

Introduction to Volume Two of the Bible Study for Married Couples: Marriage in the New Testament

Welcome to volume two of Marriage in the Bible, a series provided by Marriage in Christ. Over the course of the next 14 months or so, we will pray as married couples through key New Testament texts. We won't simply list every single time marriage is mentioned, but rather seek personal encounters with the Scriptures that will help married couples draw closer to the Lord as individuals and as couples. Our vocation in marriage gives us a special grace for this closeness, for marriage itself is the great sign of God's love for his people and Christ's love for his bride, the Church.

The marriage covenant is analogous to the covenant that God makes with Israel. In fact, the covenant that God made with his people on Mount Sinai was nothing less than a divine wedding. God united himself to his people in a sacred family bond. God is the bridegroom; his people are the bride.

The relationship between God and the twelve tribes of Israel is a flesh-and-blood relationship; they are family. The covenant was sealed with the blood of sacrificed animals and reached a climax with a heavenly banquet, a wedding feast (see Exodus 24:4–11). From that moment on the prophets saw the relationship between God and his people as equivalent to the one between husband and wife. God is the faithful husband, but Israel, his spouse, is faithless. Israel's idolatry and relentless pursuit of other gods was likened to adultery. Their long exile was likened to divorce, a state that had lost merriment and joy, symbolized by wine.

The wine dries up, the vine languishes, all the merry-hearted sigh. ⁸ The mirth of the timbrels is stilled, the noise of the jubilant has ceased, the mirth of the lyre is stilled. ⁹ No longer do they drink wine with singing; strong drink is bitter to those who drink it. ¹⁰ The city of chaos is broken down, every house is shut up so that no one can enter. ¹¹ There is an outcry in the streets for lack of wine; all joy has reached its eventide; the gladness of the earth is banished. (Isaiah 24:7–11)

But God does not give up on his wayward bride. The story does not end with divorce and exile. This comes through loud and clear in passage after passage. The prophets speak about the day when God will forgive her (Hosea 2:14–20). He will cleanse her and purify her (Ezekiel 36:25; 37:23). He will give her a beautiful wedding garment, and he will take his bride to himself. There will be a great party, with the finest food and wine (Isaiah 25). The hills will run with wine (Amos 9:13). There will be great joy on that day, the wedding feast of God. For as the Lord said in Jeremiah, "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (31:3).

So it is clear that one way to read the Bible is to see it as a divine love story. It is the story of a man head over heels in love with a woman.

You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride, you have ravished my heart with a glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace. ¹⁰ How sweet is your love, my

sister, my bride! how much better is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your oils than any spice! (Song of Solomon 4:9–10)

But the man is no ordinary husband; he is the Creator God of the universe. And the woman is no ordinary bride; she is the people God has chosen to make his own. The bride is, first, the 12 tribes of Israel; then, in Christ, the bride is the Church.

There are many ways to describe biblical hope for the age to come, the age of salvation. One of the most frequent ways is the new covenant between the God of Israel and his estranged spouse. Ancient Israel longed for the future wedding of God. As one scholar puts it, “All of human history is a story of divine love—given, betrayed, forgiven and renewed because of the mercy and compassion of God.”¹

Song of Songs ends with the bride waiting for the bridegroom (God) to come. At the time of Jesus, the Jews “were not just waiting for the kingdom of God, or the coming of the Messiah, or the restoration of the twelve tribes. Above all, they were waiting for the coming of the Bridegroom God of Israel, who will forgive their sins and unite them in an everlasting covenant.”²

So it is entirely fitting that John the Baptist announces that the long-awaited Bridegroom has indeed arrived.

“You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, ‘I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him.’”²⁹ He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled.” (John 3:28–29)

Jesus is the Bridegroom! The new covenant between God and Israel is a marriage covenant. God showers his bride with the bridal gifts of steadfast love (*hesed*) and faithfulness. It culminates with the wedding feast of the Lamb.

Each month we will provide an overall introduction to the Scripture passages and meditations for that month. The introduction will provide historical background, as well as theological and literary context, for the passages we will offer for your prayer together.

By reading, praying over, and talking about key marriage passages in the Bible, we will come to delight more in God's vision for this wonderful state in life. Our 21st-century approach to marriage is no more Christian than was the approach of the pagan culture of the first-century Roman Empire or the pagan world that Israel struggled with for all its history. The authors of the Scriptures challenged the first Christians to live as if the New Creation was bursting out in Rome, Corinth, Jerusalem, and other places in the ancient Mediterranean world. So, too, the New Creation is bursting out today in cities and homes all over the world—and it dramatically challenges what the modern world has to offer.

