

Joseph's First Christmas
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“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

Can you imagine those days leading up to that first Christmas for Joseph? Our images of Christmas - of angels singing and shepherds coming to the manger and a baby nestled in swaddling clothes [all drawn from Luke's Gospel] - are often warm and joyful. Joseph was faced with heartbreak. Life plans upended. The possibility of public shame...either for his betrothed, Mary, if he were to publicly divorce her (which may lead to her being stoned to death) or the shame of taking her into his home, knowing the child wasn't his. Can you picture how he might have been imagining how his community might talk about him? “A ‘righteous man’ whose new wife has a child...and only six months or so after they were married...hmmm...” Joseph doesn't seem to face a joyful first Christmas. Believing the child is of another man, yet wanting in his righteousness to be gracious to Mary (whom at first he assumes has sinned), he ponders a quiet divorce.

God mercifully intervenes. He informs Joseph by an angel in a dream of the child's origin. Joseph's own role is in taking Mary into his home and naming the child Jesus because He will save His people from their sins. Joseph, being a righteous man, would know the cost of rescue from sin. There is no forgiveness of sin without the shedding of blood. His step-Son, Jesus, will rescue all people from sin by His death! In so doing, He will fulfill His other identity shared in Matthew's account, Immanuel. Jesus is God with us, to give us God's love, His grace, His gift of salvation, so that through Him, we might always be with God!

Joseph awoke from his dream a changed man by God's mercy, and does as the angel commanded him.

Through His Word, our Lord gives us the same faith as Joseph, to believe what God has revealed of this child, the sinless Son of God and born of Mary. Jesus, who by His cross, takes our sin and shame upon Himself, and promises to be our Immanuel for all eternity!

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the faith you worked in Joseph who played a part in Your plan to reveal Jesus as our Savior. Give us a joyful faith that rejoices in Immanuel, and declares His name Jesus to the world! Amen