



2024 | Week 37

Couple's Reflections on Christmas

Blog Contributors:

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We often hear or see reenactments of the Christmas story—the birth of Jesus Christ. Yet, reflecting on, meditating upon, or fully grasping the message embedded in this story that impacts today's marriages is not common.

As we approach Christmas 2024, we'll take this week to delve deeper into the message of Christmas and relate it to our marital relationships. May this week's topic encourage many couples to start viewing this special celebration as the greatest declaration of hope for marriage as well.

DAY 1

There's something about Christmas that softens many hearts and draws attention to the birth of Jesus Christ. We have become accustomed to reflecting on this wonderful celebration of hope. Surely, many of us are very familiar with the Christmas story. Here at CJ2, we're not just shining a light on the importance of the birth of Jesus Christ; we'll take some time to reflect on the roles of Joseph and Mary. Indeed, we're familiar with their participation in this story, but we hope that in this week's discussion, we can take a deeper look at their roles and

responses in relation to today's married couples. Before we dive into these points, let's review the backstory.

There is great familiarity—even among those who are not consistently reading the Bible—that Jesus Christ is well-detailed in the New Testament. However, if we take the time to study, we see that He is mentioned many times even in the Old Testament. Many preachers often say that the entire Bible points to Jesus Christ—our Savior. The prophecy of His arrival is highlighted in Isaiah 7:14 and Isaiah 9:6-7. We can analyze how these two verses define the "Child."

Isaiah 7:14

- The Child will be born of a virgin.
- The Child will be called by His name, Immanuel.

Isaiah 9:6-7

- The Child, the Son, will be given to us.
- The government will rest on His shoulders.
- His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.
- There will be no end to the increase of His government or peace on the throne of David and over His kingdom.
- His kingdom will be established and upheld with justice and righteousness.

Isaiah 7-9 tells interconnected stories that center around the same historical context, focusing on the prophet Isaiah's message to King Ahaz of Judah regarding the confederate forces of Syria and Israel plotting against Jerusalem (Isaiah 7:1-2). The announcement of the sign of "Immanuel," the birth of a Child, serves as God's promise of protection. To help you with the overview, here are the key points connecting these three chapters:

- **Central Character:** King Ahaz of Judah is the main character addressed in all three chapters.
- **Threat from Israel and Syria:** The primary conflict involves the combined forces of Israel and Syria plotting against Judah.
- **Sign of Immanuel:** The core prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 announces the birth of a Child named Immanuel, representing God's promise, which is the central theme connecting these chapters.

- **Message of Trust in God:** Isaiah repeatedly urges Ahaz to trust in God and not be afraid or threatened by the approaching armies.

Kay Arthur and Pete De Lacy mention in their book, “The New Inductive Bible Study Series: Face to Face with a Holy God (Study of Isaiah)”:

“Many Christians are not familiar with the times and people of Isaiah 7-9. So how do we decipher its message and grasp its wisdom? If you understand this, you’ll be instructed, find encouragement and hope, and persevere (Romans 15:4).” [1]

To start this week’s reflection on the story of Christmas, read, reflect, and meditate on Isaiah 7-9. The key points mentioned above are a good starting place, but we encourage you to take notes of your learnings from these three chapters. Take a moment for personal application by examining your heart in light of King Ahaz’s responses in this story. Together, let’s embrace a new reflection as we approach this year’s Christmas celebration—the birth of our greatest Savior, Jesus Christ.

Keep Journeying with Christ!

Your Fellow Couple,

Rey & Annie

DAY 2

We hope that you had a moment of reflection on the story noted in Isaiah 7-9. If you haven’t, you can pause reading this blog, open your Bible (or Bible app), and reflect on these three chapters of Isaiah. It is crucial to have a good understanding of the story heading towards the prophecy of the coming of Immanuel—the birth of the Child.

Today, two major points we want to highlight in our reflection on Isaiah 7-9 are: (1) the details noted in the sign—the arrival of the Child, and (2) Ahaz’s response to the “sign” that God provided.

We know that we’re very familiar with how the “Child” was defined in the story, but we take this opportunity to remind ourselves of some important points. This is not to disregard other significant aspects of the story, but we find that these two points are particularly meaningful in our continuous journey as believers or Christ-followers.