¹ Pitre, Brant, *Jesus the Bridegroom: The Greatest Love Story Ever Told*, Image, New York, 2018, p.19.

² *Jesus the Bridegroom*, 27.

When we read and pray with the Scriptures, we encounter Jesus as a couple. Let the Scriptures find you, heal you, challenge you, teach you. In all humility, let them show you a new way to live human life—in the power of the Holy Spirit and in the heart of the body of Christ.

Part One: The Gospels

One of the central truths of our faith is that God, who was free to do anything that he wanted, chose to do certain things. Those things that he did are considered “revelation,” for they reveal God to us. The Bible is the record of that revelation. It describes not only what God did, but what those actions mean. So, we begin by making five observations about the spousal imagery in the gospels.

The first observation is about the birth and childhood of Jesus. He was born to a human mother, raised in an ordinary human family. From one point of view, those actions are no more remarkable than our own births or those of our own children. Jesus was fully human, fully “ordinary.” We do not ignore the truth that the birth of this child was also truly remarkable, for it was also the birth of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. However, the God of Israel chose to enter human history as a small, defenseless child. The incarnate Son of God really did grow up in an ordinary human family. This gives great dignity to our ordinary human marriages and families.

That leads us to the second observation: the Incarnation is the marriage of the human and the divine in the person of Jesus. Jesus is not half-human, half-divine. He is one person with two natures. God and humanity are one in the person of Jesus. We will reflect throughout this study on the spousal implications of that great mystery.

The third observation is that God, in the Second Person of the Trinity, chose a family wedding to be the setting in which he would go public with his ministry (see John 2). Jesus' sign of turning water into wine revealed his glory and the extravagance of his love, which would be revealed fully on the cross. He chose a wedding feast to be the first venue for revealing who he was.

Fourth, throughout his ministry, Jesus acted like the long-awaited Bridegroom. His interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well is a beautiful example of Jesus acting like the long-awaited Bridegroom of Israel.

Fifth, Jesus used the wedding feast as a parable for the Kingdom of God. In his various recountings of Israel's story, he announced that the long-awaited wedding of God and his people was about to begin. The gospels and the entire New Testament proclaim that Jesus is the bridegroom; he is Israel's God come to claim his bride. The long-awaited day of the Lord is here!

Here is a brief outline of part one of volume two: Marriage in the Gospels.

1. Birth and infancy
2. Incarnation (John 1 and John 3:25)
3. The Wedding Feast at Cana and John 13:1–4; 19:23–30
4. Jesus the bridegroom: the woman at the well (John 4)
5. The words of Jesus and Israel's story (various passages from the synoptic gospels)
6. Selected parables and actions of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke
7. Selected passages from the Gospel of John

Introduction to the Infancy Narratives

The Bible dramatically opens with the Spirit of God hovering over a watery, chaotic, trackless void. Then God speaks. He orders the chaos; he creates heaven and earth as a place where he can dwell forever with those beings who bear his own image and likeness. But something goes terribly, tragically wrong, and the image bearers are exiled from the Garden. A new home, a new sacred space for God and man to dwell together, must be created. In a remarkable turn, the Creator God sends the same Spirit that once overshadowed a watery chaos to overshadow a young woman, a willing servant. In the person of her child, God reveals, in the most dramatic way imaginable, his desire to join heaven and earth. The two realities are not side by side, and one thing is not imposed on the other; rather, two natures will exist in one single person. That is the wonder of the Incarnation.

A historian loves puzzles, and there are many puzzles in the stories of Jesus's conception, birth, and hidden life in Nazareth. Historians debate the nature and date of the census that led Joseph to take Mary to Bethlehem, where Jesus was born. Pious fiction and sentimental Christmas stories, going all the way back to the year 200 AD, have added layers of misinterpretation to the rather straightforward pictures presented by the evangelists. Here is just a sampling of the puzzles that arise. Is it even possible to think that in a culture that holds hospitality as one of the preeminent social virtues, a young expectant mother would be turned out to have a baby on her own, in a barn? Could a town of David not find room for an heir of David? These things are not likely! Why would Mary's cousins who lived five or six miles away not have come to help Mary at the time of the birth of Jesus? It's hard to believe that someone of Joseph's stature and obvious kindness would be so clueless as to bring his pregnant wife on a long journey where she gave birth on the night of their arrival. Who were these mysterious visitors from the East? There is no extrabiblical mention of the slaughter of the Holy Innocents. What does that say about the historicity of Matthew's account?

