

# MYSTERY AND MAJESTY GOD WITH US

## STUDY ONE

### Joseph . . . Did You Know?

*Matthew 1:18–23*

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*We've had centuries to think about Jesus' miraculous conception, but Joseph really had no time. It must have been at first a massive puzzle.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**I**MAGINE Mary and Joseph caring for Jesus as an infant. Jesus depended on them to feed Him, clean Him, clothe Him, even calm His fears during stormy nights. He was Immanuel, the Son of God, and yet He was so helpless. How could their minds take it all in?

In their song, “Mary, Did You Know?” Mark Lowry and Buddy Greene imagine Mary tenderly caring for Jesus, aware of who He was but without fully grasping who He would become.

Did she know that the little feet she caressed would one day walk on water? Could she comprehend that the tiny hand clutching her hair would calm a storm? Or touch the eyes of the blind and make them see? Or be nailed to a cross? No, she couldn't have known.

The writers could have written a second song with Joseph in mind: “Joseph, Did You Know?” Jesus was the Son of *God* . . . not his son. How puzzling the human-and-divine nature of Jesus must have been for Joseph. Theologians are still trying to put those pieces together.

Are you facing a situation that defies understanding, perhaps not as bewildering as the incarnation but still puzzling? Joseph's faith-filled response offers an inspirational model to help us navigate the shadowy regions of God's mysterious ways.

Joseph's mind was set awirl when he first heard that Mary was pregnant, and it didn't stop spinning after Jesus was born. Through it all, however, Joseph remained steady, loyal, humble, and courageous—all the qualities we admire in people of great faith and the qualities we so desperately need in our puzzling times.



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## PREPARE YOUR HEART

Do you need God’s enablement to understand more clearly, to have faith in His sovereignty, to find peace, or to move forward with His calling? The assurance our Lord gave to Paul, He gives also to you, “My grace is all you need.” (2 Corinthians 12:9). Offer the following prayer to your heavenly Father before you study His Word.

*Father, I sometimes find myself in trying situations where it is difficult to trust You. Open my eyes anew to Joseph’s experience. Teach me and help me to trust You with eyes of faith based on the assurance and guidance from Your written Word so that I may fully obey Your revealed plan for me. In Christ’s name, amen.*



## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

For most of us, our daily experience is filled with *predictability*. We awaken. We work. We talk. We play. We eat. We drink. We sleep. The sun always rises in the east, bringing morning sunlight, and it always sets in the west, ushering in the evening moonlight. Rhythms, from both nature and society, often make life more doable and more pleasant . . . but then come the interruptions.

Young Joseph experienced a jolting interruption. In fact, he encountered something *radically unpredictable*, something that has happened only once in human history!

Among the gospel writers, Matthew alone recorded Immanuel’s arrival from Joseph’s perspective. Read his story in [Matthew 1:18–25](#) and note key phrases that capture the *unpredictable*, the *unusual*. What did you find? Record your thoughts.

Now, let’s dive into the passage.



## Observation: Grappling with the Unpredictable

*Observation* is the first phase of *Searching the Scriptures* Bible studies, in which you simply see what the passage says. *Interpretation* follows when you seek the meaning of the passage. Use your observation skills to answer the following questions.<sup>1</sup>

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The apostle set the scene in *Matthew 1:18–19*. What did Joseph know . . . and not know? What inner tension did he feel based on his initial response to the news?

Joseph and Mary were engaged to be married, or “betrothed” (*Matthew 1:18 NASB*). “Jewish law regarded an engaged couple as virtually married.”<sup>2</sup> As it relates to Joseph, why do you think Matthew included this fact so early in the narrative?

Joseph was a “righteous man” (1:19). What initial clue in verse 19 demonstrates righteous character?

Joseph “thought this over” (1:20 *NASB*). What does this response tell you about Joseph’s attitude?

In *Matthew 1:20*, the angel relayed three powerful truths. What truths do you observe?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

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A fact, a charge, and a prophetic promise emerge in *Matthew 1:21*. Identify these below.

What was important about Matthew quoting the prophet Isaiah in *Matthew 1:23*? What did Matthew want his readers, especially his Jewish readers, to understand?

