

AN AMAZING PROPHECY

Matthew 1:18-25 Text vs. 23 *“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel.”*

Life is an adventure. It's a journey. A journey that will often let you encounter some unexpected bumps, curves, or detours along the way. Like the medical report you didn't expect. The accident you didn't see coming. Your job being eliminated. Having a baby. Losing a baby. Losing someone without warning. Moving. Mary and Joseph knew about curves and detours on their road, because the Christmas story has some unexpected events and curves in *its* road. The *first* unexpected event was when Joseph learned the young teenager he was about to marry was already expecting a child. What a shock! What should he do?

Now understand, a Jewish marriage happened in three stages. The *first* stage was *the engagement*, usually arranged by the parents. Two sets of parents would get together, talk things over. One would say, *“We would like to have your daughter marry our son.”* Her parents would probably reply, *“That sounds like a good idea. Let's discuss it.”* The parents would then arrange the engagement *without the young people ever being involved*. The *second* stage was called *the betrothal*. By now, the young couple had been introduced, agreed to their marriage, and signed a legal document which considered them as *“husband & wife”* even though they weren't married, yet. They weren't living together. Nothing had happened between them. They were just getting to know one another now that they had met. So, as they were building their relationship, the groom would start preparing a place for them to live. This was a time of planning. Dreaming. Happy expectations. It usually lasted about a year, until the groom led her in a wedding procession to his home.

Remember now, Matthew told us *“Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph.”* And Joseph loved Mary so much he hadn't taken advantage of her during that time. But this part of the story becomes a terrible disappointment for Joseph. It's his bump in the road. Verse 18 says *“before they came together, she was found to be with child.”* What a shock! What a disappointment! The Bible doesn't say when Joseph was told this. Or who told him. Maybe it was Mary? What was he to do? Verse 19 says, *“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.”* The Law of Moses states Joseph could have taken her to the city gate, people would have been there, and they would have taken rocks to throw at her and stone her to death for being an unwed mother while being engaged to Joseph! Then, Joseph's name would have been cleared. His reputation restored. But Joseph decided against that! He didn't want to disgrace her. He decided to just divorce her. Quietly! Then, they both could start their lives all over again. But the story doesn't end there! *“After Joseph had considered those things, 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. 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, (which is the Greek form of Joshua, meaning the LORD saves) because He will save His people from their sins.’ ‘All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet Isaiah: ‘The virgin will be with child, and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel, which means, ‘God with us.’”* Now, that's an amazing prophecy!

Let me tell you about modern-day prophet. This past November 30th was Winston Churchill's birthday. He was Prime Minister of Great Britain where his leadership during World War II became a rallying cry for Great Britain to triumph over Nazi Germany. He was born in 1874, and he became one of the greatest political leaders in history. Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Reagan considered him to be so. In his speech to the House of Commons June 4, 1940, he said, *“We shall fight on the beaches. We shall fight on the landing grounds. We shall fight in the fields, and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender!”* Churchill was a modern Nostradamus, also noted for predicting future events. Churchill predicted two World Wars. The Cold War. Even today's headlines come from predictions he made close to one hundred years ago. In 1905 he foresaw the creation of the State of Israel, which happened in 1948! In 1921, in a speech to the House of Commons, he spoke of a militant Islamic sect of bomb-carrying Jihadists who would burn embassies and destroy buildings to sacrifice their lives for a guarantee of being in an Islamic heaven. It's happening right now! At the White House in 2007, Winston Churchill, II would read a speech to President George W. Bush that had been given by his grandfather. It didn't exactly predict 9/11. But it described radical extremist perpetrators. President Nixon once said, *“Churchill was the only leader who seemed to have a crystal ball, the mind of an historian, and the courage of a soldier.”* Yes, he could see patterns repeating themselves. He would risk political death telling people what they didn't want to hear. He didn't worry about repercussions! He didn't talk in code words. Or be evasive. He delivered the facts truthfully. Just as prophets do! And Isaiah was a prophet who risked political death. He told people what they didn't want to hear. He didn't worry about repercussions. He didn't talk in code words. He wasn't evasive. He delivered facts truthfully.

And since Manasseh, the first king of Judah, had revived polytheistic worship reversing the religious changes made by his father Hezekiah, he became furious with Isaiah for prophesying Jerusalem's destruction. He ordered his arrest and had Isaiah killed by being cut in two with a wooden saw. And it was Isaiah who prophesied, *“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son. And they will call him Immanuel.”* So, Joseph had a dream.

Now, there must be something about having the name Joseph and having dreams. Remember Joseph of the Old Testament? There is a stage play, *Joseph, and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, by Andrew Lloyd Webber that's still playing in theatres. It's based on the character of Joseph from the Book of Genesis whose dreams made his brothers so angry they wanted to kill him. But in *our* Joseph's dream, an angel appeared and said, "*Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife.*" Now in Judaism, when a family name is added, it's the name of the person's father. So why did the angel call Joseph "son of David"? Because God had made a promise to King David that his throne would always reign. And later prophecies would say, Messiah would be a descendant of David.

So, the angel convinced Joseph, "*the time for the prophesy to be fulfilled has come. Do not fear taking Mary as your wife.*" And that's good! Because Joseph really did want to wed Mary. He didn't want a divorce. The angel told Joseph he was not to fear he would be breaking God's law by taking Mary as his wife, because what had happened was from God! "*That which was conceived in her was from the Holy Spirit.*" So here, God's plan was unfolding. It was God's plan for the coming of Messiah. "*She will bear a son. And you shall call His name Jesus. For He will save His people from their sins.*"

Matthew had two reasons for telling of Jesus' birth. One explains the reason for His coming. And the other confirms His birth fulfills the prophecy. And that's what Christmas is all about! According to the Gospel of Matthew, the *name* of the baby identified His destiny. Jesus was a sign of God's love. He brought peace that was to end the problems between us and God. And as John put it in 1 John 4:10, "*He was an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*" Jesus is our Immanuel. Jesus is God with us. In Him, God lived among us. He spoke to us. He ministered to us. And eventually, He died for us. And because of all that He did, God is now with us. And shall be with us forever.

Yes, this is Christmas! Billions of people around the world are celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ on December 25th. Advent began this Christmas season on Sunday, November 27th. Advent will end Saturday, December 24th - Christmas Eve. Then, Christmas begins on December 25th and lasts for twelve days. The *Twelve Days of Christmas*. It's a festive Christian season that celebrates the Birth of Jesus Christ. That's why many leave their Christmas trees up until the Christmas season ends on Twelfth Night, January 5th, the eve of Epiphany. It's when the Three Wisemen visited the Christ Child. Yes, this is a wonderful Season to fill your heart with love. Your home with joy. And your life with thankfulness, that Jesus Christ was born for you! It was *AN AMAZING PROPHECY!* AMEN