None of these puzzles should surprise us or cause us concern. All historical records that rely on human memory have details that are often remembered with varying degrees of precision—not unlike those “facts” in our own families that are remembered differently by different family members—all with complete confidence! We say they are puzzles for the historian, because Jesus' birth was a matter of the historical record. It was an event in human history. He was born during the reign of Caesar Augustus, when Herod the Great was the king of the Jews.

But there are certain aspects of these events about which the historian can say very little. The historian can tell us when and where Jesus was born, who his mother was, etc. But the historian cannot tell us who his real Father is or that his mother Mary was a virgin. Only the inspired author can tell us that Mary is the New Eve and that her child is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, “God with us.” Nevertheless, the Bible contains the record of real actions in human history—even those events which the historian can only perceive with the aid of faith.

More than that, the Bible tells us what those real actions mean. The evangelists tell us how the stories of Jesus’ conception, birth, and infancy fit into the long history of Israel. There are echoes of the Creation story and pointers to the New Creation. The evangelists tell us of the fulfillment of promises made to Abraham and David. We hear echoes of the Exodus (Jesus will return to Israel out of Egypt). We learn of the rescue of all humanity (represented by the non-Jewish magi), continuing the Old Testament story of the mysterious way in which the God of Israel rescues his chosen people, and through them, all humanity. The holy child is hunted and threatened with death; the end of the story is prefigured by the beginning.

Finally, Jesus was shaped by his human family. Luke puts it this way: “Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor” (Luke 2:51–52). Joseph and Mary were his parents; as such, they were responsible for teaching him and shaping his character. From his mother Mary he doubtless learned boundless compassion for the oppressed and that God’s grace and mercy are for all human beings, including Gentiles. It is beyond doubt that living with and learning from this remarkable woman shaped Jesus’ teaching, fostered in him his great respect for women, and prepared him to make women such an important part of his ministry (see our reflection on Luke 1:46–55). From Joseph he must have learned that there are two kinds of justice: justice that comes from the law and the kind of justice found in the prophets (see our reflection on Matthew 1:18–25).



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Luke 1:26–38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶ And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Meditation

Only a woman can be the Mother of God. She is not just the mother of his human nature; rather, she is the mother of the whole person who is the Second Person of the Trinity. This is pure gift, and could only happen because the Holy Spirit came upon her. But at the same time, it could not happen without Mary's free and full yes. Mary participates in the mystery of the Incarnation in a way that is hers alone. She is the Mother of God. From the cross, Jesus gave her to the beloved disciple and to us. She is our mother too.

Quiet reflection: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.



Pray

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Reading: Luke 1:34–35

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God."

Meditation

Astronomers estimate that the universe is expanding at about 44.7 miles (71.9 kilometers) per second per megaparsec. (One megaparsec is about 3.26 million light-years.) Those numbers are very difficult to grasp or comprehend. The power that was unleashed in the Big Bang staggers the imagination. The forces that propelled the material of the universe outward continue to propel it to this day. That is the creative power of our God. But there is an act even more impressive than the Big Bang. This same Creator God overshadowed a young woman so that in her womb, God, the Second Person of the Trinity, became a human being! God, the all-powerful Creator of the universe, became Incarnate, visible to all who had eyes to see. That same Holy Spirit was called down upon us at our wedding. In yet another unbelievable act of New Creation, he made one new being out of two. God has chosen to join himself to us, and thereby make himself more visible in the world. We have become participants in the great mystery of the Incarnation.