How do *1:18 and 1:24–25* form bookends for the account?

*When Joseph asked her who the father was, Mary said that an angel of God had spoken to her and told her she would conceive miraculously. Her son would be the promised deliverer, the Messiah, God's Son. She said it so calmly and confidently. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## **Interpretation: The Virginal Conception—Foundation for Salvation**

God's sovereignty and miraculous intervention weave like golden threads through our passage. Commentator Thomas Constable notes God's direct involvement:

The angel announced God's sovereign prerogative in naming the child (v. 21). God named His Son. Joseph simply carried out the will of God by giving Jesus His name at the appropriate time (v. 25) . . . . "Jesus" means "Yahweh Saves" or "Yahweh Is Salvation."<sup>3</sup>

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Prior to the angelic encounter and because of the gravity of Jewish law, Joseph didn't see God's hand at work. "He decided to break the engagement quietly" (Matthew 1:19). What changed in Joseph's mind-set after the angel visited him? What spiritual qualities do you see in his response?

Many Christians are familiar with the concept of the virgin birth. Why do you think Matthew made certain to include [1:24–25](#) in the account?

The virgin birth is essential for us to have a sinless Savior. To perfectly represent us, Jesus must have Adam's human nature without Adam's fallen condition. Reread verse [1:18](#). While we may call this the virgin birth text, is there a more precise way to word this miracle?

*But for right now we're preserving this virginity. We're making it clear before the Lord that I'm not in any way involved in any capacity. I'll care for you. I will love you. I will protect you. I will stand by your side. I will stand against those who verbally assault you, but I want you to know, Mary, as greatly as I love you, I respect you and I honor you. I will not touch you 'til that baby is born.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



## **Correlation: The Virginal Conception—Fulfilled Prophecy**

The virginal conception was prophesied in the Old Testament and affirmed in the New Testament. What do the following verses teach about this biblical promise?

*Isaiah 7:14:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Luke 1:26–38:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Hebrews 7:26:* \_\_\_\_\_

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Through the virgin Mary, God “brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus” (Acts 13:23 NASB). What is the spiritual implication for you, according to *Galatians 4:4–5*?

What hope does the sinless Savior offer Christians in *Hebrews 7:25*?



## **Application: Faithful Obedience**

Four questions rise to the surface of our study of Joseph. Let them prompt your thinking and then, in the spaces below, record your personal reflections based on your time in God’s Word.

1. *Are you facing a life-altering decision?* Consider Joseph’s example of self-sacrifice.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. *Will you be the brunt of wagging tongues?* Consider Joseph’s example of willingness to be misunderstood.

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3. *Are you being forced to stand alone?* Consider Joseph's example of courage to do what's right and leave the outcome with God.
  
4. *Has the Lord revealed His will to you?* Consider Joseph's example of obedience to do what he knew God wanted him to do.

Although Joseph often stands quietly in the background of most nativity scenes, his life beams with steady resolve, uncompromising faithfulness, strength of conviction, and determined obedience. Which quality inspires you most during this season of your life? Why does that quality inspire you and how does it apply to your current situation?

In what ways recently have you seen the Holy Spirit enable you to act in obedience, despite possible judgment or criticism from others?

Where do you find it challenging to trust God with the seemingly impossible? How can you lean on God for strength today?

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Joseph was caught up in a divine drama that he never would have anticipated or could have comprehended. Still, he submitted to God’s will, stepped into the unknown, and trusted God with the results. Joseph relied on the God who was doing the impossible to give him strength to navigate the difficult, and you can too.



## A FINAL PRAYER

Close your study by making Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s prayer your own.

*Make me like Joseph, Lord. Give me the capacity to live a life beyond what other people think or say or understand. Grow me in the life of faith, so that, as I take Your hand, I can walk a direction that most will never accept or understand. In the matchless name of Your Son, I pray. Amen. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

## ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, “*How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?*”
2. Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Matthew,” 2024 ed., Soniclight.com, note 1:18–19.
3. Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Matthew,” 2024 ed., Soniclight.com, note 1:20–21.

For the 2024 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Marshall F. Davis in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll’s messages. Copyright © 2012, 2024 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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