

## ACCEPTING THE CHILD

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Once someone brought me and the kids a meal. It was very thoughtful. It looked like meatloaf and that's what we all eagerly thought it was, until we bit into it. Suddenly it was very quiet around the table. The older ones politely moved their napkins to their mouths. But one of the youngest just blurted out, "Yuck! What is it?!" To this day I don't know what it was but it wasn't going to be eaten by us, and as appreciative of the person's kindness as we were, we threw it in the garbage.

When I saw the neighbor later and she asked about it. All I could say was, "You shouldn't have." (And I meant you shouldn't have!) Then she said, "Did you like it?" Oh, now what to say? "Ahh, you know ... there's not a bite of it left in the house."

**"Yuck! What  
is it?!"**

This got me thinking of Christmas presents in which we might say, "You shouldn't have." Anyone?

Here are a couple that I came across and if you gave them to me, I would say, "You shouldn't have."



For Advent this year we are reading in Matthew about the very first Christmas. The first account in the NT of the first Christmas. Last week we saw that Jesus graciously entered our dysfunctional family tree and did something momentous and genesis-like for all of us. Today we are going to see that Joseph gets a present that, if you will, he could have said, "You shouldn't have." What was it? He didn't say that. Why?

Read/Pray

(Noting in reading the juxtaposition of the words betrothed, husband, and divorce and then explaining that betrothal back then and there was considered a legal marriage even though the woman had not been moved into the house or relations consummated.)

(Noting in reading the first direct speech in the NT is, "Fear not." This has to do with the stature of angels and with our chronic dis-ease in life since we are sinners.)

I think if we were to come up with a word for these seven verses it would be "accepting." Joseph accepted the news from the angel, accepted Mary as his wife, and accepted Jesus as his stepchild. While "you shouldn't have" means you don't really want to take that gift into your life, and while Joseph could have easily thought this about God's coming to him and Mary the way he did, Joseph takes the "gift" in. As with all gifts, they are not only given but accepted. God gives Jesus. Joseph accepts Jesus.

We often say, "I've accepted Jesus" and add, "as my personal Lord and Savior." In the NT Joseph is the first to say, "I've accepted Jesus." But what does that mean – then to Joseph and now to us? This passages tells us that it

means three things. It means Intellectually Answering Questions, Socially Going Against the Grain, and Volitionally Bowing the Head, Bending the Knee.

Accepting the Christmas Child, Accepting Jesus means answering three questions. Did Jesus live? Was and is he uniquely God with us? Does he save us from our sin?

Broadly speaking when you go into the library there is fiction and there is non-fiction. Which is Jesus in? From all the ancient documents available to us and against all the standards of ancient history, if anyone, if anyone can be located as an actual historical figure, Jesus can be. He is in the non-fiction section and perhaps most everyone already agrees with this. However, the question really is whether we give him serious, reasoned, non-fiction attention.

That kind of attention must face the NT claim about Jesus, and Jesus' own claim about himself, that he is unique (one of a kind, no other like him) as God with us. The Holy Spirit bringing Mary to pregnancy, coupled with the God-with-us Immanuel name that is attached to Jesus, asserts this. Each of us will make a thumbs up or thumbs down response to him being uniquely God with us.<sup>1</sup>

Other religions have leaders who found enlightenment about how to reach God or peace. But Jesus doesn't do that. He says he simply is God.

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<sup>1</sup> Don't retreat into saying Jesus is a good teacher because good teachers don't say such things. Crazy people do but not good teachers.

And God-with-us means that he is not apart but among, not apart but within, not back then or over there, but even here and even now.

Twice in the seven verses a name for the child is given. There are two. Besides Immanuel meaning God-with-us there is, before that one, the name, Jesus. That too has a meaning.

Jesus is a Greek version of the name Joshua which means Yahweh (God) saves. "Immanuel" said who he is and how he is – God with us. "Jesus" says who he is and what he does. He, as God, saves from sin.

