

Joseph: The Virgin Birth and Prophecies Fulfilled

DARRELL DELANEY

My kids love ice cream. One day, as they were anticipating on a hot summer day which flavor to get, they narrowed it down to two flavors: mint chocolate chip and cookie dough. As they were thinking about this, a kid walked by with Superman ice cream, and they hadn't thought of that one; so, they all screamed Superman! That was the flavor they landed on. It was interesting to see that they had options, but a new option was considered that they had not anticipated before. In this episode of *Groundwork*, we will see Joseph encounter an option from God that he had not anticipated before with the situation of the virgin birth. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney; and Scott, we are in part four of our five-part series, where we are awaiting the glorious arrival of our Messiah; and in the first episode, we talked about how the Magi's presence was blessed with God's grace. They were looking for the kingdom, and they came to understand that they are also included. In episode two, we looked at the birth of John the Baptist, and how he prepared the way for Jesus.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Episode three...the previous episode... we looked at the angel Gabriel's message to Mary, that she was going to become the mother of the Messiah. The next episode is our Christmas episode. We are going to look at Luke 2; but today, we wanted to go back principally to Matthew, and to dig into another passage where the angel Gabriel has an important assignment.

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, we are waiting for Jesus in this season of Advent, and Matthew wanted his readers to understand that this was the Messiah that they had been waiting for—the one that had been prophesied about for centuries; and we see the angel Gabriel being dispatched again. This is the third time in a couple of...we have seen him in Matthew, we have seen him in Luke...this is the third time that he has been dispatched to, this time Joseph, who is the, I guess, stepfather of Jesus. He can be called the stepfather of Jesus, right?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; Matthew begins, of course, with the family tree—the genealogy of Jesus—and the whole genealogy says that so-and-so was the father of so-and-so, was the father of so-and-so, until you get to the end, and then it says: ^(verse 16) Joseph, the *husband* of Mary...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But not the father of Jesus, because this is the miracle child of the incarnation. So, he is Mary's husband, Jesus' earthly father or stepfather, but not the biological father. We are told Joseph is a righteous man; he is a carpenter from Nazareth; he is a good man, but he is faced with a situation when Mary, his fiancée, becomes

pregnant and he knows it is not because of him.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, as we look at this passage, we want to see what exactly happens with this story. So, in verse 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. ¹⁹Because 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. ²⁰But 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. ²¹She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

²²All 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”). ²⁴When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, Scott, there are scholars who say that there are three aspects to the Jewish marriage. The first step is that parents must agree on the terms and the arrangements of it; the second is that they become betrothed, which is like our modern-day engagement...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

Where they are promised to each other; and then the third is the couple moves in together after they are married. So, when Joseph receives this message from the angel, it is between step two and step three, and that is a problem because she is pregnant, and if he is not the father, it could look like a scandal to the regular person.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And as we said in the previous episode, Mary must have thought this, too, after Gabriel told her she was going to conceive a miracle child. She surely wondered, as we said, would Joseph buy this story about: Oh, I saw an angel. Oh, really. Maybe Joseph would believe Mary, but would everybody else in Nazareth? It probably had to be a scandal; and this reminds us of what we also talked about, Darrell, in the previous episode, that when God taps you for something special, it never makes your life easier. It always complicates things; and it surely did for Joseph, but he is a righteous man, and that is very important...in the next part of this program, we are going to loop back to this...it is important for Matthew's theme to a Jewish reading audience to peg Joseph as righteous. Joseph never speaks in the Bible...not here in Matthew and not in Luke. He never says a word. He speaks through his actions, and he had always spoken through his actions. He was a good man; he was a righteous man; he was a *tsedeq*, as they would say in Judaism, which is what everyone wanted to be: righteous; and the only righteous thing to do here is divorce her.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, because he is righteous, and because the scripture says he is a man who follows and obeys the law, there is a law about that, where if you are caught in adultery in Leviticus 20 it says you should be stoned to death—you and the person you committed it with. He doesn't know who the other person is; this is before he gets the dream, that is, the message from the angel; so, he is like: I don't know where the guy is, but I love her and I don't want to stone her, so I am going to find a way to gently put her away quietly so that no shame can be brought on her or on us or on anyone else; and that actually talks through like how the heart of God is, because God's heart for Israel is one that is committed and betrothed, but yet suffers because Israel is

