

## Reflecting on Matthew 1:18-25

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*<sup>18</sup> This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> 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." <sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: <sup>23</sup> "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). <sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. <sup>25</sup> But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.*

The story of the birth of Jesus, as recorded in the book of Matthew, is one I have heard time and time again over the course of my life. However, it was not until two months ago that I began to recognize a new meaning to the scripture; one I had never considered before. Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph and she was found to be pregnant with a baby that was definitely not Joseph's. If the word got around, Mary would have been shamed, ostracized, and even possibly stoned to death. The scripture records that Joseph was faithful to the law and yet did not want to expose Mary to public disgrace, so he decided to divorce her quietly. I see this as him not wanting to be the one to throw her under the bus; he wanted to still offer some support in a quiet and distant way. I am all too familiar with what it means to remain neutral or take a quiet stand on issues, rather than doing something to actively contribute to change. I say, "Well, God knows my heart and sees my heart." I think that as long as I am washing my hands clean of putting people at a disadvantage or

distancing myself from people who worsen situations for others, then I am doing enough. I am doing my part.

It is definitely better to do something, anything, rather than nothing at all, to draw attention to social ills which need to be addressed. It was wonderful that Joseph refused to expose Mary to public disgrace. Yes, God saw his heart and knew his intentions; God saw his quiet support of Mary, but I believe God invited him to take his support up a notch. In his dream that night, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph, encouraging him to take Mary as a wife, explaining the big picture and significance of the child in Mary's womb. By marrying Mary, Joseph would be affiliating with, joining, associating, and connecting with her. He would be joining himself to someone who was supposed to be facing punishment, judgment, ostracism, and even death. Sometimes it is easy to get into the habit of hearing, reading, and discussing issues of injustice, but do I actually ever consider stepping out of my comfort zone to accompany others on their journey? Who am I joining, affiliating with, associating with, connecting to?

Just like Joseph was not aware of the big picture or the significance of what Mary was carrying, I remain unaware of the gifts, skills, talents, and passions that my neighbors and siblings, who have different experiences than I do, are carrying inside them. They are created in the image and likeness of God, and my thoughts, words, and actions toward them should reflect a knowledge of this. God reminded Joseph that Mary was an image-bearer of God, carrying treasures that would impact the world, and God invited Joseph to walk alongside Mary on her journey. God continues to invite us to do the same today! I am glad that: "when Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife". I pray that we also will wake up and say what we need to

say, do what we need to do, go where we need to go, and stand with whoever we need to stand with!

The NBA XPLOR program has four cornerstones, one of which is *community engagement and justice work*; this cornerstone is one of the reasons I felt drawn to the program. XPLOR Residents are encouraged and challenged to get involved in hands-on service and justice work. In our work sites, host congregations, meetings with spiritual companions, and conversations with XPLOR staff and friends, we are reminded of the importance of connecting our faith to the work of justice in day-to-day life. As I continue to figure out what I am passionate about and the different ways I can use my gifts to lift up the gifts of my neighbors, so we can work together for justice and equity, I am grateful for the supportive community that my XPLOR journey has provided. There have been highs and lows, but I would not trade a minute of my XPLOR experience for anything else.

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**NBA XPLOR** is a 10-month service residency opportunity for young adults ages 21-30, with the purpose of empowering young adults to discern and develop a “heart for care” as they live together in simple community, engage in direct service and justice work, engage in leadership development, and discern their vocational calls to honor the various communities they are called to serve. **Learn more and apply at [nbacares.org/xplor](https://nbacares.org/xplor).**