As before, there is a question -- can he? Does he? You don't have to understand how he does any more than you have to understand how headache relief works. But you have to think there's something to what he claims such that you give him a try. There isn't a real accepting of Christ without this.

A man named GK Chesterton said, It isn't that Jesus has been tried and found wanting; he's been found difficult and not tried. To accept Jesus means to try him. Have you thought ... and tried him?

Accepting Jesus for Joseph and us means to Socially Go Against the Grain. Why do I say this? For these reasons. Joseph knows he is not the man who made Mary pregnant. He is also described as a faithful and good man and because of that he is going to divorce Mary. A good man, one who cares about God, is not going to wink at this immorality. So to now change course is going to leave him open to all the other good people who care about God thinking that he is winking at immorality. He's going to feel

their questions, their judgment. See Abraham as our father.

Or, even though he knows he is not the guy, by proceeding with the marriage, he's going to face all those people thinking he is the guy, that he jumped the gun. Wedding date and six months later, a baby. What are we thinking about the couple with that math? What would they think? He would face stigma, rumors.

If you and I follow Jesus with a bunch of people who are following Jesus, we may not know questioning glances and rejecting words. Although these were, in Joseph's case, people of God. But it is almost inevitable that you and I, attached devotedly to Jesus, will, by the world at large, be looked at as fanatics, as narrow-minded, as weak-minded, even mean spirited. Go to the university, to media centers, to the high school and you will find this so. Jesse Ventura, whose claim to fame is professional wrestling and once being the governor of Minnesota, gave voice to what I am talking about when he said, 'Religion is a "sham and a crutch for weak-minded people who need strength in numbers."

Accepting Jesus means accepting, taking the heat in the kitchen. Don't be offensive, please. But do know that saying Yes to God is going to mean saying No to other things and that will somehow somewhere rub somebody wrong. It did in Joseph's day and it does in ours. He was willing and I think it was he more wanted God than status quo with people. How about you and me?

Accepting Jesus means, thirdly, volitionally bowing the head, bending the knee. Where do we see this? Several places. First, Joseph had made a decision to

divorce Mary. Then he's asked to do otherwise. He takes in the new information, reconsiders his choices, and bends his way to God's way. Some people don't take in new information very well. They have no reverse gear on their mental transmission.

Second, Joseph was told what to name the child. I remember my mother-in-law cutting our daughter's hair without having spoken to us about it first. I didn't like that. I certainly wouldn't have liked her entering the birthing room and telling us what we'd name our child. But that is exactly what God did. You shall name him Jesus. The real father tells the stepfather what the name is and Joseph bends to God's command.<sup>2</sup>

Third, what was Joseph told to name the child? *Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins.* It doesn't say, as a first thing to say about Jesus, that he'll give people wisdom or show them love, although these are true. What is told us is that he shall save us from our sins. That means Joseph had to bow his head, bend his knee to admitting a sin problem. It's nice to unwrap a present from your best friend but what if it's a bathroom scale? It's from a friend and it saying there is a problem.

In sum, when I am driving I like seeing the yield sign ... for other drivers. I like them yielding to me. But acceptance of Jesus, if it means anything at all, it means having forever before you a yield sign, where you and I yield to God. There is no real Christianity in us, if we are not bowing the head and bending the knee to Jesus.

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<sup>2</sup> Later, when Joseph names Jesus, he is legally claiming the child, doing the equivalent of signing his name on the father line of the birth certificate.

I've accepted Jesus and yet this matter, my way or his, comes to me daily. Does it not you? Have you surrendered? Are you surrendering? There is no meaningful acceptance of Jesus without this.

John Calvin once said, My heart I offer to you, sincerely and promptly. Joseph doesn't speak at all in the Christmas stories but if he did, this is what he would say, because that is what he did – God's will, sincerely and promptly. In so doing he is the first man to accept Christ. Let's you and I join him in doing so.

*If you would like to talk with someone about this message or your spiritual life, or to have someone pray with you, the pastors and elders of the church would welcome your call.*

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