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Reading: Luke 1:46–55

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord,⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,⁴⁸ for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

⁵⁰ His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. ⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; ⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. ⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Meditation

Mary's song is made up of pairs of opposites—for example, "he brought down the powerful, but lifted up the lowly," or "he filled the hungry but sent the rich away emptyhanded." It has been suggested that the phrase "He has helped his servant Israel" would naturally be followed by "*and he has cut off the Gentiles.*"³ But this second phrase is missing. In much the same way, Jesus omits several lines from Isaiah 61 when he quotes from the Isaiah scroll in the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth (Luke 4). Most notably, after the words "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor," Jesus omitted "*and the day of vengeance of our God*" (Isaiah 61:2b). He also did not include verses 5-7 of Isaiah 61, which proclaimed that the Gentiles would be Israel's servants and that all their riches would flow to Israel. We should not be surprised that Jesus' friends and neighbors were enraged. They actually tried to throw Jesus off a cliff, because he wasn't giving voice to the nationalistic desire for revenge. In a small town surrounded by foreigners and with memories of a long history of abuse and oppression at foreign hands, the settlers in Nazareth longed for the day when their enemies would be overthrown and utterly defeated. Jesus' mother must have told her son a much different story about what God's real intentions were.

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³ Kenneth Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels*, IVP Academic, Downers Grove, IL 2008, p 191.



09



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

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Reading: Luke 2:1–7

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴ Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵ He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the **guest room**.
(Translation modified by WCW)

Meditation

Did the term “guest room” surprise you? Perhaps, like many of us, you have always pictured a “no vacancy” sign hanging outside a shabby commercial inn, with an overworked or uncaring innkeeper forcing the travel-weary expectant mother to have her baby alone in the barn. From what we know of the ancient world, that is much harder to imagine than what must actually have happened. First, ancient homes often had a main living area with a common space for the whole family. That space would have been used by the entire family for both eating and sleeping. Their animals would have been brought into the house at night for safekeeping and to give warmth to the family. A food box (manger) would have kept the animals contented. Guests would have been accommodated in a separate “guest room” (the word can also be translated “inn”). Second, it is nearly impossible to imagine that in his ancestral village, Joseph’s relatives would have left Mary alone to have a baby. Picture the scene in a fresh way: the guest room is full; Joseph’s female relatives are helping Mary in the main room of the home; the baby is lovingly placed in the animal feed box, which is now lined with fresh straw. Sound more ordinary? Jesus was indeed born into an ordinary, real family, with real human love.

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Reading: Luke 2:8–20

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" ¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Meditation

If you were responsible for telling the whole world about the arrival of the most important person in human history, whom would you tell first? Our modern temptation would be to tell everybody, by posting it on social media. But what if that were not an option? Would you tell the President? Would you tell the Pope? How about the most famous reporter in the media? Or would you tell the homeless veterans who are holding up signs at stoplights asking for a few dollars? Would you tell the migrant workers who are picking our fruit? How about the single parents working two jobs just to make ends meet? Whom would you tell? God told shepherds first.

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Reading: Luke 2:41–52

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover.⁴² And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival.⁴³ When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it.⁴⁴ Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends.⁴⁵ When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him.⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.⁴⁷ And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.⁴⁸ When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety."⁴⁹ He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he said to them.⁵¹ Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

Meditation

Here we have a father and mother searching for Jesus. All parents understand the anxiety they felt. Who would not panic with a child missing for three days? And upon finding him, what parent would not have challenged the child, "Why have you treated us like this?" Jesus' answer is mysterious, and it actually prefigures the moment when a couple will later encounter him, the one they thought they had lost, on the road to Emmaus. We can translate Luke 2:49 slightly differently, so that the 12-year-old Jesus says, "Did you not know that **it was necessary for me** to be in my Father's house?" Now compare that with the question the Risen Jesus will ask the couple on the road to Emmaus, "**Was it not necessary for the Messiah** to suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26). It is possible that even for those of us who know Jesus, like his parents or the couple on the road, there is still more mystery to encounter.

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Reading: Matthew 1:1–17 (excerpts)

An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah,² the son of David, the son of Abraham.² Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,³ and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by **Tamar** . . .⁵ and Salmon the father of Boaz by **Rahab**, and Boaz the father of Obed by **Ruth**, and Obed the father of Jesse,⁶ and Jesse the father of King David. And David was the father of Solomon by **the wife of Uriah**,⁷ and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah . . . Joram the father of Uzziah,⁹ and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,¹⁰ and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah,¹¹ and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of **the deportation to Babylon**.¹² And **after the deportation to Babylon**: Jechoniah was the father of Salathiel, and Salathiel the father of Zerubbabel,¹³ and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor. . . Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob,¹⁶ and Jacob the father of **Joseph the husband of Mary**, of whom **Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah**.¹⁷ So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations.