1. **The sign given is that the Messiah shall be born of a virgin.** We know this important detail and often equate this event as “supernatural.” It is indeed supernatural for a child to be born of a virgin, but another detail that is often overshadowed by this perception is that the birth from a virgin was intended to be spotless, pure, and without any stain of sin. Matthew Henry commented, “Christ would be born, not of an empress or queen, for He appeared not in outward pomp or splendor, but of a virgin, to teach us spiritual purity, to die to all the delights of sense, and so to keep ourselves unspotted from the world and the flesh, that we may be presented as chaste virgins to Christ.”[2]
2. **The sign proves that He is the Son of God and the Mediator between God and man.** He will be called by the name “Immanuel,” which means “God with us” (Matthew 1:23). We know that God is above us, but in the profound message of the Gospel, we see Him in this name as our Redeemer. This name is tied to the identity and mission of Jesus Christ. Jesus’ saving of humanity stems from the fact that He is God present among us. The arrival of Jesus and His gift of salvation consists of both reconciling and connecting us to God (in relationship with Him) and vice versa. The expected response in this divine connection—bringing us to be with God—is described as our “great duty” from a changed heart. Recognizing Jesus as Immanuel compels us (believers) to live in a way that honors and welcomes this relationship with God. The dual aspects of Jesus’ identity as both Immanuel and Savior are intricately intertwined, emphasizing that true salvation involves both divine presence and human response.

Surely Ahaz didn’t know how Jesus would end up on the cross, so this “sign” serves as a major encouragement that God would be with him during this distressing

period. Despite the prophet Isaiah's efforts at encouragement, we saw Ahaz's refusal (Isaiah 7:10-16). The sign would have given him light, yet he refused the light! He already had a plan to depend on Assyria rather than on God (2 Kings 16:7, 2 Chronicles 28:16).

Sadly, we can find great similarities between Ahaz's response and how we view Jesus Christ—from His birth, His recorded works, and His act on the cross. When we find ourselves in a critical situation (it may not be the same nature of war as Ahaz's, but the distress brings similarities) and see the impact on our marriage - we may choose a different route for resolutions. Worse still, when endurance is stretched to the extreme, many decide to call it quits and seek comfort in divorce. On the other hand, even if the couple equally declares their acceptance of the Gospel, the lack of intentionality in a life anchored in Christ tends to lead to the temptation of losing focus and resorting to resolutions that we mistakenly think align with His will and purpose. The poor self-awareness and continued misunderstanding, or soft-pedaling of God's truth, fail to recognize that we are still journeying in the "dark" instead of making progress toward the "light" that God has provided through His Word, Jesus' modeling, and the convictions of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus said:

"This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil." John 3:19

We surely need a Savior. This need is not just a one-time declaration but a continuous remembrance that helps us stay focused on seeking His light—His ways. May this attitude resonate with us not just during Christmas—in remembrance of His birth—or during Holy Week—in remembrance of His act on the cross—but in a day-to-day commitment to anchor our lives to Him—our Savior and Redeemer.

Keep Journeying with Christ!

Your Fellow Couple,

Rey & Annie

DAY 3 | For Husbands

The story shows that the angel appeared to Joseph and explained Mary's condition following God's will. We will see that this message didn't just come to Joseph as an instruction for a "religious act"; rather, his actions showed evidence of what was in his heart and mind. In Matthew 1:19, Joseph is noted as a righteous man who did not want to disgrace Mary. In such a situation, where Mary's condition could also drag his name into what was then considered a "disgrace," God's righteousness flowing in him resulted in his loving and caring for Mary. Although the Bible doesn't specifically mention the exact vulnerability of Joseph due to the situation, we can safely conclude from the angel's opening message, *"Don't be afraid,"* that it recognizes humanity's natural response of fear or discomfort when facing uncertainties or difficult situations. Particularly during that time the culture was quite aggressive toward women who were pregnant outside of marriage—considered unclean and liable to be stoned to death (Deuteronomy 22:20-21)—his encounter with the angel led to a more profound understanding of the situation and a courageous act for his role in this life-changing event.

