

# Marry The Girl!

## December 22, 2019

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### Matthew 1:18-25

[18] Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit;

[19] and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

[20] But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; [21] she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

[22] All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

[23] "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel" which means, God with us.

[24] When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife, [25] but knew her not until she had borne a son; and he called his name Jesus.

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Grace to you, and peace, from God Our Father and Our Lord and Savior Jesus The Christ!

One of my very favorite Christmas songs I learned from Peter, Paul and Mary. It is called "The Cherry Tree Carol." I want us now to sing it together. It will help to take us into the Christmas Gospel 'Orchard' where some Christmas Gospel fruit is ripe for the eating.

**When Joseph was an old man, an old man was he  
He married Virgin Mary, the Queen of Galilee  
He married Virgin Mary, the Queen of Galilee**

**And one day as they went walking, all in the garden green  
There were berries and cherries as thick as may be seen  
There were berries and cherries as thick as may be seen**

**Then Mary said to Joseph, so meek and so mild  
"Joseph, gather me some cherries for I am with child"  
"Joseph, gather me some cherries for I am with child"  
Then Joseph flew in anger, in anger flew he**

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**"Let the father of the baby gather cherries for thee  
Let the father of the baby gather cherries for thee"**

**Then up spoke baby Jesus, from out Mary's womb  
"Bow down ye tallest tree that my mother might have some  
Bow down ye tallest tree that my mother might have some"**

**So bent down the tallest tree to touch Mary's hand  
Said she, "Oh look now Joseph, I have cherries at command"  
Said she, "Oh look now Joseph, I have cherries at command"**

**When Joseph was an old man, an old man was he  
He married Virgin Mary, the Queen of Galilee  
He married Virgin Mary, the Queen of Galilee**

Now, we all know the story. Mary becomes pregnant with Jesus by the Holy Spirit. Joseph doesn't know about it. He finds out about it and then decides to divorce Mary quietly. Whatever she has told him, he doesn't believe. Then, the night before he is to appear in court to file the divorce papers, he has a dream. In the dream, an angel appears and says, "Don't be afraid. It is God's doing. You may go ahead and marry the girl, if you choose. Name the child Jesus. He will save people from their sins." Then when Joseph awakes he goes and gets Mary and they go to see the Rabbi and get married.

It's a nice story, don't you agree? But, what does it have for you and me?

Most of you are old enough to have experienced something in life that has not gone the way you had planned. And, because of that you experienced great distress. And you felt you had no choice but to react in a certain way.

It might not be your wife getting pregnant by someone else. It could be a spouse or child or parent dying suddenly. It could be a brain aneurysm. Or cancer. It could be your spouse is having an affair. It could be a teenager getting hooked on drugs. It could be getting fired from a job, with no advance warning. It could be your best friends, a married couple, with no obvious signs of trouble, announcing the marriage is over. Or, it could be a medicine you start to take for one problem that causes 10 more problems even worse.

What do you do when life throws you a screwball like the ones Carl Hubbell threw in the 1934 All-Star Game to strike out five hitters in a row? The hitters were Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Jimmie Fox, Al Simmons and Joe Cronin.

Listen to how Barbara Brown Taylor reflects on Joseph's dilemma:

"According to Matthew, the whole grand experiment hangs on what happens with Joseph. If Joseph

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believes the angel, everything is on. The story can continue.... But if Joseph does not believe, then everything grinds to a halt. If he wakes up from his dream, shakes his head, and goes on to the courthouse to file the divorce papers, then Mary is an outcast forever - either killed by her family for disgracing them and herself or disowned by them and left to scratch out her living however she can, feeding herself and her illegitimate child on whatever she can beg or steal.”<sup>1</sup>

“In our own age of people who raise children without benefit of marriage, the issue of legitimacy sounds a bit quaint, but the heart of this story is much bigger and more profound than that. The heart of the story is about a just man who wakes up one day to find his life wrecked: his wife pregnant, his trust betrayed, his name ruined, his future revoked. It is about a righteous man who surveys a mess he has had absolutely nothing to do with and decides to believe that God is present in it. With every reason to disown it all, to walk away from it in search of a cleaner, more controlled life with an easier, more conventional wife, Joseph does not do that. He claims the scandal and gives it his name. He owns the mess ‘he legitimates it’ and the mess becomes the place where the Messiah is born.”

Joseph “... is the one in the story who is most like us, presented day by day by day with circumstances beyond our control, with lives we would never have chosen for ourselves, tempted to divorce ourselves from it all when an angel whispers in our ears: Do not fear. God is here. It may not be the life you had planned, but God may be born here too, if you will permit it.”

“... God’s birth requires human partners - a Mary, a Joseph, a you, and a me - willing to believe the impossible, willing to claim the scandal, to adopt it and to give it our names, accepting the whole sticky mess and rocking it in our arms. Our lives, our losses, our Lord. And not just each of us alone but the whole church of God, surveying a world that seems to have run amuck and proclaiming over and over again to anyone who will hear that God is still with us, that God is still being born in the mess and through it, within and among those who will still believe what angels tell them in their dreams.”<sup>2</sup>

What do you do when life throws you a mess you aren’t prepared for and haven’t in any way expected and for which you have no responsibility?

You want to know? You really want to know? Well, you marry the girl, for Christ’s sake!

**When Joseph was an old man, an old man was he  
He married Virgin Mary, the Queen of Galilee  
He married Virgin Mary, the Queen of Galilee**

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Gospel Medicine by Barbara Brown Taylor, Cowley Publications, Boston, 1995, p.156.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. pp. 156-157.

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