

JJ<sup>1</sup>

The worst dreams we have are the ones that leave us in a cold sweat when we wake up, or leave us filled with dread, heartache or great disappointment. They're those dreams that are so disturbing that they keep us up. Sometimes we just even have to get up and start our day much sooner than planned to get our minds off that terrible dream and back into reality.

One day for Joseph, his worst dreams and fears came true—or so he thought.

Matthew tells us that Mary “was pledged in marriage to Joseph.” At some time before our text, Mary and Joseph stood before family and friends and publicly made their vows to one another. They were legally married, but it is important to remember that in the Jewish culture up to a year went by before a married couple would live together in the same house and enjoy that special physical union of husband and wife.

Just like any engaged couple today waits in eager expectation for their wedding day, you can be certain the same was true of Mary and Joseph. Joseph would have spent that time preparing, even building their new home. How fitting since Joseph was a carpenter.

Now picture that day when Joseph's world began to fall apart. Matthew says, “Before they came together, she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.” We are not told how Joseph found out, we just know that he did. Just think of how fast news travels around here! The same would have been true of little Nazareth.

It can be hard for us to really understand what Joseph was going through because of cultural differences and we know the whole story that the child in Mary's womb was a child conceived by the Holy Spirit. Either Joseph didn't know this at all yet, or he didn't believe Mary's story when she told him. And really, can you blame him if he didn't believe her? If you or I heard it, we'd probably just see it as an elaborate story to explain away infidelity.

Matthew writes, “Joseph, her husband, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her. So he decided to divorce her privately.” Joseph was a man who loved God and his Word. He, therefore, also had every intention of keeping the 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment. He wasn't going to live in a marriage that was broken from the get-go. According to Old Testament law, Joseph had two options. One was that she

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<sup>1</sup> JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for “Jesus Help”. It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

would face the punishment due an adulteress—being publicly stoned to death (Lev. 20:10). But Joseph obviously wasn't out for blood, loving Mary too much to let that happen. Instead he decided to make use of the divorce law the Lord had permitted his people to have because of the hardness of their hearts (Mt. 19:8). And so according to that law, Joseph was going to hand her a certificate of divorce and dissolve their marriage quietly.

Now still you might wonder why Joseph couldn't forgive her. If he thought the child wasn't his but still truly loved her, why would he do this? Well, this is where we have to remember one cultural aspect in particular. This apparent offense had two consequences. Not only did Joseph think Mary was unfaithful to him, but also this son wouldn't be his. Remember, for the Old Testament Israelite lineage was directly tied to their inheritance in the Promised Land. If this child wasn't Joseph's, the father could come and lay claim to Joseph's inheritance in the Promised Land. Understanding these things helps put us in Joseph's sandals and understand his actions which weighed heavy on his heart.

Even before Joseph went to bed that night, I'm sure he was filled with fear and worry. "How could this happen? What's going to happen to me? What's going to

happen to Mary!? How am I ever going to sleep tonight?"

Well, Joseph did eventually fall asleep. But instead of terrible dreams assailing him all night long, he has the best dream of his life! "...an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 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.' "

You can just imagine Joseph's reaction in his own dream, "Is this real? Is this happening? The Lord wants me to do the complete opposite of what I decided I would do! He wants me to take Mary home! And what's more, you're telling me that this child growing in her womb isn't from an act of

adultery but was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit!?"

How do you think you would react to that? We would probably just wake up and think, "No way I'm doing that!" But look how Joseph reacts. We are simply told that "When Joseph woke up from his sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him. He took Mary home as his wife, but he was not intimate with her

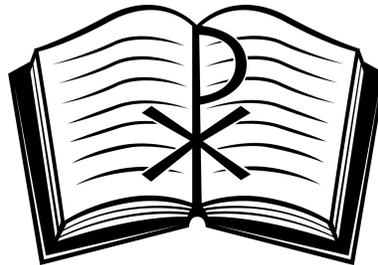


until she gave birth to her firstborn son. And he named him Jesus.”

With that, Joseph’s fear was gone! Why? Because **JESUS WAS COMING!** Perhaps he even thought, “How silly of me! I know Mary better than that! She would never have done such a thing! I should have remembered those prophecies of old. Both of us are descendants of King David. She is a pregnant virgin. How amazing! God is keeping his promise! In her womb is Immanuel, God with us!!! I am to name him Jesus, the **LORD** is salvation. Of course this should be his name because he will save us from our sins!”

When we wake up from a terrible dream, we get relief when we realize it wasn’t real, even if it takes a while to set in. But for Joseph, you could say the opposite happened. Instead of waking up and discovering that his dream wasn’t true, Joseph sees that it was reality! And this is what took away his fear.

One of Joseph’s worst nightmares became a reality—or so he thought. God showed him it was the complete opposite. Sometimes our fears and worst nightmares become reality, too. While we shouldn’t expect to have them suddenly revealed to us as the greatest good, God does promise to use even our worst-nightmare-become-reality for our good (Rom. 8:28). But most of the time, we’re not going to see the good right away like Joseph did.



Sometimes that good won’t be seen until years down the road. Sometimes that good won’t be seen until heaven. But there is something we can see, believe and hold as our reality right now even when nightmares become reality: **JESUS HAS COME** and **JESUS IS COMING** again, **SO DON’T BE AFRAID!**

Jesus has come to live the ultimate nightmare for us. Every single day of his life, he woke up and battled Satan to the bitter end of every temptation. Every single day of his life, he held on to a perfect, never wavering faith in his heavenly Father. Every single day of his life, he perfectly loved all until the nightmare truly came in his suffering on the cross. It was there he endured the ultimate nightmare of an eternity in hell for *you!*

Yes, your sin and my sin put him there, but he went there willingly, all so that he could save us from our sins and thereby take away every fear from our hearts. The greatest fear has been removed. We will not die, but live! And we shall see that life in the fullest when Jesus comes again on the Last Day.

Friends, Jesus has taken away the greatest fear—the fear of death and hell. If he has taken away our greatest fears by keeping his greatest promises, then, friends, we have no reason to fear that he won’t keep every other promise as well. When fears and nightmares become reality, Jesus is right there with us. He has

made his home in your heart through the gift of faith and will one day come to take you safely home to heaven. Until that day comes, he will be with you, guarding and protecting you every step of the way and taking away all of your fears. **JESUS HAS COME** and **JESUS IS COMING** again...**SO DON'T BE AFRAID.** Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

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