

God's Partners

by Travis Dean

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I enjoyed watching our children stage the nativity scene last week. As you can see, the manger is still on the stage. I remember reading the story of a Christmas pageant. It's entitled, "**Trouble at the Inn**". Some of you may be familiar with it. The story takes place in London, Ontario, Canada. The children are 2nd graders. There is one boy who stood out from the rest, though. His name was Ralph. He was a big boy, and should have been in the 4th grade, but he was a little slow in more ways than one. The teacher decided Ralph should be the innkeeper. It was a pretty simple role, and hopefully Ralph wouldn't mess it up. Well, the big night arrives, and the play is progressing without any major mishaps. That is, until Mary & Joseph appear and knock on the door of the innkeeper. They knock loudly, and Ralph appears. "What do you want?" Ralph bellows. "We are looking for lodgings," comes the reply. "Well, look for them somewhere else. The inn is full." Mary & Joseph are persistent and beg for at least a little corner. Ralph looks down at Mary, and there is an uncomfortably long pause. At last Ralph repeats the words he has been taught to say, "No, begone!" As Mary & Joseph leave, the innkeeper, instead of going back inside, watches them with perplexity. His mouth is open. His eyes fill with tears. Suddenly, the innkeeper calls out, "Don't go, Joseph. Please don't go. Bring Mary back!" With his arms stretched out and a big smile on his face, he says, "You can have my room!"

I'm sure we would all like to have been a part of the **first Christmas pageant**. It's such a great story, filled with so many interesting characters. Today, though, I would like us to put the spotlight on Mary & Joseph. For thousands of years, starting with Eve, and generations afterward, women hoped that they might give birth to the promised Messiah. I would like us to consider the following question, "Why did God choose Mary & Joseph?" Of all the Jews that God could have chosen to be the parents of His Son, why did He choose them?

So, let's begin. First, we will look at **five** popular traits of Mary & Joseph that made them a good fit for being the parents of His Son, and then we will look at **three** of their traits that from a HUMAN perspective may make them unpopular.

The **first** trait that Mary & Joseph had that God was looking for was they were in the line of David. God had promised in **Isaiah 11:1**, "There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of His roots. These words are the first in a prophecy of the coming Messiah. Both Mary & Joseph were descendants of David (Luke 1:30-32; 2:4).

The second and third traits relate to Mary. So, **number two**, she was a virgin. God had promised in Isaiah 7:14 that His Son would be born to a virgin. Turn with me to **Luke 1:26, 27**. God's timing is perfect. Mary is legally committed to being Joseph's wife. But she and Joseph are still living separately. She is still a virgin. At this critical time, God announces to her that she has been chosen to be the mother of His Son. Joseph has committed to marrying her, so there is a father figure in the picture, but she is still a virgin. God comes, really, at just the perfect time. Here, again, this is what God is looking for in someone who would be a parent of His Son.

Number three, and again this is seen most notably in Mary, is child-like faith. In Luke 1 the angel Gabriel tells Mary that she has been chosen. She will give birth to a son, who will be called the Son of the Highest.

His kingdom will never end. Mary is confused because she isn't married. But Gabriel tells her that the power of the Holy Spirit will bring about the conception in her womb. This is unheard of. It's never happened before. It's humanly impossible for a woman to have a child while being a virgin. But notice Mary's response in **verse 38 of Luke 1**. She doesn't argue. She doesn't try to understand how this is possible. "Ok, Lord. I'm Your servant. Whatever You want me to do. Here I am. May it happen just like You have said." What a response is this! This is the kind of faith that really pleases God. I believe this is what God was looking for in someone who would be a parent of His Son.

The next two traits are seen most notably in Joseph. You know, God could have picked a woman who wasn't engaged. But He wanted His Son to have a father figure in the home. Our **fourth** trait is integrity. Turn with me to Matthew chapter 1. Try to imagine Joseph's position. He has legally committed himself to be Mary's husband. The only way out now is divorce. But they aren't living together yet. And he finds out that Mary is pregnant. According to Luke's narrative, Mary went to see her relative Elizabeth, very soon after the angel Gabriel appears to her. It is believed that she doesn't tell Joseph the story until after she gets back. And she's gone for three months. For all Joseph knows, she has gotten pregnant by some man while she's been gone. How does Joseph respond in this situation? Let's read **Matthew 1:19**. Joseph is an honorable man. He is a man of integrity. He could have disgraced Mary. He could have made it a public issue. But he decides to divorce her privately, for Mary's sake. His justice is mixed with mercy. After the angel explains to Joseph what has happened with Mary, Joseph further shows his integrity by agreeing to remain as Mary's husband in spite of the criticism he is sure to receive. Beyond this, he decides to stay living separately from Mary until she gives birth. His respect for God's plan is commendable. God sees in Joseph a man who is qualified to be the father of His Son, because he is a man of **integrity**.

The **fifth** trait, which is seen most notably in Joseph, is **immediate obedience**. Turn with me to **verse 24 of Matthew 1**. The Lord Himself appears to Joseph in a dream, and tells him, "Don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife." He explains to Joseph that it IS the Holy Spirit who has brought about the conception. Joseph's response is immediate. He doesn't delay. He doesn't question or doubt what he has been told. He immediately commits himself to being Mary's husband. He obeyed God without hesitation. I believe this is the **fifth** reason that God saw in Mary & Joseph two people who were qualified to be the parents of His Son.

