

I was asked to do something very simple, devise a plan in which I ask my wife to go out of town this Christmas season. It seems simple, it doesn't have to be a real request, nor should it be, but it should be documented in order to capture her response. My wife will be approximately 38 weeks pregnant at that time. I can easily anticipate her response to be along the lines of, "Are you kidding me? I'm only leaving the couch for work and food, there is no way on God's green Earth I'm going two and half hours away from the hospital. Why would you even ask that?" Mind you there are hospitals everywhere, but not THE HOSPITAL which she spent an insane amount of time researching to ensure all the amenities and comforts provided will meet the standards she requires for the delivery of our child. Any requests along these lines would begin with her refusal and end with her insistence that I delete any video of the reaction and promise never to provide it to her father for use as an illustration in his Christmas sermon. This inevitably culminates in my apology for even suggesting it. But the idea of this scenario does intrigue me, and it caused me to think about our situation and the situation Joseph and Mary must have found themselves in 2000+ years ago.

I can't even bring myself to propose a white lie of an out of town trip because I, like her, can't imagine not being in the area of the state we are most comfortable and prepared to deliver our child in. So how could Joseph propose to Mary that she come with him to Bethlehem to complete a Census and how could Mary say yes? Or maybe Mary suggested she go with him and if that's the case consider my mind blown that she would voluntarily do anything other than binge watch all the episodes of "Uptown Nazareth" (viewable each and every day from the comfort of her own front porch). Consider the fact that while the distance from Indianapolis to South Whitley is arguably about the same distance away as Nazareth was to Bethlehem (approx. 100 miles); I wouldn't want my wife to endure a 2 hour car ride, let alone the marathon Mary was agreeing to go on when she said yes to an 8-10 day long trip likely whilst experiencing Braxton-Hicks contractions, that while not always painful are at least uncomfortable. Add in the fact that she is making the journey on the back of a mule through desert like terrain and you might have the first appearance of Wonder Woman long before All Star Comics #8 introduced the character to pop culture. But what is it that made her say yes? What is it that made Joseph believe it would be okay to ask? Easy guess here; It's faith...

Everything Mary and Joseph did during this time of their lives had to have had multiple layers of faith to it. From the moment Gabriel appeared to them and explained that Mary was going to conceive a son and deliver a virgin birth, they displayed a level of faith that we might argue hasn't been seen since. God asked Mary to bare his child and she agreed knowing that she could be stoned for having an unwed pregnancy, no MTV show for her, just the prospect of death at the hands of the citizens of her community. With no way to hide the fact that she was pregnant, this almost certainly would have been the case. Fortunately, God not only chose Mary, he chose this couple of Mary & Joseph.

Mary gets a lot of love, especially around Christmas time, and I think Joseph is often a forgotten figure in the Nativity story. This man finds out his fiancé is pregnant and knows full well he didn't play a part in it, but he demonstrates concern for Mary in a way that often goes overlooked, he decides to divorce her in private instead of humiliating her. Yes, even though they were not married, they were still pledged to be, which required a formal divorce either by going through the Jewish courts or by having the divorce decree witnessed by two individuals with no grounds for the divorce needing to be stated. Imagine that, there was no updating the latest social media site with a rant involving expletives and degradation or any statements at all from Joseph insinuating Mary was adulterous and calling for action from the

people of the town (which would have been an appropriate response for the time). With this plan in mind Joseph continues about his life.

Imagine you are in his shoes, he must feel humiliated: He is a well-respected carpenter and a man in love. He then learns of this news? Now he's lying in bed one day when Gabriel visits him in a dream and tells him much the same story he likely had heard from Mary. We see this as affirmation of Mary's story in the context of studying the Bible, but imagine if that was you. I know I would wake up and feel like what Mary had told me earlier in the day must have affected my dreams like some sort of scene out of Inception, planting the seeds for an encounter of the paranormal kind, and here I am without my totem. But that's not what Joseph thought and that's not how he treated his experience. He believed it was divine, the work of God. He woke up and took Mary as his wife, promising to raise this Son of Man. That is faith.

The birth of Jesus does not happen without God having chosen these two specific individuals. He chose Mary to bare and raise Jesus while at the same time choosing Joseph to teach and protect him while he grows up on this plane (God is the father of Christ, Joseph was his dad). While my wife and I's child has not yet been born we already find ourselves in a position to want to protect him or her and to keep them safe from the unexpected (hence we have mapped out all the routes to our hospital of choice, none of which involve coming from South Whitley). Which brings us back to the Census Joseph is being called to complete, one that you and I have a hard-enough time completing every ten years from the comfort of our kitchen table. Just think about your government requesting you to take an 8-10 day trip, your wife is pregnant, oh and you're going to be crossing the desert just to be counted, would you do it? I know I couldn't, heck I couldn't even propose a hypothetical scenario to leave town for my wife at the request of her father. But we weren't chosen to participate in the Nativity, we were chosen to receive the benefit of it. Christmas is a reminder of not only Jesus' birth and God's gift to his people that will ultimately be played out in the life and teachings of His son, but it's a reminder of what family is and what a family who has faith in God can and will do. Mary never stopped saying yes to God or to Joseph, she believed in the calling of her and Joseph's family. Joseph never stopped caring for Mary or raising Jesus up the right way, he believed in the mission of his son. They were a family of faith in God.

I don't have to ask my wife to go out of town this Christmas season, she doesn't have to roll her eyes, tell me no, and ask me to delete a video because I couldn't do what was asked of me by my father-in-law, let alone what Mary and Joseph had to do. I am grateful for my life, my faith, and my family all aspects of which were made greater 2000 years ago in a manger when a man and a woman gathered around a newborn baby in the town of Bethlehem.