

# God is Protector

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Date: 22 December 2019

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Good morning. This is Matthew chapter 1 verses 18 through 25.

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.

Before 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. 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.

She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. These will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet. The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us.

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

[ 1 : 0 9 ]     This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. I was walking home from school on a cold winter day, took a shortcut through the woods, and I lost my way.

It was getting late, and I was scared and alone. But then a kind old man took my hand and led me home.

Now mama couldn't see him, oh, but he was standing there. And I knew in my heart, he was the answer to my prayers.

Oh, I believe there are angels among us, sent down to us from somewhere up above.

They come to you and me in our darkest hours to show us how to live, to teach us how to give, to guide us with the light of love.

[ 2 : 3 4 ]     Angels. Joseph had a dream, and an angel of the Lord appeared to him. Angels among us. Angels speaking to us.

Angels sharing. We have a Christmas tree, you might have noticed. And on the Christmas tree, we have little ornaments. Maybe you haven't taken a close look.

One of them's an angel. I like the angel. One of them's a cross. Another one's a heart. And then the last one is a dove.

A dove. The symbols of our faith, the symbols of God, that God is still speaking to us, that God has a plan for our lives, that the Holy Spirit will fill our hearts with the love of God and his salvation.

And on each ornament is the name of a family. So if your family's not on that ornament and you want to fill out one with your family name, I'm like, there's a table back there.

[ 3 : 32 ] You can do that. I mentioned it last night, and the basket filled right up. And that's kind of cool. God has a plan. But sometimes one of the hardest things we do in life is trying to discern, what is it that God wants for us?

What are we supposed to do? Because we also have a plan. Joseph had a plan. He was a righteous person. He knew the scriptures, it said.

He studied his faith, and he tried to live his life the way God would want him to live and the way people would respect him. He was descended from kings, after all. He was a carpenter.

I suspect he had those little signs out in front of the houses he built, built by Joe, you know. I just think. Cell phone number on there, you know. He studied the scriptures.

He went to worship. He knew what his religion was about, and he knew this verse, I'm sure, from Proverbs. It said, The father of a righteous child has great joy. A man who fathers a wise son rejoices in him, and he wanted his family to rejoice.

[ 4 : 42 ] So he had a plan. He was going to have a career as a carpenter. He was going to raise a family, and there was this young woman in the village that caught his eye by the name of Mary.

I suspect they grew up together. Back then, it was just a little village. There's a very good possibility that they kind of chose each other early on in life. After all, there weren't that many choices.

And Mary came from a good family. She was a good girl. She knew what she was supposed to be. And Joseph was engaged to her.

I felt good about that. I suspect Joseph, the way I would see it, was probably in his late teens, maybe early 20s.

We're not sure. By our standards, a young man, but by that culture, just starting his life. When I was 14 years old, I've told some of you that I went away on a church retreat to a place called Cherry Creek, and I went because there were a whole lot of pretty girls from my church going on the retreat.

[ 5 : 50 ] I'll be honest. That's why I went. And while I was on the retreat, there was one girl that caught my eye. She not only caught my eye, she caught my heart.

I was going to marry this girl. I was 14, and I made that decision. I made the plan. It's going to happen. Up to that point in time, I hadn't had that feeling about a girl.

Oh, from time to time, I would give a girl a ring, but there were the ones from Miller's Drugstore that after two weeks would turn your finger green. You know what I'm talking about, right? But I also fell in love with God.

I experienced God reaching into my heart and touching me in a way I had never felt before. And the religion that I grew up with and that Joseph grew up with became a living thing within my life.

And I had a plan. I decided at the age of 14, I was going to read the whole Bible. Nobody told me how to do it, so I started in the beginning and went to the back of the book.

[ 6 : 51 ] That's not really the better way to do it, but another story, another sermon. I made a plan that I would marry this young woman, we'd have a family, and we'd have a life together. Joseph had a plan.

And his young fiancée went off to visit her relative Elizabeth. I'm sure he was fine with that. You know, that sounds good. Go visit the family, make connections. That'd be good for you to get away for a little while.

