

Sermon or Lesson: Ordeal Of Mary And Joseph (NIV based)
[Lesson Questions included]

PASSAGES: Luke 1:26-35,38; Matthew 1:18-24; Luke 2:1-7; Matthew 2:11-15

INTRO: Have you ever signed up for some program, and then part way into that program you discovered that the experiences you were encountering in that program were not what you thought you were signing up for? Matter of fact, you definitely would not have signed up in the first place had you know what you would experience in that program?

As we are going to see in the ordeal of Mary and Joseph, following God's program does not always align with what we would like or expect.

READ: Luke 1:26-35,38 - Mary's Situation

[Lesson Question: In each of these passages, what challenges, difficulties, or hardships did Mary and Joseph go through as a result of following God's program? In what ways did their experiences align with or contradict what they probably expected for being the Lord's servants?]

SECTION POINT: Mary agreed to cooperate with God's program for her even though it meant her wedding and marriage would be greatly affected.

- - Mary was "highly favored" before God, i.e. she was righteous. (v.28)
 - - She was pledged to be married, and probably had formulated plans for the wedding, the marriage, and a life together with her future husband. (v.27)
 - - Mary was a virgin (v.34), suggesting she had no plans to get pregnant before she was officially married or to get pregnant by anyone else, which she voices concern about and questions (v.34) after being told by the angel that she is about to get pregnant (v.31).
 - - Mary identifies herself and proclaims herself to be "the Lord's servant" (v.38), suggesting she regards serving the Lord as her occupation, very dedicated and committed to fulfilling the tasks that the Lord has for her to do.
 - - Citing this basis or reason of being the Lord's servant, Mary agrees to cooperate with God's program (v.38), giving approval to become pregnant as the angel had described to her.
 - - Certainly, Mary was unaware of all the future ramifications of this choice to follow God's program for her.
 - - But she would know that this development would significantly alter or mess up her plans and activities of being a newlywed wife.
 - - Yet Mary was flexible and willing to commit to follow God's program for her.
-

READ: Matthew 1:18-24 - Joseph's Situation

SECTION POINT: Joseph experienced a God-caused crisis before he was even aware that God wanted him to cooperate with God's program.

- - Joseph "was a righteous man", therefore essentially also favored before God like Mary was. (v.19)
- - Certainly, Joseph was making plans and preparations for his upcoming marriage and subsequent life as a newlywed husband.
- - However, God injects a major change that seriously jeopardizes Joseph's marriage plans, which Joseph "finds" out is the pregnancy of his fiancée. (v.18)
- - At this point, Joseph does not know that this pregnancy is part of God's program for him and his fiancée, so he makes plans to break off the engagement and break up with Mary in an honorable quiet way. (v.19)
- - Maybe he even had an unpleasant conversation and confrontation with his now pregnant fiancé, not believing her 'wild' story about how this happened.
- - But God steps in to reassure and redirect Joseph that this pregnancy is not a terminal development for them but rather in actually is indeed an intended part of God's program. (vv.20-21)
- - So, Joseph agrees to cooperate with God's program, even though his personal plans for marriage would be significantly messed up. (v.24)
- - He too is completely unaware of all the future ramifications of this choice to follow God's program for him.

READ: Luke 2:1-7 - Mary And Joseph's Situation Together

SECTION POINT: Mary and Joseph encountered difficult situations even though they probably expected smooth trouble-free sailing in God's program.

- - Mary and Joseph traveled from Nazareth 70 miles (113 kilometers) south to Bethlehem, and even though Mary's pregnancy was nearly full-term, she may have walked. (v.4)
- - They arrived in Bethlehem and it is time to give birth, but there is no room in the 'inn' or lodging place. (Strong's #2646 - v.7)
- - Contrary to their desires, they were spending the night of the birth outside near the livestock feeding area probably located on the edge of town, and maybe under a shade tree that would protect livestock from the sun. (v.7 - manger, v.8 - shepherds nearby)
- - Note that there are no Greek words used here representing a 'stable', so they likely did not spend the night in some kind of covered hutch for livestock.
- - And even though there is available a Greek word for 'cave' in the New Testament (Strong's #4693), this word was not used here or in any other accounts of the birth of Christ.
- - Besides, staying in a cave would have been worse - piles and layers of animal defecation and wetness from urination, along with accompanying flies, maggots, dampness, and unventilated intense repugnant odors.
- - Dodging the numerous scatter animal droppings, Mary and Joseph would have found a clear spot where she gave birth probably on the ground on a towel, blanket, or cloak.

