

Fear Not
“Barreling Down the Mountain”
Matthew 1:18-25
Small Group Discussion Guide

Opening Question (get everyone involved in discussion):

- Describe a time when you felt out of control. Your example can be light-hearted or serious.

Read Matthew 1:1-17 and then discuss the following.

- Why does Matthew begin his Gospel with a genealogy, and specifically, why does he begin by connecting the birth of Jesus with the family tree of Abraham and David?
- What is odd about the relationships that Matthew describes in v. 16? What “problem” does this observation pose? (Joseph is in the bloodline of Abraham and David, yet Jesus is not actually a son of Joseph. He is named as the son of Mary. For Jesus to fulfill God’s promises to Abraham and David, Joseph must “become” his father).

Read Matthew 1:18-19 and then discuss the following.

- Our concept of the Christmas story has become so sanitized over the years that we often fail to grasp the human reality of it. What would Joseph’s reaction have been to learning that Mary was pregnant?
- What do you think of Joseph’s plan? (V. 19)

Read Matthew 1:20-23 and then discuss the following.

- What fear on Joseph’s part does the angel address here? (The fear of going ahead with the marriage to Mary and adopting Jesus as his son).
- What would it “cost” Joseph to go ahead and marry Mary?
- On Sunday we noted that *sometimes God will require risky, frightening obedience of us.*
 - Can you recall a time when you were certain that God was nudging you toward this kind of obedience? How did you respond?
 - Does anyone in your group feel that they are currently in this kind of situation? What are the “costs” involved? What is most frightening about it?
- How does the angel convince Joseph to go ahead with the marriage and become the adoptive father of Jesus? (Pastor Josh pointed out three reasons. See if you can recall them and/or find them in the text. Hints are below, along with answers for leaders in case you get stuck.)
 - “Joseph, *Son of David...*” {For the angel to immediately remind Joseph that he is a descendant of David would have the startling effect of showing him how this seeming scandal was actually the fulfillment of God’s long-standing promises}.
 - Mary didn’t cheat on you, Joseph. {To Joseph’s surprise, the Holy Spirit really was the one who impregnated Mary. Thus the baby in Mary’s womb can be called “Immanuel,” God with us}.

- What's in a name? {For Joseph to name the baby "Jesus"—which means, "The LORD saves," is a glimpse of what Jesus ultimately came to do—to meet our greatest need.} How did Jesus's reason for coming, as described in v. 23, differ from many religious leaders? In what way would he meet our greatest need? See Colossians 2:13-14.
- These three reasons for Joseph to move forward in the face of risky obedience all add up to the following: if you understand who this baby is and that he's coming to do for you what you could never do for yourself, you can move forward in spite of the risk, with confidence.
- What effect does this understanding have on the way that you approach risk and costly obedience to God?
 - Pastor Josh said that this understanding of who Jesus is and what he came to do has the power to "break the lie" in our hearts, which undergirds our fear of being out of control. What is that lie, and how does this gospel understand free us from it?
 - How is it true that Jesus enables us to *exchange control for confidence*?
 - With regard to the current situations in your group, already mentioned above, how does this insight impact your approach to those situations?

Read Matthew 1:24-25 and then discuss the following.

- Based on these verses, what effect did the angel's message have on Joseph?
- Do you think that Joseph's obedience to God became easy after the angel's visit? How did it remain costly?
- What sacrifices was Joseph now willing to make, and what do you think motivated them?
- Do you think this Bible Study will enable you to approach differently the risks or sacrifices that lie ahead?

Prayer:

- In view of the life circumstances already shared, pray for one another to be courageous in moving forward with obedience.
- What other needs exist in your group? Spend some time praying for them.