And she came back with what looked like she had put on a little bit of weight, which is good. That means Elizabeth taught her how to cook. That's good, you know, I'm glad for that. Until they found out that the little weight, and she was pregnant.

And then she told Joseph that the baby was God's child. And I don't know about you, but I would have a hard time with that thing.

And his dreams were completely shattered. We have a plan in life. We have ideas. We know what we're going to do, and it's tough when our dreams are shattered.

[ 7 : 56 ] And what do we do with that? Every day that I get up in the morning, except for Sunday, oddly enough, I make a plan. I actually sit down at my computer, and people that know me well know I have a list.

These are the things I am going to do. I know what that day will be. I know what I'm going to accomplish. I know who I'm going to see, who I'm going to talk to, what's going to happen. And I never complete that plan.

Ever. Does anybody else have this problem, or is it just me? Never, ever does it happen. Something comes up, something occurs, somebody calls, something happens in someone's life, and all of a sudden, I have to make a choice.

And I have to prioritize. And the people that I thought that I was going to be caring and loving with, I have to set aside, because there's something else that I've decided I have to do more.

And I don't like it. Because my plan, my dream, my expectation failed. And I don't like to fail. I don't know about you all, but most of us don't like to fail.

[ 9 : 07 ] And yet we do. So one of the struggles we have is how do we even make those decisions? How do we come to terms with making the proper decisions in our lives and the right choices?

Said the little lamb to the shepherd boy, do you hear what I hear? Do you hear what I hear?

Do you have the ability to understand because you've heard what God would want you to be? Joseph, it says, was faithful to the law. He didn't want to expose Mary to public disgrace.

He had it in his mind to divorce her quietly. 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.

He thought about it. He studied the scriptures and knew the ways of God. He understood what God would want him to do. He gave deep consideration, but then he listened.

[ 10 : 14 ] Do we hear what God wants us to hear? Our ears open. Do we know that the angels around us are speaking to us of what God wants us to hear?

Do we listen? We can make the wrong choice for all the right reasons. It's hard because we have a plan.

The problem I had with this young girl that I was in love with is that she was dating a friend of mine. So we became best friends. It's a strategy, young men, unless you don't know that.

We became best friends, which meant I hung around her all the time because he was her girlfriend. Boyfriend. Anyways, you understand.

And eventually they broke up. And because we were all so close, he didn't mind. In fact, he was actually happy that I wanted to go out with her. She had another girlfriend.

[ 11 : 22 ] And so we finally started to date. I even bought her a ring. Not one of those Miller's Drugs rings. I mean a real ring because we were, anybody remember this? Going steady.

Remember? Back in the day, we used to go steady, which meant that we had an exclusive relationship with each other. We're just teenagers.

But it mattered to us. Joe had a plan. He's faithful to what he's been told. He wants to do the right thing.

He has the tape recordings going in his mind like we all do about what we're supposed to do, what we're supposed to accomplish, what our life is supposed to be like. We've been taught since we were this high how to walk, how to talk, how to act, what we're supposed to be.

And now it's all come crashing down. And the angel said, don't be afraid. Don't be afraid.

[ 12 : 26 ] Don't be afraid of what people think. Don't be afraid of what people say. Don't be afraid about the fact they'll talk about you or that you won't accomplish what you set out to do.

Because they did talk about Joseph. They did talk about Mary. They did rumor around about them. And I don't have the feeling from anything I've seen that Joseph's career turned out to be as successful as he wanted it to be.

And the angel said, don't be afraid. I'm sure he was afraid. Maybe he was afraid because he didn't believe Mary and he thought, you know, she was unfaithful to him.

I think he might have been afraid because he thought it was God's child. How many of you want to grow up as Jesus' stepfather? Jesus, get down off of there!

You want to... Jesus, just, you know, if you would be so kind as to... How do you even do this? You got the Son of God living in your house!

[ 13 : 27 ] What do you want to do? Oftentimes people are defined by what they do and by their integrity and Joe is in a place where he has to actually give both up.