Today, we may no longer be living in a generation that "disgraces" women who are no longer virgins or who become pregnant before marriage. However, if we look deeper into today's many relationships, we will recognize that this uncomfortable situation has translated into many forms. Those "uncomfortable" discoveries about a wife can trigger fear, discomfort, or worse, dismay in a husband. Surely, every man wants to have a "good" wife. Our considerable acceptance of whatever "concerns" arise will pass the boundaries we set if we don't see any drastic harm it could bring to our "manhood."

When I met my wife, Annie, she was honest and upfront about the bad decisions she had made in her life and the consequences she faced. I appreciated her honesty, which clearly communicated to me how she wanted to change the course of her life. Her situation may have put some fear and hardship on her end, but I found myself willing to take her despite that. As the years went on, I discovered more about her, and not all of these discoveries were appealing; most of the time, they led to very difficult conflicts. Over a decade of being together, I learned to manage and slowly embrace Annie, but when I

came to know Jesus Christ, things changed. It was only through Him that I experienced a change in how I viewed my wife, our marriage, and our family. Today, when we face difficulties, we rely on our commitment to anchor our lives and marriage to Christ. His grace enables us to have the courage to seek Him and obey Him. It's not easy, and both of us have been very honest about how difficult it is to be amid spiritual warfare—wanting to obey God but battling the desires of our flesh. Only through His grace and unconditional love does my volition remain in line with Him.

There are many moments when both of us find ourselves in fear while facing certain seasons, but I constantly remind myself how wonderful Father God is. We can come to Him for help and guidance. Just as Joseph showed evidence of fear, God sent an angel to remind him to take courage and to receive instructions on how to deal with the situation. Today, we may not be expecting an “angel” to give us instructions on how to fulfill our role according to God’s design, but let’s not forget His promise that we will not be journeying through this life alone. It’s a matter of how intentional we are in anchoring our minds and hearts to Jesus and cultivating a relationship with Him; then we will have the opportunity to recognize the instructions He’s giving us. Matthew Henry said:

“God’s time to come in with instruction to His people is when they are nonplussed and at a stand. God’s comforts more delight the soul in the multitude of its perplexed thoughts.” [3]

God often chooses to give direction and wisdom to His people when they are in a state of confusion or uncertainty. The term “nonplussed” refers to being perplexed or puzzled, while “at a stand” signifies being stuck or unsure about what to do next. This means that during moments of difficulty, doubt, or indecision, God is particularly present and ready to offer His guidance. If we sincerely seek God, we will recognize and appreciate the comfort that God provides during times of distress and confusion. When we are overwhelmed by troubling thoughts or worries, it is God’s reassurance and comfort that can truly bring peace and delight to the soul. In other words, divine comfort has a powerful effect when one faces trials, as it illuminates the darkness of uncertainty and sorrow.

Fellow husbands, we may be facing many challenges and threats to our marriages in today’s culture and generation, but let’s not forget that God is especially near to His people in their struggles and confusion. It is truly important to continuously seek God’s guidance and comfort during such times, highlighting that His support can lead to profound relief and joy amidst life’s challenges. It serves as a reminder of the hope that God can bring when one feels lost or troubled - that’s Jesus Christ!

‘But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.’

Matthew 6:33

Keep journeying with Christ Jesus.

Your Fellow Husband,
Rey

DAY 4 | For Wives

There are two accounts of the Christmas story that are commonly referenced to remember the special celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ: (1) Matthew 1:18-25 and (2) Luke 1:26-38. Reading these two passages will provide us with a good understanding of Mary’s responses. In today’s blog, I pray that you, my fellow wife, will be as encouraged by these accounts as I have been.

In the account of Matthew 1:18-25, we can identify two significant points regarding Mary’s role: (1) the purpose of marriage and (2) the pregnancy of the promised “seed.” Although Mary was engaged to Joseph, the direction of their marriage took on a deeper significance when the angel spoke to them about the “pregnancy of the virgin.” This purpose highlights the great importance of this “Child” and underscores the significance of their participation leading up to the birth.

