

Questions for reflection, application, and discussion

1. When many think of Mary and Joseph and the first Christmas, they think of a peaceful scene defined by the joy of a baby and the excitement of unexpected visitors talking about angels and bringing gifts. In reality Jesus' birth was an event that brought an incredible crisis into their lives, resulting in a great deal of sacrifice and uncertainty.
  - a. Do you agree that most people see the first Christmas as a scene of peace and joy and miss the trauma that Mary and Joseph went through? If so, why do you think this is the case?
  - b. Read Matthew 1:20-23. What questions did the angel answer? What questions and concerns did the angel fail to address and/or answer? When he called Joseph to take Mary as his wife, why did God leave so many questions unanswered?
2. Can you imagine yourself in Joseph's shoes, trying to explain to your family your decision to go ahead and marry Mary, in spite of her pregnancy?
  - a. What do you think he told them? What do you think they believed?
  - b. How do you think Joseph's family responded to what he said and did?
3. While it is interesting to read of the crisis that Mary's pregnancy and Jesus coming brought to Mary and Joseph, it is important to remember that the Bible is always practical, and thus we should always seek to read it looking for personal application.
  - a. While the events of Mary and Joseph's life were truly unique, what principles can and should we learn and apply to our lives from the story of the crises they faced.
  - b. Why is it important to see and understand the pain, rejection, and crisis they faced? How does understanding this impact your understanding of the story of Jesus' birth? What wrong conclusions can people come to if they see the story of Jesus birth only as a story of joy and celebration?
4. When the angel came to Joseph in Matthew 1, he not only told Joseph that Mary was a virgin, that the pregnancy was the result of a miracle, and the child was the promised Messiah, but he also challenged Joseph "*do not fear to take Mary as your wife*"
  - a. Why would fear have kept Joseph from taking Mary as his wife? What did he have to be fearful of?
  - b. After the angel told him that Mary was a virgin, and that her child was of God, did that remove the possible causes of Joseph's fear? Why or why not? What did he have to fear, tempting him not to marry Mary, even after knowing this?
  - c. In his message Pastor Mike said that one of the primary reasons people do not surrender their lives to Jesus is fear. What did he mean by this? Do you agree? What is the root cause of this fear?
  - d. Read Hebrews 11:6; How does this verse describe faith? What is the correlation between a lack of faith and fear? In the life of a person who claims to be a follower of Christ, is an unwillingness to obey Christ in areas of the person's life always rooted in fear and a lack of faith? Explain your answer.