



## LC STUDY GUIDE

### Done in Sync with the Rediscovering Jesus Series

The Passage: Matthew 1:18-25

For Life Community usage the week of 12/14 - 12/27/15

**Intro:** Today we want to take another look at Matthew 1:18-25, the same passage as our previous study. However, instead of focusing on the supernatural announcement of the angel and Jesus' virgin birth, today we want to focus on the relational tension between Mary and Joseph.

#### Intro Questions:

- We all know the holidays can be a time of tension within families, friendships, workplaces, even within church communities. What is it about the personal nature of the holidays and this time of year that brings out the tension?
- Combined with our own inter-personal dynamics, the societal tension and all the happenings of the world, we are left praying for the "Prince of Peace" to come soon. What type of peace does Jesus offer and how does it differ from the peace sung about out in radio-friendly pop culture songs?

**Central Point – Only the peace of God can move our broken relationships from being away from our heart to being brought near again.**

#### Matthew 1:18-25

**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 – From what we have in this text, what kind of guy do you think Joseph was? Does he remind you of anyone you know? Is there anything you can personally relate to?

I – For the sake of exercise, imagine yourself as Mary explaining to Joseph that you are pregnant and your child is the Son of God. Play out the spectrum of Joseph's possible reactions. As this story takes on life for you, how do you think he truly reacted?

I – As is regularly mentioned, the punishment for a Hebrew woman's unfaithfulness would be stoning or a merciful exile. There was no real way for Joseph to avoid all the shame, but he could divorce Mary quietly and limit the public spectacle between their respective families. Again, for the sake of exercise, now imagine being Joseph telling Mary you are going to divorce her... "quietly."

A – These conversations never go well. Leaving virgin births and marital unfaithfulness aside, does anyone feel free to share some of the tough conversations these exercises bring to mind? What do you wish you would have said or not said? What do you find yourself reflecting about now?

I – The Scriptures are filled with broken relationships that need healing and reconciliation. Understandably, Joseph is divorcing Mary, but before he does so, the angel of the Lord appears to him in a dream validating Mary's story. He awakes, believes, and takes Mary home to be his wife. From the outside looking in, it appears unexplainable. What do you think Joseph had to realize, and self-rationalize? What do you think Mary had to come to terms with ("Hey a short while ago, he was going to divorce me! Now ....")?

A – Perhaps one of the greatest mercies we have in Scripture is the angel of the Lord appearing to Joseph. The Lord speaks in many ways, sometimes through visions, sometimes in our prayers, in sermons, in small group settings, and sometimes in the prompting of our hearts in the most extraordinary or ordinary of times. As we near the end of Advent, how has the Lord spoken to you lately in terms of the damaged relationships in your life? Who in our lives needs to move from outcast to inside the home of our heart?

- a. Please note that not all these questions are to be asked in a single meeting. Take some time to prayerfully discern what will serve your LC the best. Select and reword the questions that best fit your voice and your Life Community group.
- b. Complement these 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. Application: Pace the study to conclude with difference-making application.
- e. Secondary texts—use other texts sparingly, even if they are relevant. Such texts will push you into "teaching" rather than facilitating, causing people to feel distracted or de-powered.