous Jew, it was unthinkable for him to complete a marriage to someone who had been unfaithful to him. He demonstrated his deep love for Mary by his intention to end the marriage quietly. He could have charged her with adultery, making a public example of her and allowing the law to deal with her. Jewish law would have required that she be stoned to death (see Deuteronomy 22:23-24).

God Intervenes

Joseph chose the most compassionate route for ending the marriage, but before he could take action, God sent a messenger to him. The angel addressed Joseph as "son of David" (Matthew 1:20), a reminder that the Messiah was to come through David, just as Matthew pointed out in his genealogy. The angel's announcement harmonizes with the one given to Mary in Luke 1:35: The child would be special indeed!

The name *Jesus* is a form of *Joshua* and means "the Lord saves."

A Plan Fulfilled

Matthew points out that the manner of Jesus' conception "took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet" (Matthew 1:22). Matthew's Gospel, written primarily to Jews, was intended to show that Jesus was indeed the Messiah promised by the prophets. No doubt Matthew felt that describing the miraculous virgin birth could help to convince skeptics that Jesus was the Messiah promised in Isaiah 7:14. Matthew also demonstrated that Joseph was intended to be Jesus' earthly father by beginning his account with a careful delineation of Jesus' lineage.

Knowing that this was God's plan, Joseph's dilemma was gone. He could complete his marriage to Mary, and he didn't hesitate to do so. And when Mary's son was born, they named him Jesus, for he would save us from our sins.

The Jesus Connection

Jesus encouraged his followers to trust God because he knew God would take care of them—just as God took care of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus. Jesus' life can be an encouragement for us to trust God.

God's purposes for us are beautiful. Maybe something in his plans doesn't make sense to you right now. Ask for help, and God will show you in time just how perfect his plans for you are. Don't be afraid; he will never let you down. You can always count on God. You can write a prayer about God's plan here.



Luke 2:1-20; Hebrews 1:1-4

► Bible Point—Jesus was born to be our Savior.

Key Verse—“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’ ” (John 14:6).

DIGGING DEEPER



Daily Challenges

Choose one or more of these activities to do this week.

- **What are you trusting God for right now? Write down your prayer, lift it up to God each day, and add to it as you discover where God’s leading you.**
- **Talk to a trusted Christian friend. Ask how he or she sees God working in your life right now, and share what plans God might be trying to show you.**
- **Share with a friend how you’re trusting in God right now. Let your friend know that God has plans for him or her, too. Pray for God’s plan for your friend as well, and ask if you can pray right there with him or her.**

Through the Week

Use the following passages and questions to explore additional biblical insights about trusting God’s plans.

Monday—Psalm 37:3

- **How can trusting in God keep you safe?**

Tuesday—Psalm 32:10

- **What are some benefits of being surrounded by God’s unfailing love?**

Wednesday—Proverbs 3:5-6

- **How are your paths different from God’s paths? Which do you think is better for you? Why?**

Thursday—John 14:1

- **Why can we trust in Jesus the same way we trust in God?**

Friday—Psalm 56:3

- **What fears do you need to trust God to overcome?**

Saturday—Isaiah 25:9

- **What has God done for you when you’ve put your trust in him?**

Talk Topics

- Discuss a time you thought you knew the best plan—but things didn’t work out the way you thought they would.
- Why do Christians sometimes find it easy to agree that God knows everything and has plans for their lives, yet find it so difficult to trust God with all areas of their lives?
- What keeps us from trusting God fully?

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