

So, Joseph, what are you going to do? You weren't counting on this one. You met a nice virtuous girl--or so you thought. You took the plunge and made her your wife to be. She's only grown dearer to your heart.

That's why this is so painful. You've been looking forward to starting a family, and here she is--pregnant. Of all the girls, you never thought that Mary would be the one to do something like this.

Now, that would be bad enough, but listen to her excuse: she says that the baby was conceived by the Holy Spirit as an angel declared God's Word to her. Wow.

So, Joseph, what are you going to do? You're a righteous man. Clearly, this marriage can't happen, and goodness knows you've got grounds to end this engagement. You're a loving man, too, and no matter what Mary's done, you don't want her to suffer. Maybe she's got the right idea, packing a bag and heading to her cousin's house to lay low for a while. Why don't you follow that cue and just divorce her quietly, because it's going to take an act of God to keep the two of you together now....

...Which is, of course, exactly what happens next. An angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream and says, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins." The angel confirms Mary's story: the Child is conceived by the Holy Spirit. It's going to be a boy, and Joseph is to name Him "Jesus." Yeshua, which means "Yahweh saves." This Child will not just be a great prophet or priest or preacher. This Child is God Himself. It's the truth, Joseph.

So, Joseph wakes up and marries Mary after all. Life has gone from normal to scandal to God's intervention. But when he takes her for a wife, Joseph knows that Mary has kept her word and her virtue; he has the Lord's Word on that. However, don't discount the awkward position in which he finds himself; he now must defend the story he himself didn't believe when Mary first told it to him. "Yes, I'm still engaged to Mary. Yes, she's pregnant, but that doesn't bother me because the father is the Holy Spirit. How do I know? An angel told me in a dream." Really.

Amazing that neither Joseph nor Mary are ruined by worrying about what other people are going to think; instead, they place their trust in the Word which they have heard. Of course they are going to have their human moments; moments of doubt, fear, apprehension, fatigue, just to name a few; but in the face of all kinds of pressure, their bottom line is simple. This is what God said. Doesn't look good; doesn't look likely; shoot, it doesn't look possible...but this is what God said. And so we're going to go with it. That kind of acceptance is the essence of faith.

Remembering Joseph's experience gives you and me the opportunity to look in the mirror this evening. How foolish are you willing to look for the sake of Christ? How much pressure am I willing to endure from acquaintances and colleagues, family and friends for going with what

God has said...and for making my life decisions accordingly? Some might try to deflect such self-examination by saying: Well, of course Joseph and Mary could stand strong—they had angels appear to them! But hold on—the same God who sent angel messengers to Mary and Joseph has sent you his message in written form. That is no less of a miracle, if you know how the Bible has come down to us. We can't wiggle out of it that easily.

What price are you willing to pay for being known as a follower of Jesus? How much do you care about what an unbelieving world thinks? God has communicated His way of life to you in his Word—are you letting his words be your life's bottom line?

What do you think would happen if you renewed your commitment to living like Joseph and Mary—saying, this is what God said, and we're going to go with it? Of course, that means a renewed commitment to knowing what God HAS said in the Bible, learning and studying his letter to you. So what would happen to you if you renewed your commitment to making God's Word your bottom line in all decisions? What would happen in your home if the Word became the heart of your family life? How might this community be changed if we really lived out that Word out there? How might this congregation look different if we renewed our commitment to living out God's Word, saying, God said it—we're going to go with it? Mary and Joseph, human as they were, show us what true courage is like. Doesn't look possible, but this is what God has said, are we're going to go with it. No matter what the consequences are for living this way, we're going to go with it, because what matters is being found faithful by God. What matters is living in his grace now and in His glory forever.

And let's not forget that the child that Mary gave birth to and that Joseph protected and raised is our redemption. He escaped death as a baby because the time for his sacrifice had not yet come; but he would not escape death forever. He would be put to death at the hands of men in his early thirties. This was no mistake. It was the required price for the sin of all people. It was the required price for your sin. Jesus himself would know the full meaning of: "My Father said it, so I'm going to go with it." He would go with it all the way to the cross and the tomb, so that you would be declared innocent. Not guilty. An unblemished record is yours. Jesus took your sentence. Put all your trust in this. And if you need an example of what to do next, look to the courageous and very real people entrusted with taking care of God's Son for a time—and learn from them this point of view: "Doesn't look good; doesn't look likely; shoot, it doesn't look possible...but this is what God said. And so we're going to go with it." Amen.