Jesus Christ was born into an environment of Love. Mary and Joseph loved each other deeply, and were committed to the task of raising the Son of God to maturity as partners in God’s calling.

Joseph is referred to as a “just man,” and his sense of justice and love caused him to treat Mary with respect, even when he did not know about God’s activity in her life. His act of kindness informs our understanding of justice, not as divine retribution, but as grace that leads to transformation and new possibilities.

Joseph’s Dream - Matthew 1:18-25

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 Her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly.

20 But just when he had resolved to do 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 as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

22 All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 23 “Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,’which means, “God is with us.”

24 When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, 25 but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

Observations

Joseph Before the Dream: In the Book of Deuteronomy there are severe consequences for sexuality outside the bounds of marriage. Yet Joseph’s understanding of the law is not one of retribution or cold-hearted application, but one that allows for grace.

The Dream: God sometimes uses special means to convey truth, but we must always be careful of false interpretation. In Joseph’s dream there is no need for interpretation, but a direct message with specific instructions.

The Author’s Comment: The Gospel of Matthew often shows the link between the activity of God and the fulfillment of Scriptural prophecy in the Old Testament.

Joseph After the Dream: Joseph was obedient to God. Furthermore, he voluntarily curtailed his own sexuality in order to honor God’s activity.
Questions for reflection or group discussion:

- God
  - We must often reshape our understanding of a situation according to God's revelation.
  - God will provide us with the wisdom and direction we need.
  - God can speak to us using many different means.
- The Kingdom
  - The first manifestation of the kingdom of God was the human family: husband, wife and child.
  - Showing grace to others opens new possibilities.
- Personal Growth
  - God may assign us new and surprising tasks.
- Relationships
  - Application for abundant living:
    - The first manifestation of the kingdom of God was the human family: husband, wife and child.
- Our Mission

Further Study for a deeper understanding:

On Grace

- The Woman Caught in Adultery - John 8:1-11
- The Gift of Love - 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Verses for Memory:

> “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

On Marriage and Love

- Jesus on Marriage and Divorce - Matthew 19:1-12
- Directions Concerning Marriage - 1 Corinthians 7:1-16
- The Christian Household - Ephesians 5:21-33

Verses for Memory:

> “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” (Moses in Genesis 2:24…Quoted by Jesus in Matthew 19:5…Amplified by Paul in Ephesians 5:31)

Questions for reflection or group discussion:

- Have you ever thought ill of someone, only to find there was more to the story?
- Which do you think takes more effort, to offer grace or to hold on to a grudge?
- After you forgive someone, how do you move on?
- Have you ever had a dream or super-natural experience that changed the course of your life?

Final Thought:
What is God teaching you?