GOD saw that they were a good fit. They were the type of people HE was looking for. But there are a few things about them that were NOT popular with the JEWS, that from OUR perspective were questionable. **First**, they lived in Nazareth. Turn with me to **Luke 1:26**. Nazareth was located in Galilee. Galilee was filled with hillbillies. Judea, where Jerusalem and Bethlehem were, was a more educated and urban area. And Nazareth, well, it was first of all so insignificant that it's not mentioned anywhere in the Old Testament. And the great historian Josephus, when he lists 200 towns in Galilee, doesn't include Nazareth. Not only was Nazareth puny, it was wicked. The prevailing attitude was that NOTHING good could come out of Nazareth.

Well, there is a **second** characteristic of Mary & Joseph that might make them a questionable pick in OUR eyes, especially of the Jews in their day. Mary & Joseph were in poverty. Turn with me to **Luke 2:22, 24**. They have come to the temple to offer a sacrifice. And what do they bring? A pigeon. Why not a lamb? They were too poor. Too poor to even afford a lamb for a sacrifice! Surely they were not fit to be the parents of God's own Son! Yet God, who owns the SHEEP on a thousand hills, chose them. His ways are not our ways.

There is a **third** characteristic that might be seen as a strike against Mary & Joseph. Scripture alludes to the fact that Joseph had already been married and had at least six kids. Turn with me to **Mark 6:3**. These are the words of the people that Jesus grew up with: "We know this man's life history. He's a carpenter. His mom is Mary. (They don't mention his father) We know his four brothers – James, Joses, Judas, and Simon. His sisters live just down the street. Who does this guy think he is?" The way Jesus' brothers act, according to the culture at that time, it's clear that they are older than Jesus. Since Jesus was Mary's firstborn, these siblings mentioned were from a previous marriage of Joseph. God sends His Son into a mixed family.

PEOPLE questioned the qualifications of Mary & Joseph, but God saw that they were a perfect fit. He chose them to be the parents of His Son.

In choosing Mary & Joseph, God invited them to be His partners. They were to join Him in preparing His Son to accomplish the greatest mission of all time – to tell the truth about God, refuting Satan's lies that had been told for thousands of years, and to save a lost human race. Talk about a weighty responsibility. Raising a child to accomplish this great task. God picked Mary & Joseph to partner with Him.

I imagine they must have wondered what their role was. How do you raise the Son of God? Why would you need to instruct Him? He's God and He's perfect. It must have been a very unique experience. They probably felt horribly inadequate. But they accepted the responsibility. They answered the call. They agreed to be partners with God. What an incredible experience it is to partner with God!

What was the result of this partnership? How did Jesus turn out? Turn with me to **Matt. 3:13**. Jesus has been working as a **carpenter** in Nazareth. He is 30 years old. There is evidence that Joseph is dead by this time. Only Mary is left. I invite you to read sometime the chapter in Desire of Ages by Ellen White entitled, "The Baptism". When news of John the Baptist's preaching reaches Nazareth, Jesus recognizes this as His call. His time has come. And He is ready. Jesus lays down His tools. He gives a proper farewell to His mother, and joins the crowds that are flocking to hear John's preaching at the Jordan River.

Turn now to **Luke 3:22**. God gives His full approval. He was well-pleased with who Christ had become. Jesus was perfectly prepared for His ministry. Mary & Joseph have partnered with God in raising Jesus, in preparing Him for His supreme mission – to tell the truth about God and save the world. In this partnership they have succeeded. Jesus Christ is fit. He is prepared to accomplish His mission.

There is a second part to the outcome of this partnership. This is perhaps the most amazing of all to me. Turn with me to **John 7:3-5**. Jesus' brothers were a thorn in Jesus' flesh. They gave Him trouble His whole life. They were older, and they tried to bully Him around. They made His life extra difficult. And John says in verse 5 they didn't believe in Him. They didn't believe He was the Son of God, the Messiah. More than anyone, they had seen Jesus' perfect life. But they refused to accept Him. How tragic! Turn now to **Acts 1:14**. This is a small group of believers. All together they number 120. These people are in the upper room in response to Jesus' command to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to come upon them and anoint them for the calling to take the gospel to Judea, Samaria, and the whole world. Who makes up this group? First and foremost there are the 11 disciples (Judas has hung himself). The women mentioned are thought to be the wives of the disciples. Then there is Jesus' mother, Mary, and who else? Jesus brothers! They are there in the upper room. They have become believers. They have been blessed by Jesus' presence in their home. Somehow, somewhere, sometime, the light breaks through, and they believe in Him.

God partnered with Mary & Joseph. And there are **two** great works that are accomplished. Jesus is prepared for His ministry, for His great mission. And Jesus' brothers become believers! Two become well-known leaders in the church, each having an epistle canonized in the New Testament! (James & Jude) It could be that if God hadn't chosen Mary & Joseph to be His partners in the raising of His Son, that these four men would not have become believers and become the men that they were.

In closing, turn with me to **Matthew 9:35-38**. On that first Christmas God chose two people to be His partners. On THIS Christmas God is looking for all of US to be His partners. Jesus was doing what He could as one person. But when He saw the multitudes, when He saw how many people were coming to Him for help, He was moved with the thought of His own human limitations. So He told the disciples, "Pray for the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers." In other words, "We need more people!" There are so many people who would respond and believe in Christ, if they only knew of Him and what He has done for them.

There is no greater privilege than being a partner with God. God wants you to work in His field. If you would like to join me, and say, "Here I am, Lord, pick me. I want to work in Your harvest," I invite you to stand.