unfaithful and cannot keep his commands in the law. So, the God who we serve is actually being portrayed in a small way in the way Joseph lives.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Israel really was sinful, and God loved her anyway. Joseph only *thinks* Mary is sinful...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But he loves her anyway, until the matter becomes cleared up for him. Right; Joseph is kind of a metaphor for God here, that God, despite disappointment, loves. We see that in Hosea, right? Where the prophet Hosea marries a bad woman, and that becomes a metaphor for God and Israel; and yet, even though God says in Hosea 11: Oh, I have had it with you people! Then he kind of takes a deep breath and says: But I cannot give you up.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am your Dad...I am your Father...and I am not going to give you up; and that is sort of what Joseph does here; but of course, things are going to be clarified for him. So, let's say that by the time Joseph has his dream with the angel, Mary has already told him the story and he maybe didn't buy it. Obviously, if he had bought the story, he wouldn't have thought to divorce her. He would have said: Oh, my; that is really amazing, Mary! Well, okay. I guess we are being called to... He didn't buy it; he didn't believe it; so, guess what? Joseph gets the next angel visit to confirm it.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is really interesting that God will come into a situation, and for some who think that it might become easier, it will become complicated; but God is still looking for the obedient and faithful response to that, and that is what we are called to. Even though the situation could seem like a dilemma to God, it is not a dilemma to God, because he has found the solution through this very announcement. He is going to redeem the world. When we come up next, we are going to talk about the surprising turn of events that happened when the angel showed up. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this episode, where we are in Matthew Chapter 1. Matthew has a very, very brief account of the birth of Jesus, just about seven or eight verses, really, starting in Matthew 1:18; and we have just seen, Darrell, that Joseph didn't believe Mary's story. He believed she had been unfaithful to him; and the only righteous thing left for him to do was to divorce her. He could have done it harshly. He even could have called for her death, as you pointed out in the previous segment, Darrell, but he decides to do it lovingly and quietly; but for sure, he wants to put some daylight between himself and this scandal; and so, an angel comes to him...the same angel, probably, who came to Mary...and says: It is not a scandal; she is telling you the truth; stay with her and name the boy Jesus.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is interesting that God has been dispatching angels left and right to send the priority mail messages because he doesn't want them to mess these messages up. This is a very important message that he needs to know. Earlier we talked about an episode prior to this, how the angel Gabriel came to talk to Zechariah and Elizabeth, and then Mary; and in this situation, we see in this passage, picking up at verse 20, what the angel says to him. It says:

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. ²¹She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

That is quite astonishing based on what Joseph could have been feeling in this moment: You love her; you might be sad; you might be even shocked or grieving; you might also be relieved to know, oh, it is not a scandal; it is not I have been cheated on; it is actually a miracle. All of the above, probably.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and I imagine that the next day Joseph visited Mary and maybe kind of looked down at his feet. He said: Sorry, I didn’t believe you. You were telling the truth. Okay. You know, because he had to kind of eat crow here. He didn’t believe her. Now, it turns out, oh, it really is of the Holy Spirit, just like you said, Mary. It is a miracle child. You didn’t do anything wrong. We said a minute ago, though, Darrell, that it is interesting, Joseph never speaks, actually, in the Bible. His actions speak, but he is a righteous man. This is a key theme in Matthew’s gospel. In fact, Darrell, we did a series on *Groundwork* not long ago on the Sermon on the Mount, and we pointed out there that one of the big things Jesus does in the Sermon on the Mount is he redefines righteousness. The Pharisees had made it all about external obligations and laws. So, Jesus goes through the Ten Commandments and he deepens them. Jesus reveals a new righteousness, and Joseph is showcase number one. He did the righteous thing in wanting to divorce her, but now God says: There is a higher righteousness, Joseph. Stay with her. So, Joseph is the first person in Matthew, but not the last, who ends up having righteousness redefined for him by the one called Jesus.

DARRELL DELANEY

Option A is: Follow the righteousness that is in the law, and that you should do; it is a good thing. Option B is: Totally disregard the law and do whatever you want. Option C is: Christ comes in and redefines what righteousness really is. It is not by the externals, it is not by the achievements, but it is by the grace that is given to one to say yes to the Lord’s will; and that is exactly what happens with Joseph. This is an option he did not see coming; and it is really powerful to see that God is not bound by whatever polaric options we have in our limited minds...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, right.

DARRELL DELANEY

That was actually the benefit of what would come out of it. Jesus being the one who will save us from our sins.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; Jesus, the Greek form of the Hebrew name Yeshua, that we translate Joshua, and both of them mean *God saves*. So, salvation, Darrell, is built right into the name of Jesus. He is named the *saving one*, basically; which means that he is the one who has long been promised. Somebody had to save the people from their sins, and when God tells Joseph...and he had already told Mary, too, we saw in Luke 1...name him Yeshua...Iésous...the Saving One. We know, this is the one who is going to save the world.