History does not provide a comfortable narrative for a woman who is pregnant outside of marriage or engaged amid such turmoil (Deuteronomy 20:7). Understanding the lifestyle of that time gives us insight into how uncomfortable this “pregnancy” could be, not just for

Mary but also for Joseph. This discomfort is evident in Matthew 1:19: “And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly.” Some theological experts have commented [4], “He deliberately consulted and determined within himself to dismiss her or put her away by giving her a bill of divorce, in a very private manner; this was sometimes done by putting it into the woman’s hand or bosom” (Deuteronomy 24:1). However, we see how the angel alleviated Joseph’s discomfort by providing a clear explanation of the pregnancy (Matthew 1:20).

While Matthew’s account provides a good sequence of events, offering an idea of Mary’s willingness—and perhaps calmness—to face a potentially shameful or dangerous situation, we can consult Luke’s account for a more detailed perspective on Mary’s responses. Below are Mary’s responses that resonated with me in the story recorded in Matthew 1:18-25.

- Mary displayed discomfort at the appearance of the angel, which I find to be a natural response for women (and possibly for men as well). She was perplexed by the angel’s message, particularly the salutation, “Favored one, the Lord is with you” (Luke 1:29).
- Mary listened despite her puzzling thoughts, her attentive demeanor being encouraged by the words, “Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God” (Luke 1:30). This attitude of listening led her to raise a question to further understand her role (Luke 1:34).
- Mary declared and honored God’s sovereignty, expressing her obedience in faith (Luke 1:38).

Though it may not be explicitly stated, we can recognize Mary’s calmness despite the natural human reaction to an unexpected “visit.” Matthew Henry made a profound note: “Being conscious of her own innocence, she kept her mind calm and easy, and committed her cause to Him that judgeth righteously. Note, those who take care to keep a good conscience may cheerfully trust God with the keeping of their good names and have reason to hope that He will not only clear up their integrity but also their honor.”

May Mary’s responses serve as encouragement to many of us, particularly when facing uncertainties in life. While

we may not experience an encounter with an angel to guide us in making decisions that align with God’s will and purpose, our acceptance of Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior allows us to receive His promised Holy Spirit (John 16:7) to assist us. We also have well-documented accounts of God’s words (the Bible), detailing His promises, attributes, and works. It also includes records of previous witnesses who obeyed Him, particularly the modeling of Jesus Christ during His time on Earth.

Although we may not be accustomed to living a life that recognizes the spiritual realm, our intentionality in anchoring our lives to Jesus Christ can lead to experiential learning and testimonies—our own stories of not only experiencing angels but also God’s presence in our lives. When the time comes for us to face divine appointments that challenge our comfort and test our faith, we can trust Him because we have encountered Him.

Keep journeying with Christ!

Your Fellow Wife,

Annie

DAY 5

We all know that the birth of Jesus Christ is the greatest hope for us as humans. Through His birth, our relationship with God is restored, and anchoring our lives to Him leads us to the fulfillment of God’s promises. This message is widely spread during this season; sadly, its true essence has been covered up by many exciting traditions. Before we know it, we’re back in our usual day-to-day lives, which don’t reflect how we should truly live, having Christ as our greatest hope. Additionally, there is more we can learn from the other characters included in this great story. Such is the wonder of this amazing narrative, as we can relate to the various relationships that we have today. Here at CJ2, we are focusing on the relationship between husband and wife as it relates to the Christmas story.

During the prophecy (Isaiah 7-9), we can refer to the responses of King Ahaz as we take our own heart-checks.

How do we respond to the “signs” of God’s promises today are we like Ahaz with evident hesitation? On the other hand, even if we claim to be believers or followers of Christ, do we genuinely desire to seek Him in every situation we face? Are we truly seeking the “light,” so we can finally take steps to move away from “darkness” (John 3:19)?

As married individuals (or couples), are we learning from the responses of Joseph and Mary?

