

# 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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*Matthew 1:18–23*

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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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# MYSTERY AND MAJESTY GOD WITH US

## STUDY TWO

### Jesus . . . What a Gift!

*2 Corinthians 9:15; Philippians 2:5–8*

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*If you think Jesus' conception and birth were amazing, then look before the conception. Realize who they held in their arms and you'll see the baby in a whole new light.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**C**HILDREN unwrap Christmas gifts with uncontainable delight. Their eyes widen, their jaws drop, and their voices squeal excitedly over the gifts they receive. However, as days and months go by, the happiness that accompanied the gifts fades.

Every Christmas, we hear the story of God's gift of Jesus to humanity and sing carols about His wondrous love. The jingle bells, decorated trees, and twinkling lights announce *Christmas is here!* Yet, the elaborate displays and flashy productions might have the opposite effect of their intent—keeping us so preoccupied and stimulated that we miss out on letting the true wonder of Christmas into our hearts.

In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we'll quietly let the wonder in and recapture the joy of Christmas by unwrapping God's gift, Jesus, and seeing Him for who He truly is: God in the flesh who humbled Himself to carry out the rescue operation called salvation. The joy of receiving this Gift never fades!



#### PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you begin your Bible study, pray like the psalmist prays: “Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in your instructions” (Psalm 119:18). Ask the Lord to illuminate His Word so that the eyes of your heart can catch a fresh glimpse into the greatness of His Gift.



# Jesus . . . What a Gift!

2 Corinthians 9:15; Philippians 2:5–8

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## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In his book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll highlights the necessity of checking the context of our Bible passage, which means examining what comes before and after.

*Second Corinthians 8–9* provides the general context for 2 Corinthians 9:15. Paul addressed generosity as it relates to individual believers, churches, and God—urging generosity in the Corinthian church. *Second Corinthians 8:7–8* provides the specific context for today’s passage. According to *2 Corinthians 8:7–8*, write the reason Paul gave for talking about generosity.



## Observation: Generosity Exemplified

*Observation* is carefully reading and thinking about what the Bible actually says.<sup>1</sup> So, carefully, slowly, and repetitively read *2 Corinthians 8:7–9* in different translations. What subject did Paul turn to in 8:9 and why?

Note Paul’s two statements: “He was rich” and “He became poor.” What did Paul emphasize with these descriptions, and what did these descriptions illustrate?

## Jesus . . . What a Gift!

*2 Corinthians 9:15; Philippians 2:5–8*

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Now, let's turn to our second passage, Philippians 2:5–8. *Philippians 2:1–4* sets the context. Begin by reading these first four verses and summarize Paul's point. What mind-set did Paul ask his readers to have in their relationships with one another?

Next, read *Philippians 2:5–8* carefully, slowly, and repetitively in multiple versions. Paul illustrates a mind-set of unselfishness with Jesus. Reread verses 6–8 carefully. Observe who Jesus was before birth.

Jesus did not consider equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, what did Jesus do, according to *2:7*?

How did Jesus humble Himself according to *2:8*?

Look at the last part of verse 8. Observe the kind of death Jesus experienced.

# Jesus . . . What a Gift!

*2 Corinthians 9:15; Philippians 2:5–8*

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Now observe *2 Corinthians 9:15*. First, note the one who does the giving. Second, look at whether the word *gift* is singular or plural. Record what you see.

Reread *2 Corinthians 9:15* in different translations. What did Paul exclaim about God’s gift, Jesus?

*Paul, one of the brightest minds that’s ever come onto this earth, a theologian among all theologians. The man with an enormous vocabulary comes to the gift and he says, “There are no words.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## **Interpretation: Generosity Illustrated**

In *interpretation*, we seek to know the author’s intended meaning of the passage so we can understand timeless truths for us today. From *2 Corinthians* and *Philippians*, we observed that Paul wanted his readers to be unselfish in their interactions with each other. He used Jesus as the perfect illustration.

In *Philippians 2:6–7* (NASB), Paul used the word *form* twice in the English translation. However, there are two Greek words for “form”—*morphe* and *schema*. Look up *morphe* and *schema* in the Greek lexicon available for free at [billmounce.com](http://billmounce.com). Summarize the difference between these terms and then explain why that difference is significant for your understanding of *2:6–7*.

