

Speaking to the soul



Joseph

Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly. Matthew 1:19

At the centre of the account of Jesus' birth is a man about whom we know very little. Joseph was the legal father of Jesus, but after Jesus' birth, we meet Joseph on only one occasion, when the family visit to Jerusalem for Passover when Jesus was 12 years old.

Although it is not detailed anywhere, we get the distinct impression that Mary was a widow by the time Jesus' public ministry began. One verse in the New Testament tells us that Joseph was an artisan (Matthew 13:55) and it is generally assumed that he was a carpenter - but we can't even be sure of that. The Greek word used for artisan also refers to those who work with iron or stone.

Although we know very little about this extremely important man, we do know about his character. In today's verse, he is described as a "righteous man", which means that he was concerned to be obedient to the law.

That made life incredibly difficult for him, because he was engaged to a woman who was pregnant. Engagement, at the time, was a much deeper commitment than it is today, and it could only be brought to an end by death or divorce. When a woman who was engaged to be married became pregnant by another man, the original penalty was death by stoning, but by the time of Mary's betrothal to Joseph, it had become divorce.

So, according to the law, Joseph was obliged to divorce Mary. But he was a gracious and sensitive man and, although he was eager to obey the law, the last thing he wanted to do was humiliate Mary. Therefore, he resolved to divorce her quietly. Ultimately, an angel stepped in to change things but, still, I warm to the way in which Joseph set about handling this difficult situation.

Life is full of awkward situations and challenges. I thank God for the Josephs of this world who are good and honourable

people, always striving to do what is kindest and most honouring to God.

QUESTION

What do you learn from the way in which Joseph handled his predicament?

PRAYER

Loving Father, help me to live so close to you that I will always make wise and careful decisions. Amen

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