



The Dream of Saint Joseph by

Philippe de Champaigne, 1642

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Andy

Opening Prayer

We praise you for the light that transformed the future for Mary and Joseph, that lit up the sky on the night of the Jesus's birth,

continues to shine today. May each

day be a new dawn, rich in promise and filled with your love.

Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven.....

Amen

Bible Reading Matthew 1:18-25

The Birth of Jesus Christ

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is 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."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us." When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

*Holy words, Holy wisdom,
Thanks be to God.*

Reflection

In ancient Jewish culture, a couple being betrothed was different to our custom of being engaged. It was then a legally binding commitment, but couples lived separately until after being officially declared married and only later had a wedding ceremony. This explains why when Mary became pregnant, Joseph had in mind to divorce her quietly to avoid public disgrace. But the messenger sent from God tells Joseph that something really different and amazing has happened, that the baby has been conceived from God. That Joseph should not be afraid to marry Mary because the birth of this baby will change the world and will go on changing it. After receiving God's message, Mary and Joseph were officially declared married, but their



actual wedding ceremony happened later after the Nativity events. We don't read about this in the gospels because the emphasis is very much on the miraculous birth of Jesus.

God came in Jesus Christ to make possible a personal relationship with each of us. This was achieved through Jesus being both human and of God. His humanity, his life and teachings being something that we can closely relate to, as he shared our human emotions. He came to fill a deep need in all of us, to know that we are loved, to have purpose in life and that after this life our spirit will return to be with God.

It was a former Archbishop of Canterbury Michael Ramsey who talked about 'a space within each of us that only God can fill' Which was later described as a 'God-shaped space'. He said we have to let God into that space within us, so that he is in our hearts and our minds.

That is the true message of Christmas –the birth of Christ is very different from the commercial festival it has become over the years, but we have an opportunity to focus on the real meaning of Christmas. Jesus Christ came to turn everything upside down, or rather, to turn them the right way up – to bring justice, peace and joy.

When we celebrate Christmas what we should be reminded of why God entered our world in poverty and humility so as to connect with and be part of our humanity. As we get to know more about Jesus, and listen to his words in the gospels we learn the truth about God. We learn what we mean to him and his love and hope for us and our lives.

It is not just about believing a charming story which happened 2000 years ago –it is about having a relationship now with God –and we can do that in the stillness of quiet reflection, which is prayer. It is in those times of quiet reflection that we can feel God coming into our lives and filling that empty space – that space of nothingness and doubt that only God can come in and change- to give meaning and purpose to our lives.

Amen

Closing Prayer

Gracious God this Christmas may be difficult because I may not be able to see all those that I love as I would normally do.

There may be times when I feel lonely and a bit isolated, but help me to reach out to those that are able to be around me. Help me to share the true excitement and joy of Christmas with them. I learnt through the coming of Jesus of your great love for me, come Lord and fill the God-shaped space in my life this Christmas. **Amen**

Prayers inspired by 'Prayerfully Yours' by Nick Fawcett