



OASIS: GIVE AS GOD GIVES
DONE IN SYNC WITH
OUR “ADVENT CONSPIRACY” SERIES
The Passage – Matthew 1:18-25

Preface: Welcome to our LC Bible study in our new Christmas sermon series, “The Advent Conspiracy.” These LC studies will complement the sermons, often using the same biblical texts, and will help your LC go deeper in personal understanding and application. These italicized portions are meant to resource and help you in leading, not to be distributed to the entire group (it limits conversation).

Study’s BIG Idea: A key piece in the Christmas story is the obedience of those involved – like Joseph.

Opening Question/Transition:

What are some of your favorite Christmas traditions?

Christmas time can be a hectic time of year. What steps do you take to help you maintain perspective?

What parts of the meaning of Christmas seem to get lost during the holiday rush?

When we think of “Mary and Joseph” – we tend to think more of Mary – but what actually comes to mind when you think about Joseph?

Matthew 1:18-25 (NIV © 2011)

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. 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.

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. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

O – What do we learn about Joseph in the passage?

(He was an honorable man, seemed to truly care for Mary even though the seemingly obvious deduction would be that she cheated on him. Furthermore, after hearing the angel’s message, he changed his mind, demonstrating that he was a person of obedience to God’s will.)

I – Luke examines Jesus’ birth story more through Mary’s lens and Matthew is more through Joseph’s perspective. While Matthew moves through this story too quickly to satisfy some of the

reader's obvious questions (like exactly when did Joseph really find out? What is the timeline?), what do you think Matthew is trying to show us and why does he lean more into Joseph's story? (*Matthew's audience is largely a Jewish one. By showing Joseph, an honorable Jewish man of the law, Matthew is setting up a theme of obedience to God's will despite how bizarre these events and circumstances may be.*)

A – It's easier to understand why Joseph listened. After all, he was convinced that an angel had appeared to him – most of us would. But imagine if you were one of Joseph's honorable Jewish friends listening to him tell you this story about the angel in the dream and his pregnant fiancé impregnated by the Holy Spirit. What would you have advised him?

O – What strikes you as interesting in understanding the Jewish engagement period in relation to modern engagement practices in the West?
(*Among the main differences between the Jewish engagement and the modern understanding is the use of "divorce." In ancient Jewish culture, the pledge to be married was legally binding and only a "divorce" could break it. Furthermore, the only legitimate grounds for divorce at this point would be infidelity.*)

I – There is a school of thought that Joseph, a righteous man, did believe that his virtuous fiancé's conception was supernatural but still planned on divorcing Mary because he felt unworthy to be God's earthly father. Why do you think God seems to call the under-qualified for the work of His Kingdom?

(*While we can never know the answer, a constant theme throughout Scripture is that "God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble" -Prov. 3:34.*)

O – What does the angel tell Joseph?

O – Why do you think Matthew wants to be clear that Joseph is not the biological father of Jesus and writes that he had no union with Mary until she gave birth to Jesus?

I – After Joseph awakens from the dream, he is a man on a mission. He goes from planning on divorcing Mary to taking her as his wife, flees to Bethlehem to escape Herod's plot of killing all the infant children in Israel and settles in Egypt for a few years. What Old Testament themes does this remind us of?

(*In the Old Testament, dreams were used as a means of divine communication. The New Testament opens similarly. Joseph, being a righteous man, would have remembered the dreams given to Abraham, Isaac, and Joseph. The flight to Egypt is similar to Jacob's family heading to Egypt to escape the death of famine. Later in Matthew, Jesus will exit Egypt and be tempted by the devil in the wilderness before beginning his ministry. While there are differences between the two narratives, there are astonishing similarities between ancient Israel and Jesus.*)

I – Isaiah 7:14 says, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." (We should note that the context of Isaiah 7 is concerning Ahaz son of Jotham, not the birth of Jesus narrative).

The Hebrew word *almah* is not a precise equivalent to "virgin" in which all the focus is on a young woman with the lack of sexual experience, nor is it precisely equivalent to "young woman," in which the focus is on age without reference to sexual experience."

While many OT passage feature *almah* as young women who are unmarried virgins, there are disputed texts such as Prov. 30:19, “The way of a man with a maiden” (implies a young married couple in love).

Interestingly enough, Isaiah selected *almah* over the more common *betulah* which can also refer to a woman who is a young virgin of marryable age but also has exceptions. Likely it would have posed the same type of problems because there is no Hebrew equivalent for the English word “virgin.”

Matthew, writing in Greek, uses *parthenos* – “a virgin” understood in the modern sense. Whether he is aware of the debate in Isaiah or not, what do you think he is trying to do?

(Ultimately, he is trying to show that this child is the Son of God. He is quoting Isaiah to show foreshadowing in the Old Testament and double fulfillment. When read as a book, concluding with the Resurrection, Matthew wants to be clear on Jesus’ divinity.)

A – How do we as Christ-followers proclaim the meaning of Immanuel (“God with us”) when to many, God feels so distant?

A – Like many events in Scripture, Joseph’s obedience looks foolish and naïve from an outsider’s perspective. God issues a calling and invites the individuals to either reject His will or to live in obedience to it. What can we learn and apply from Joseph in our understanding of the Matthew narrative?

Key: O – Observation. I - Interpretation. A – Application

- a. **Please note that not all these questions are to be asked in a single night.** Take some time and select and reword the questions that best fit your voice and your LIFE Community group. Certain questions work better for certain groups. You are encouraged to prayerfully discern what will serve your LC the best.
- b. Complement OIA questions with “process questions” (what else? what more? what do others think?).
- c. When you ask questions, give people ample time to think and respond. Wait. Take your time; don’t rush people but encourage their participation. And avoid answering your own questions!
- d. Timing/pacing: allocate your time and move forward gently, with a steady pace.
- e. Application: Pace the study to conclude with “difference making” application.
- f. Secondary texts—use other texts sparingly, even if they are relevant. Such texts will push you into “teaching,” rather than facilitating. It can cause people to feel distracted or de-powered.