



Finding^{the} Real Christmas Story

HOPE • LOVE • JOY • PEACE

WEEK 3 DEVOTIONAL

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE | The Gift of Peace

RECEIVE

Take a few moments to read **Matthew 1:18–25**. Read these passages slowly, thoughtfully, prayerfully. Read in such a way that you imagine the Holy Spirit is trying to speak to you. For the Jewish people sharing a genealogy would have been a natural introduction to locate a new baby in the history of their people. As you read, journal words or phrases that stand out to you. Then go back and consider why those words and phrases caught your attention. Read the passage again imagining motivations and emotions of the characters. Finally, read and consider what these verses might imply about PEACE in your relationships and community this season.

REFLECT

1. How peaceful are you right now? Take time to reflect on and journal through what is enabling or inhibiting consistent peace in your life?
2. How many times have you seen *It's A Wonderful Life*? Journal the first things that come to mind when thinking of this classic Christmas tale.

3. We come to this passage with our current cultural tolerances. To fully understand we must read it from the eyes of Jewish culture where things were much more rule-bound and tight. Placing yourself in Joseph's sandals, what is going through your mind when you are told that your fiancee Mary is pregnant? What do you imagine is going through Joseph's mind? What emotions would he have?
4. What was Joseph's action? How would you describe his dilemma between "the Law" and disgracing Mary? What do you learn about Joseph in verse 19? How peaceful do you feel as Joseph right now? Why?
5. Enter the Angel (again). These are stark instructions. How do you imagine Joseph receiving these words? What would you do?
6. Mary, in fact, becomes the fulfillment of words spoken centuries before in Isaiah 7:14. Do you imagine she knows that? What do we know about the information Mary has at this time?
7. Mary and Joseph follow through the uncertainty and cultural messiness. Do you think they are living in faith or fear? Do you imagine their hearts to be at peace with this or anxious—a "what's going to happen next?" feeling? Would enabled them to proceed in following the path they did?
8. From what you just reflected on what formational points can you glean to work into the flow of your life with Jesus this next week?

RESPOND

9. Mary and Joseph lived into the messy situation on the first Christmas – uncertainty, unknown, historic significance beyond their understanding – all scratching away at their peace. What can we learn from that as we "curate" our holiday events this year? What fear, anxiety, hurt, anger and messiness are you carrying into your plans and your week that is chipping away at the peace you experience in your life? Can you lay those down in the "manger"? What do you say as you try to do that?

10. What does George Bailey's character and story teach us about how we view our "past, present, and future"? Where are you living today carrying past hurts and missed opportunities, future worries and "I'm behind on my plan" self-inflicted guilt? Reflect on and journal what comes to mind.
11. One of George's most obvious character qualities was compassion and mercy. How does that relate to Joseph? How does it show up in Mary? How about you? Where does compassion, thoughts of the well-being of others, overcome your own plans? Journal a top of the head list of needs you can think of and ask the Spirit if there is an action you should take this week.
12. Pastor Dan closed with a perspective on life. He likened a splash that causes ripples to the events we create, experience and witness. What splashes have you experienced lately? What splashes have you caused? What are the ripples? Describe an event and ponder the result. Journal what might come of it throw the goodness and grace of God being moved by your actions and prayers. How does this nurture the peace of Christ in your life?
13. As you go through your week, be mindful of where you sense a conversation. Did you initiate? Should you have? Why didn't you? Write these promptings down and look for a pattern. Pray for what's missing—boldness, time, interest, curiosity? Ask God to show you how to be part of "good news of great JOY" this season.
14. With these new found insights, gather your favorite people, make your favorite warm Christmas beverage and have a peace filled night watching the movie *It's a Wonderful Life!*

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 1:18–25 | New International Version

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ 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. ²¹ Today 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."

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.