Meditation

Genealogies are very important to us. They provide connections to our roots. They help explain who we are. We find a place, a way to fit into the great human story. Matthew does for Jesus what Ancestry.com does for so many of us, only much more. Jesus is the goal toward which the whole of Israel's history has been inexorably heading. He is the one in whom the promises made to Abraham and David are fulfilled. He is the solution for the all-too-human story of sin and failing. But look at the list again, especially at the names and events that are in boldface type. Our family story is the story of prostitutes, adultery, murder, national exile. See also the wonderful human response to God's grace, the yes of Joseph and Mary. Jesus is the one who ultimately makes sense out of our story, our genealogy. In him we find our place in the story, checkered and sinful and human as it is.

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Matthew 1:18–25

Pray

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-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 1:18–25

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do 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 as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³ "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." ²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

Meditation

We know that God is just in all that he does. We know too that Jesus is God. So, it would follow that Jesus was also just. He would be a righteous King who would govern wisely and do what was right in the land, as Jeremiah had said (23:5). But in the same way that the child Jesus had to learn from his parents how to walk and talk like any human child, he must have learned something about justice from his parents as well. In this case, he learned a lesson from Joseph. Joseph was a righteous man, a just man. It was fortunate that Mary and the divine child in her womb were at the mercy of a man whose sense of justice came not from the law, but from the prophets. The law would have killed Mary and the unborn baby. But Joseph believed, with Isaiah, that a bruised reed should not be broken or a dimly burning wick quenched (Isaiah 42:3–4). Jesus learned that lesson well. Matthew described Jesus with the very same language: "A bruised reed he will not break, a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory. And in his name the Gentiles will hope." (Matthew 12:17)

Quiet reflection: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 1:21–23

"She will bear a son, and **you are to name him Jesus**, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³ "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and **they shall name him Emmanuel**," which means, "God is with us." ²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

Meditation

The Bible tells us not only what happened, but what the events mean. The two names "Jesus" and "Emmanuel" are given by God himself, one through the angel and the other through a prophet. Both names reveal the way in which God has chosen to rescue his people Israel and, though them, all of humanity. Matthew tells us that the miraculous conception and birth of this child fulfills the promise made through the prophet Isaiah over 700 years earlier. The child in Mary's womb is Emmanuel, "God with us." And "Jesus" (a popular boy's name at the time) means "Yahweh saves." In Hebrew, this name is the same as "Joshua." Remember the story of Israel, in which Joshua led the people into the promised land after the death of Moses. This child is greater than Moses; he is Israel's God in person. God promised to send a Messiah, a King who would defeat their enemies and bring justice to the whole world. But what must have shocked the whole of the created universe is that God Himself came as this King.

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God, come to our assistance.

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Reading: Matthew 2:1–12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ² asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." ³ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: ⁶ 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'" ⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸ Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." ⁹ When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹ On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Meditation

The psalmists and prophets had foreseen that one day all nations would stream to the Lord and bring him gifts (e.g., see Isaiah 2:2–3; Psalm 72:10; Isaiah 60:6). What would one day become a great flood of nations began with the arrival of the three wise men from the Arabian Peninsula. They saw something in the night sky that alerted them to the birth of a king in Judea. They brought gifts fit for a king. We are part of that great flood. We come to the King with gifts as well, gifts of our marriages, our families, our time, and our treasure. But as the wise men were warned not to return to Herod, who was plotting to kill the child, we too must be on alert. The enemies of the Lord are still afoot.

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09



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

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Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

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Reading: Matthew 2:13–23

¹³ Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." ¹⁴ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, ¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son." ¹⁶ When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. ¹⁷ Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: ¹⁸ "A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more." ¹⁹ When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ²⁰ "Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead." ²¹ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. ²³ There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, "He will be called a Nazorean."

Meditation

Herod the Great was a paranoid tyrant who had several of his sons and his favorite wife killed. Caesar Augustus is reported to have made a humorous pun that he would rather be Herod's pig (*hus* in Greek) than his son (*huius* in Greek). The pig would be safe because Herod was Jewish. So, it is not hard to imagine his fury after being deceived by the wise men. It is entirely consistent with his character that he would slaughter all the male children in Bethlehem just to end the life of one child who was a threat to his throne. Joseph, ever attentive to the Lord's word, took his young family into Egypt for their safety. Matthew alerts us to the dangers that will ever be present for Jesus. He will be a threat to the powers of the world. He will be killed by Pontius Pilate, the representative of Caesar. He will be rejected by his own people. But for now, he is safe in the care of his loving and protective family.

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