

“When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him” (MATTHEW 1:24, NIV).

Bible Study 38

Joseph: The Stepfather

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Read Matthew 1:18-25, 2:1-23 and Luke 2:1-40.

Why was Joseph considering divorce even before he and Mary were married? _____

Who was Jesus' father? _____

How do we know? _____

Why did Matthew list Joseph's lineage? (*Matthew 1:1-17*) _____

Who named Jesus? _____

We all know what Mary's role was in God's plan to save the world, but what about Joseph's role? Mary's mission and "calling" didn't exactly fit into Joseph's original plans for his life. Starting a marriage as the stepfather of someone else's child was not what Joseph had in mind when he asked Mary to be his life partner. Imagine the strain on their relationship when she tried to explain her pregnancy to him. How could he possibly believe her wild story about an angel and an "assignment" from the Most High God? He would have to see his own angel before he could tag along with whatever was ahead in Mary's great (but rather inconvenient and awkward) adventure as mother to the Savior of the world.

And it was an adventure! Joseph's new mission was to be the guardian of the Messiah, and his assignment caused him to make incredible adjustments in his life. He would have to be willing to travel to any place, live in any city, pack up and disappear in the night, or go the long way home to protect God's greatest Gift to the world. His own career and business—even his new family—would have to be put on hold while he and Mary carried out their mission from God. Their marriage became an *on mission* partnership focused on delivering the Savior to their world.

After they were married in Nazareth, how many times did they move? _____

Name the places they lived and an approximate length of time for each stay. (Check out Luke 2:4; Matthew 2:7,16; Matthew 2:13,19; Matthew 2:23 and Luke 2:39-42.)

Try to list all the adjustments the family must have made living in Egypt (e.g., language, diet, school, job).

What other children did Mary and Joseph have? (*Matthew 13:53-57*) _____

Read Luke 2:41-52.

Joseph's unique mission was to be stepfather and mentor to the boy he named Jesus. Joseph had the responsibility of creating and maintaining the physical and educational environment for Jesus throughout his childhood, adolescence and even into young adulthood. He obviously did a great job according to Matthew's book (informed by Jesus) and Luke's book (informed by Mary). Was it "normal" for a Galilean family to walk to Jerusalem every year (Luke 2:41) for the Passover?

They were a young family with several small children—all younger than Jesus was. Mary must have been pregnant nearly every year they traveled. Who taught Jesus so well that He was able to ask such probing intelligent questions in the Temple when He was only 12 years old? Was this family wealthy enough or well-connected enough for Jesus to have a formal rabbinical education, access to teachers or even a copy of the Scriptures, way up in Galilee?

Joseph was a student and practitioner of the Scripture (Luke 2:22,27,39,42). How well would you have studied your Old Testament prophecy after an angel announced your wife was going to be mother to the Messiah? As Jesus did His apprenticeship in the carpenter shop, Joseph was teaching his stepson much more than woodworking.

Apparently Joseph died between Jesus' 12th and 30th birthdays (between Matthew 2 and 3). Imagine all the changes and challenges the family faced. In what ways did Jesus become head of the household? How many mouths were there to feed? Why was Jesus always called the "carpenter's son" and never the "carpenter"? Had He not yet finished with his apprenticeship? Was his leadership role in the family what caused the tension in Mark 3:31-35?

By reading between the lines of the biblical account and considering the very human situations of people like Joseph, Mary, Jesus, and his brothers and sisters, you can learn and apply some of the most practical lessons of Scripture to your own life.

What can you learn about marriage from Joseph's example?

What do you learn from his experience about "stepfathering"?

What insight have you gained about parenting your own children?

Are you willing to accept any mission from God and make whatever adjustments necessary in your life to fulfill it? Yes No

Do you want your marriage to be an *on mission* partnership? Yes No