We may not have an encounter with an angel (as Joseph and Mary did), and it is given that we, as humans, are not accustomed to receiving divine appointments or instructions from God. Our separation from Him due to sin has caused moral blindness and obscured our understanding of the spiritual realm. Despite the massive resources available today, we cannot start learning about or experiencing the reality of Jesus Christ in our lives until we accept Him as our personal Lord and Savior. Matthew Henry made a profound comment regarding Joseph’s obedience to the divine precept:

“Extraordinary direction like this we are not now to expect; but God has still ways of making known His mind in doubtful cases: by hints of providence, debates of conscience, and advice of faithful friends. By each of these, applying the general rules of the written word, we should, therefore, in all the steps of our lives, particularly at the significant turning points, such as this one for Joseph (and Mary), take direction from God, and we shall find it safe and comfortable to do as He bids us.” [5]

Our intentionality in viewing the significance of Jesus’ birth in our lives and marriage reflects how we respond to the message of the Gospel—His invitation to the gift of eternal life. Furthermore, we will not experience His attributes and character if we are not intentional in anchoring our lives and marriage to Him. A life and marriage anchored to Jesus Christ is a redemptive journey through discipleship. This intentional discipleship leads us to observe and experience His impact in our minds and hearts, resulting in transformed ways of living.

May our Christmas celebrations be filled with significance so that we do not miss the true essence and impact of Jesus in our lives. Furthermore, may our day-to-day lives be anchored in the truth that we have a living Savior—a

Redeemer and Restorer. Through Him, our relationship with God is restored, and we live a new life until the time comes when we will embrace the gift of eternal life.

If this week’s topic has spoken to you and impacted your heart and mind, you can accept Jesus into your life by declaring the following prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you for saving me. I accept your gift of eternal life. Forgive me for my sins and guide me as I follow you today and in the days ahead. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.**

You can visit this link for more information on the declaration you just made. CJ2 has curated resources from today’s ministries, teachers, authors, and preachers that will further explain the significance of having Jesus Christ in your life. Furthermore, CJ2 is here to journey alongside you and your spouse.

Have a wonderful Christmas celebration!

Keep journeying with Christ.

Your Fellow Couple,

Rey & Annie

NOTES

[1] Arthur, K., & De Lacy, P. (2008). *Face-to-face with a Holy God*. Harvest House Publishers.

[2] Henry, M. Commentary on Isaiah 7.

www.blueletterbible.org

[3] Henry, M. Commentary on Matthew 1.

www.blueletterbible.org

[4] Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible. Matthew 1:19.

www.johngill.thekingsbible.com

[5] Henry, M. Commentary on Isaiah 7.

www.blueletterbible.org



Let's embark on a comprehensive learning experience with this week's topic by following the **D.R.A.S.H. - 5 Steps of Learning Method!**

Step 1 | Discover the Truth

Read the following verses and list down all your learnings;

- Isaiah 7-9 - The prophecy of the birth of a Child; List down your observations to the responses of King Ahaz, include the following verses - 2 Kings 16:7; 2 Chronicles 28:16
- Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38 - Any details noted in these verses that captured your attention? List it down. In separate columns, observe the responses of Joseph and Mary.

Step 2 | Reflect and Meditate on the Truth

- How has this week's deeper reflection on the story of Christmas spoken to you and related to your current faith journey and marital relationship? What convictions have you received that encouraged you to make changes in the coming days? Set a meaningful goal that supports your spouse and strengthens your marital relationship.

Step 3 | Apply the Truth

- What old habits or practices do you need to change as a result of your new discoveries and understanding of Jesus' invitation? How do you plan to implement these changes?

Step 4 | Share

Using a storytelling concept, compose a short story about how you will share the truths you discovered in this week's topic with your spouse or other married individuals journeying with you. You may want to consider a 1-minute or 5-minute storytelling technique. You can use the following guiding questions in your composition:

1. What truths did you discover and reflect on in this week's topic?
2. How are these truths and reflections related to yourself and your current marital status?
3. What actions do you plan to take in the coming days that relate to this week's learning?

Step 5 | Help in Navigating the Truth

- Besides your spouse, identify another person (or member/s of your small group) who will journey alongside you as you take intentional actions based on this week's learning. Consider what additional help you may need, such as further discussion or a regular prayer partner.

We pray that you encounter God through this week's topic. May His grace turn your learning experience into a transformative journey, leading to testimonies of breakthroughs that further strengthen your walk with Christ Jesus!

Let us know how this guide has helped you!

May this study tool be effective and helpful for every fellow seeker and believer who is intentionally journeying with Jesus Christ. We would be grateful to hear how this tool has significantly impacted your journey and your relationships with your spouse and others. Please share your feedback or experiences through this [link](#) (or scan QR Code)



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