- - This occurred outside at night (v.8), so one of the things Joseph would have been doing is holding or attending to a torch or candle, assuming they had one and there was no wind to blow it out.
 - - Then she placed Him in a 'manger' - a feed trough for livestock designed to keep the feed from getting mixed and polluted with the animal droppings. (from Strong's #5336 - v.7)
 - - And the weather was not cold, otherwise Mary would have held the baby close to keep Him warm rather than lay him by himself in the feed trough.
 - - This was an extremely unpleasant situation - dirty, stinky, manure, flies, blood, afterbirth, etc. - but there probably was a well in the livestock feeding area that would have been useful for water cleanup, assuming they had something to carry the water in.
 - - God's program for Mary and Joseph here included making a long trip on foot while full-term pregnant, no indoor decent place to stay in while giving birth outside on the ground at night in a livestock feeding area in the midst of manure and flies.
 - - Going into this situation, Mary and Joseph would have been unaware this hardship is also an intended element of God's program.
-

READ: Matthew 2:11-15 - Mary And Joseph's Situation Later

SECTION POINT: As part of God's program, Mary and Joseph suddenly became targets for death, which was probably not what they thought they were signing up for when they agreed to cooperate with God's program.

- - A visit by Magi brings Mary and Joseph a seemingly excellent unexpected surprise: very expensive gifts.
 - - Perhaps moments later however, an extremely serious life-threatening situation develops – they have to flee for their lives in the middle of the night.
 - - They left in haste so they probably took few of their belongings.
 - - They probably had to walk fast at the beginning, in the darkness, carrying the child the whole trip.
 - - And then they had to travel at least 280 miles (451 kilometers) on foot to stay in a foreign country.
 - - Yet, God did provide them with the finances to support this escape trip.
 - - This too was part of God's program. (v.15b)
-

BIG IDEA: When you are going with God's program, things do not always go in a good and easy way you expect or would like them to.

IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS:

- - The setbacks, hardships, struggles, difficulties, crises, dangers, sufferings, failures, and etc. that you encounter and experience while being the Lord's servant may actually be intended parts of God's program.

- - As the Lord's servants, our job is to stay true to doing whatever God has for us, and let Him bring forth the results He intends.
 - - We should not quit, surrender, lose heart, fall apart, fade away, make excuses, avoid obstacles, try to rationalize quitting, nor blame others.
 - - Instead, we should expect that unexpected challenges, difficulties, and hardships may come upon us and then willingly endure what God has ordained for us as we faithfully follow His program.
-

Works Cited:

Bible. "The Holy Bible: New International Version." *The Bible Library CD-ROM*. Oklahoma City, OK: Ellis Enterprises, 1988.

"Strong's Greek Dictionary." *The Bible Library CD-ROM*. Oklahoma City, OK: Ellis Enterprises, 1988.

Copyrights:

Scriptures taken from Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc®
Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Copyright © 2016 Mel W. Coddington, and permission is hereby granted that this document may be used, copied, and distributed non-commercially to non-profit organizations, individuals, churches, ministries, and schools worldwide, provided the copies are distributed at no charge and retain this sources documentation as supplied herein. This document is not for sale, resale, or for use as a gift or premium to be offered in connection with solicitations or contributions.

File name: OrdealOfMaryAndJoseph-SermonOrLesson.____ (.htm, .doc, .pdf)
Translation used: NIV, quoted or referred to in various places within this document
Source: www.BelieverAssist.com
Updated: August 13, 2016