

CHRISTMAS SURPRISES



Surprise Pregnancy

Key idea:

Jesus' miraculous conception confronted Joseph and Mary with a scandalous, faith-testing situation that required radical obedience, revealing how God fulfills His ancient promises through the most surprising means.

Key text:

Matthew 1:18-25

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” — which means, “God with us.” ²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Key points:

1. Before they were married or had sexual relations, Joseph discovered that Mary was pregnant, but was told by an angel that Mary was still a virgin and the pregnancy had come about by the power of the Holy Spirit.
2. God's will is often fulfilled in surprising ways - Even when people understood God's promises, they couldn't imagine how He would actually fulfill them.
3. Jesus is Emmanuel - "God with us" - Christmas is about God Himself coming to be with us and for us, not sending someone else to save us.
4. Jesus came to save us from our sins - This is our greatest need, even when we're focused on other problems (political, social, economic).

5. Trusting and obeying God's will is often costly - Both Joseph and Mary faced scandal and misunderstanding, but they chose faithful obedience anyway.

Discussion Questions:

1. What were the three stages of Jewish marriage customs, and why is understanding betrothal important to this story?
2. Why was Joseph's situation such a difficult dilemma? What does his response tell us about his character?
3. Joseph chose to divorce Mary quietly rather than expose her to public disgrace, even though he believed she had sinned. How does this model of righteousness balance truth and mercy in our own relationships?
4. How does the virgin birth fulfill prophecies from both Genesis 3:15 and Isaiah 7:14 in unexpected ways?
5. How does the virgin birth challenge our understanding of what is scientifically possible, and what does this reveal about God's power to work beyond natural laws?
6. The name 'Emmanuel' means 'God with us.' How does knowing that God came to be with us, not just send someone else, change how you view your struggles and challenges?
7. Jesus came to save us from our sins, yet people often look for salvation from political, economic, or cultural problems instead. What distractions keep you from focusing on your real need for forgiveness?
8. Both Joseph and Mary faced scandal and costly social consequences for their obedience. What might faithful obedience to biblical sexual ethics or other countercultural commands cost you today?
9. Joseph woke from his dream and immediately obeyed despite not understanding everything. How can we cultivate this kind of immediate, trusting obedience when God's direction seems unclear or difficult?
10. The teaching states that trusting and obeying God's will may be costly in the short term but brings eternal dividends. Can you share an example from your life where obedience was difficult but ultimately proved God's wisdom?

Practical Applications:

1. Confession Practice: Set aside 30 minutes this week for honest confession before God. Don't make excuses—just come clean like David did. Experience the freedom of forgiveness.
2. Trust Exercise: Identify one area where you're struggling to understand or trust God's will. Write out a prayer like Mary's: "I am the Lord's servant. May it be as you have said to me."
3. Costly Obedience: Is there an area where you know what God's Word says but you're hesitant to obey because of potential cost? Share this with one trusted person in the group and ask them to pray for you and check in with you.
4. Emmanuel Meditation: Spend time each day this week meditating on the truth that Jesus is "God WITH us"—not against you, but for you. Journal about what this means for your current struggles.
5. Listen to [Joseph's Song](#) by Michael Card or [read the lyrics](#) to help you meditate on the staggering difficulty Joseph faced when the identity of the Child in Mary's womb was revealed to him.