## Jesus . . . What a Gift!

*2 Corinthians 9:15; Philippians 2:5–8*

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The Greek word *harpogmos*, used once in the New Testament (Philippians 2:6), speaks of clinging, holding on to, grasping. What did Jesus release His hold on? Why is this release significant about His character?

When Paul says in *Philippians 2:7* that Jesus “emptied Himself” (NASB), what does this mean?

Find in your *Bible dictionary* the meaning of *cross* and *crucifixion*. Describe the humiliation and pain of this kind of execution.

*“A cross,” not “the cross.” . . . He died on a cross, even a cross-kind of death, which was the lowest form of death! It’s where the sorriest criminals on earth wound up. . . . What a gift from God to all of us. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

Why is Jesus’ generosity the foundation of believers’ generosity? How can understanding and gratitude for His sacrifice fuel wonder and generosity in our own hearts? Don’t forget to consult your resources if you need to! Check out Chuck Swindoll’s commentary *Insights on Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* and *Constable’s Notes* at [Netbible.org](http://Netbible.org).

*Remember the context is humility; it is unselfishness. Jesus . . . didn’t cling to that position, didn’t clutch it, that equality with God. When it became necessary for a rescue operation called salvation, He released His hold on that and was willing to take upon Himself a different schema. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

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## Correlation: God's Generous Heart

The third step of a *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study is *correlation* where we explore how the text compares with other Bible passages. Carefully read [John 1:1–3, 14](#). How did John describe Jesus in the prelude of his gospel?

In the NASB, John 1:1 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” In Koine Greek, the structure of the sentence “the Word was God” is particular. The Word was not the Father. The Word was not a god. But, what God was, the Word was also. John accentuates the divine nature of Jesus by writing that the Father and the Son share the same essence or substance.

In [1:11–12; 3:16–18](#), we find a wonderful promise about God's gift of Jesus. Summarize this promise below. Describe the two responses to God's gift of Jesus and their respective consequences.

*The gift remains available as long as you're alive, but when you're dead, there's no more gift. There's no more hope. There's no second chance.*

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What does supernatural generosity look like in believers, according to [1 John 3:16–18](#)?

Examples of God's generosity sprinkle the pages of Scripture and flow down from heaven to cover the earth. From the rain to the bumper crops, the fingerprint of our generous God is everywhere (Acts 14:15–17). However, His greatest showcase of generosity is the gift of His own Son.

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*Before there was earth . . . there existed the Godhead: Father, Son, Spirit, co-equal, co-existent, co-eternal, together. And there He was, second member of the Trinity, a part of the plan that would rescue those who live in the future on that little globe called earth. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## **Application: Celebrate and Extend Generosity**

*Application* is a response to in-depth study of the Scriptures. What insights about God's gift of Jesus have you drawn from your time in God's Word?

*We tend to forget that the baby born to Mary is the One who has always been the second member of the Trinity, God in flesh among us.  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

What is it about the incarnation, life, and death of Jesus that leaves you speechless?

Music and songs are effective ways of storing God's truths in our hearts. Charles Hutchinson Gabriel wrote the lyrics below in the early 1900s. It has been described as the "raw amazement at the magnitude of Christ's sacrifice."<sup>2</sup>

I stand amazed in the presence  
Of Jesus the Nazarene,  
And wonder how He could love me,  
A sinner, condemned, unclean.

How marvelous, How wonderful!  
And my song shall ever be:  
How marvelous, How wonderful  
Is my Savior's love for me!

He took my sins and my sorrows;  
He made them His very own.  
He bore the burden to Calv'ry  
And suffered and died alone.

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As your vocal cords sing or hum the melody, let your heart stand amazed at God’s wonderful and marvelous gift of Jesus! Using this song as inspiration, put into words your own amazement at God’s ineffable Gift to humankind.



## A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, Your Son became human to rescue me. He humbled himself and died so that I may have a relationship with You through faith in His perfect sacrifice. Open the eyes of my heart to see the unseen at the nativity scene. Rekindle in me the wonder of Your indescribable Gift. Help me give freely and sacrificially as I celebrate Your Gift to me. In Jesus’ precious name. Amen.*

## 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. Charles H. Gabriel, “My Savior’s Love,” in *The Celebration Hymnal: Songs and Hymns for Worship* (n.p.: Word/Integrity, 1997), hymn 348.

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