



Matthew 1:18-19

18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. 19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

Well we made it through three days of the ge-

nealogy of Jesus, the historical record of Jesus' family tree that both Matthew and Luke chose to start their gospels with. And the expectations for the original reader couldn't be any higher. You see at the time of Jesus, the exile continued in people's hearts, God's promises felt like ancient history, Roman tyrants like Herod the Great held power, and it had been more than 400 years since God had sent a prophet. Yet as we've seen in the opening 17 verses of Matthew's gospel, Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham is here. The culmination of all God's promises and all of the Old Testament has arrived in one man, a great warrior king like David. The exile is over, the king is here, to defeat the Romans and to re-establish the Jewish nation in its rightful lands. And so the expectations are high. But the reader is also highly intrigued, and a little wrong-footed. Do you remember

from yesterday the 39 repetitions of 'father of,' and then the hugely significant break in verse 16, with the momentum of the genealogy demanding that Joseph be the father of Jesus, but instead verse 16 says, 'and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.' So we've just worked through a huge genealogy of Joseph's line only to emphasize the fact that Joseph is not Jesus' father! What's going on here?

And so with very much interest we now turn to verse 18 which begins with 'This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about:' and the answer is: illegitimately – or at least that's how it would have seemed to Joseph. And you know, in a society like their's, where even being engaged was so serious that to end one you needed a divorce, this stigma would have

haunted Mary and Joseph for the rest of their lives. And it never left Jesus either. In John 8:19 Jesus's opponents taunt him with words to the effect of 'at least we know who our father is.'

And again we can't help but feel here so strongly that Jesus became one of us. Jesus' dad discovered that his fiancé was pregnant, and neither of them were ever be able to live it down. 'Oh sure it was the Holy Spirit,' your from Nazareth aren't you, I hear there are a lot of pregnant virgins running around in those parts.' My family's not perfect, how about yours? Teased when you were younger? Did you have a rough childhood? So did the Lord Jesus. You know we lose track of Joseph after chapter two, he probably died, perhaps you grew up without a dad, so did Jesus, shoulder the responsibility for you family, so did Jesus, he came down and he became one of us – so

he can relate to us, and we can relate to him.

Jesus wasn't the son of Joseph, he was the son of God. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And because of the nature of his birth people would have whispered behind his back right throughout his youth. When you became a Christian, you too were born again, and you too can now call yourself a son or daughter of God. And with it, just as happened to the Lord Jesus, will come all sorts of persecution – which is a Christian word for trouble and grief and trials caused by people who are hostile to the Christian faith. In Matthew 10, Jesus tells his disciples, his closest followers, that they will be hated by everyone because of him. And in 2 Timothy 3:12, one of the greatest early Christians, Paul, says it as a fact 'everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecut-

ed.' Jesus and Joseph were, and we will be.

Maybe right now you're feeling the heat of persecution; some trouble, grief or trial because you are a Christian. Perhaps you're feeling excluded by friends or people at work, or maybe you're single and are finding it hard to meet someone with a faith like yours, or perhaps something far worse than both of these. Well Jesus knows how all this feels and more, right from the moment he was born. Why not pray to him about it, ask him to help shoulder your burden throughout this tough time. Because he will if you open up to him in prayer, and in fact he promises to do so when he says that his burden is easy and his yoke is light.

But the flip side of this is that maybe you are not experiencing any persecution at the moment and if so praise God for such a bless-

ing! But know that it will come, and don't be surprised when it does, because 'everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ will be persecuted.' But if it doesn't come, then perhaps you might need to ask yourself, 'am I ashamed of Jesus'? Jesus is not ashamed of you, he's accepted you just as you are, just like accepted Tamar and Rahab and David into his family, and just like he accepts all who come to him in repentance and faith. But later in chapter 10 Jesus has these words of warning for those that are ashamed of him. 32 "Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. 33 But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.

Why not take a moment now to reflect on this passage of Scripture yourself. How might Joseph have felt when he heard the news

that Mary was pregnant? What about Mary in this moment? You might consider Joseph's good character, and what it would have been like for Jesus and his family growing up under this cloud. Perhaps you grew up under a similar cloud, how does it make you feel that Jesus went through exactly what you did? Why not pray to him about it now? Or pray for strength through persecution. Or pray for courage that you might not be ashamed of Jesus and that you might be bold, even today, to acknowledge him before others.