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Matthew 1:18-25

18. “Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.

19. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly.

20. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

21. ‘She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.’

22. Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

23. ‘BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL,’ which translated means, ‘GOD WITH US.’

24. And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took *Mary* as his wife,

25. but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and

he called His name Jesus.”

According to verse 18, after Mary and Joseph were engaged they found her to be pregnant/with child. Because they had not had relations, Joseph assumed she had committed adultery.

According to the Law, Joseph could have publicly divorced her and had her stoned for adultery. But in verse 19 we read, “And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly.” Here God calls Joseph “a righteous man.” In so doing God gives us a living example of righteousness.

Joseph’s example shows us that righteousness by God’s definition is much more than being “right” or “legally correct.” Joseph considered Mary’s feelings and her situation. He showed mercy and compassion for her, in his decision to guard her reputation and protect her life.

James, Joseph’s next son by Mary writes in his New Testament letter, “If you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,’ you are doing well.” James 2:8 Later he writes, “For judgment will be merciless to the one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.” James 2:13

But Joseph’s righteousness also included a healthy fear of God. Although he loved Mary, he still was going to end the engagement and marriage. He know that a

marriage partner that would commit adultery would certainly affect his relationship with God in the long run for the worst. The New Testament today strongly warns about being unequally yoked with unbelievers or sinners.

Because of his righteous decisions, an angel appears to Joseph in verse 20 and commands him to marry Mary. So God's definition of righteousness as seen in Joseph, the man he chose to raise His Son, is a balance of mercy and justice, with an overriding fear of the Lord.

Jesus came that we might fulfill all righteousness. How are you doing this Christmas season? Do you have a healthy fear of the Lord God Almighty, who would send His only begotten Son into the world to suffer and die for you, and do you practice mercy, compassion, and forgiveness to others when they do you wrong?

These are the gifts that Jesus really wants from us on His birthday!

Merry Christmas.