DARRELL DELANEY

And so, you also picked up Joshua, which is the salvation of the Lord...that is what his name means; and so, if you look at the Old Testament through a Reformed perspective, you will see that God is doing a type and shadow effect in the Old Testament. So, Joshua is the physical deliverer who saves Israel’s people from the Amalekites, the Perizzites, the Amorites, and all the ites; and here is what Jesus is doing on a heavenly scale for the sins of the people, because we realize that the big baddies are not the ites out there...not the Hitlers, not the Mussolinis, but the bad guy is us. We are the ones who carry the sins; we are the ones who have no way of salvation without Jesus’ intervention. So, Jesus is the new option for salvation permanently in the heart of people, and he has been offered here today.

SCOTT HOEZEE

As the cartoon character, Pogo, once said: We have met the enemy and he is us. It is not somebody else who needs saving, it is me; it is you; it is all of us: He will save his people from their sins. Not just he will save the bad people. No; Gabriel told Joseph: He will save his people...all the people...anybody who gets saved is going to get saved this way; and the great thing, Darrell, and indeed, you just said, Joshua was a form and a shadow...a preview...a prototype...for the ultimate savior who would come, and that is all true, Darrell, because this is the fulfilment of a plan, right? God had a plan all the way back to the Garden of Eden, when he said: Somebody is going to come to crush the serpent's head; the one who led Adam and Eve into sin. *Somebody* will come who will take care of that; and now that somebody has come in the person of Jesus.

DARRELL DELANEY

And Jesus is the best gift that God could give in any situation. Forget the things that are under the tree. It is about Jesus being the ultimate gift. He knows that we could not get out from under our own sins or the punishment of it; and to put that gift that is so tremendous in little Bethlehem is the irony of this passage, where God is bringing that great gift to a small place, to start on a small scale, and Jesus is the one who is going to be the one who saves us; and the message is beautiful. It is the one that God uses to redeem the hope of the world, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and as you just said, so few people know at this point, right? Joseph and Mary know that something big is up, though even they maybe couldn't fully conceive it. Zechariah and Elizabeth know that their son is going to prepare the way. So, there are just a handful of people who know the truth. Maybe nobody in Nazareth believed Joseph and Mary's story, if they even told them. Maybe they all assumed this was just a bad thing, but it wasn't a bad thing; it was the best thing ever, and as we also said in the previous episode, it has become such a theme at Advent, right, Darrell? God has always taken the low road. He has always taken the quiet way...the surprising way. As a famous preacher once said: While all the world was focused on the mighty Roman Empire, God snuck down the back staircase of history and dropped a baby into a manger and said: There now; this is the salvation of the world. But as we wrap up this episode, we want to turn to sort of Matthew's larger point in writing his whole gospel, and some practical application of all this for our own lives today in Advent. So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, we have been looking at in this fourth episode of our five-part Advent and Christmas series, Joseph; the character who we said never speaks. He is only in Matthew and Luke. Joseph is never mentioned in Mark or John, I don't think. He is a righteous man whose righteousness was redefined, we just said. So, let's go back to Matthew 1 and remind ourselves of what happens in verse 22.

DARRELL DELANEY

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”). ²⁴When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

So, Matthew, who wrote this gospel, is literally trying to make sure that everyone knows this is the Messiah that has been prophesied about—this is the one we have been waiting for; and he refers back to this passage, where it says “God with us” in the Old Testament.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; hey, one little thing here, though, Darrell: I have often, when I have read this, they will call him Immanuel, and he named the name Jesus. I always thought, you know, it is sort of like a story like you can imagine a grandmother talking to her granddaughter, and her granddaughter is pregnant, and the grandmother says to her granddaughter: Now, dear, you know, I would really love it if you could name your child after his grandfather, Cornelius; and the granddaughter says: Yes, Grandma; I will do that. And then you read in the story: And seven months later, she gave birth to a child and she named him George. It is like, wait a minute. You said you were going to name him Cornelius, and you named him George. Here, they will call him Immanuel; so, he named him Jesus. It is like, well, which is it? Immanuel...Jesus...Jesus...Immanuel...well, as you said, Darrell, it turns out they both mean the same thing. Jesus, the saving one; and he saves us because he is God with us; and Matthew said that fulfilled a prophecy.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; the prophecy actually came from Isaiah Chapter 7:14, where it says: Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. So, Matthew is kind of winking at his audience here. He is like, this is that virgin; this is that Son; and this is the one who is going to bring us the salvation that we are looking for; and it is really powerful to see that Matthew is closing gaps and tying it all together so that the people reading can know this is it; don't miss it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Matthew is always quoting the Old Testament—alluding to it—because as we have said, Matthew wrote for a Jewish reading audience; people who knew their Bible; and so, he knew he could do these quotes, or he could even just refer to a Bible passage without spelling it out and his readers would get it; they would know. Oh, yeah; that is Isaiah. Oh, yeah; that is Jeremiah. Oh, yeah; that happened when David was king. So, Matthew was able to capitalize on the scripture knowledge of his readers, in this case, going back to that word that he will be Immanuel: God with us. What an amazing promise that is: God with us. In fact, Matthew was a very good writer, and he included what, in literally terms, is called some *inclusio*[s], which we could also call “bookends”. So, he starts his gospel with something and then he ends with the same thing. So, in this case, he starts with Immanuel, Chapter 1, God with us; and he concludes in the last chapter, 28, with Jesus and the Great Commission: Surely I am with you. So, we've got Immanuel in Matthew 1; we've got Immanuel in Matthew 28; and the Immanuel of Jesus is never going to go away. He is always going to be with us.

DARRELL DELANEY

And that is a comforting thing for those who the Advent season may not be a season where they are rejoicing. Maybe they lost loved ones, maybe they are not very happy. Some of them call it blue Christmas. When people are sad, when people are homeless, when people have situations that are complicated, it is very comforting to know that Matthew is reminding us that God with us; in the mountains high and in the valleys low, and in all places in between, God is with us.

As we think about, like, practical application for this section, I was wondering what we could do as believers today to prepare for his Second Coming; and one of the first things we can do is begin spreading that good news to everyone, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and one way to do that...so, there is the famous line from St. Francis of Assisi, I think it was: Preach the gospel at all times, and if necessary, use words. I think one of the things the lesson of Immanuel teaches us, Darrell, is that sometimes we represent Christ and we preach the gospel by being present.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Jesus said: I was in prison and you visited me; so we go to the prisons, and we are with them...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We are God's presence; we are God with them, right? We go to the hospital to visit the sick; we go to the funeral home to visit the grieving; we go to the widow's house to visit the lonely. All of that is our participating, through the Holy Spirit, in this Immanuel idea. So, we preach the gospel by being with people in the sad and difficult situations of their lives.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think Joseph models that beautifully because he never says a word in the scriptures. He actually does what God commands him to do, and he is present with Mary; he is present as a family and as a father; and I think that model is very beautiful. As far as us, we are relieved because we don't always have to think of what we need to say, or we don't have to have eloquent speeches in our back pockets. We just need to go sit with people, and we need to be fully present with people. I think the second thing we can do, Scott, is to remind ourselves that even though Jesus promised this would be a trouble-filled world, that we are not left to our own devices because the Holy Spirit is with us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We said earlier, in this episode and in the previous one, when God comes into your life, things get more complicated, not less so; and Jesus said, too: You follow me, you are going to get persecuted. In this world, you will have trouble, Jesus said, but I have overcome the world, and I am with you. That is a beautiful thing. And of course, ultimately we know that because Jesus' name means *salvation*—because Jesus' name means *God with us*—the final enemy...the great enemy...death...also no longer has the last word.

DARRELL DELANEY

It's a beautiful thing to know that death does not have the final say. Most people thought that death was the period...the end...the amen; but it actually is the comma, because there are things that are coming after death that God has promised to those because he is the resurrection and the life. So, even in death or life, we belong to him. That is the Heidelberg Catechism question and answer first: What is your only comfort in life and death? That you belong, body and soul, to our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; in life and in death; and that is the great, great promise; and that is the God we serve. God never made the creation just to sort of tick down on its own and walk away. We are not Deists. We believe that God has remained intimately involved with us. He hasn't fallen asleep at the switch, Darrell. He is with us. He is attentive. He listens to our prayers; and now, by the Holy Spirit, we are temples of the Holy Spirit. God is with us and with all, thanks be to God.

DARRELL DELANEY

Thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We hope you will join us again next time as we study the story of Jesus' birth and celebrate what it means for us. Connect with us now at groundworkonline.com to share what *Groundwork* means to you, or to tell us what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

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