And it's hard when the plan you have doesn't seem to work. And I understand that. His reputation, his business, his life's dreams, everything seems like it's going to be shattered.

The Christmas tree didn't always look like this. I remember when I first came to this church, I had a tree similar, not exactly like this, but similar out in the Wyoming County churches I serve. And I had copied that from somebody else and I thought it looked really nice.

When I came here, they had what we refer to as a Charlie Brown tree. I don't know if you know what a Charlie Brown tree is. It really wasn't the tree so much. They just cut some tree they found in somebody's yard, put it up, and then throw whatever they had around on it.

You know, some of it was homemade stuff, some of it was different colors, some of it was this or that. It really looked, sorry those of you who were here, awful.

[ 14 : 41 ] But I knew enough that what people think matters. Just like Joseph knew, your reputation and what people think about you really makes a difference in your life.

So I was smart enough not to say, man, that's an ugly tree. Had a plan. I had an idea in my mind of what I thought it should be.

I'm pointing over here because it was on this side of the church back then. It was ugly. I went out with this young girl and we talked and we planned.

We talked about how many children we'd have, where our life was going to be, what we were going to do for a living. And we'd talk about God. We had met on a church retreat.

She went to church but somewhere in one of those deep discussions I found out she didn't believe in God. Well, that was troubling. I mean, I had shifted my whole world over the last three or four years.

[ 15 : 44 ] I had changed from being a person who was doing all sorts of things that were wrong, bad, terrible, trying to live the life God wanted me to live and I knew that God was transforming my very being.

How am I going to go through life with a young woman who doesn't believe in God? So I prayed to God and I prayed to God to change her mind and change her heart and change her life which is the right thing to do and God said something that just made me not happy.

He said, she's not the girl for you. What? Yes, she is. I've been in love with her, God, for three years.

Don't tell me she's the wrong girl. If you listen, God will send you the message sometimes through angels, sometimes just speaking to you, sometimes you'll just feel it but you'll understand what God wants you to be and God clearly told me no.

So I said to God, then you show me the girl I'm going to marry, because I'm like 17. Sometimes you talk that way to God when you're 17. Sometimes you talk that way to God when you're my age too but anyways.

[ 17 : 08 ] You show me the girl. I actually had a dream that night and God showed me the girl. I didn't know it at the time but I saw this girl.

We were standing in some place looking out a window off of a meadow but she had a different color of hair than the girl I dated. Mine was a blonde and this was a brunette.

Joe has a choice to make. Neither one of these choices is what we would call good. He either is going to live to the rules of his faith and his culture and his society and what he's planned and become a self-righteous judgmental bitter man where he's going to live to a relationship that he knows is not proper and all the rumors and all the things that are going on and end up being licentious with no values and no moral compass.

Whatever he does it's wrong. said the night wind to the little lamb do you see what I see? Do you see it?

Do you see what God has in mind for you? He's trying to do the right thing by disowning the child of God. He's trying to do the right thing by putting Christ out of his life.

[ 18 : 33 ] How many times if we were honest would we be trying to do the right thing by putting Jesus aside? Fortunately the Patriots and Bills played last night.

We know the unfortunate results but it makes it a lot less of a moral dilemma for you today, right? You can be here. That's not a big deal if you miss church for a football game and we have church on Saturday night and church all through the week, right?

But how many times do we find ourselves trying to make the right decision and we're putting the Christ child aside? Because we're trying to do what we think is right.

What people have told us is right. I didn't want to hurt the people who put those ugly ornaments on the tree. I didn't want to tell them that their tree looked like a mess.

But sometimes decisions are hard. Break a heart or break a rule. Sometimes it feels like there's no right, right? We're like Joseph here.

[ 19 : 39 ] Caught between law and grace. I plan every single day what I'm going to do and every week I have another list that I have to do by Sunday morning.

every single time I fail. Every single time. And Jackie will tell you that in the evening on Sunday night often times I'll be sitting in my chair trying to relax and I'll start groaning.

Oh. Oh. And she'll say what's wrong? Is your stomach off or something? And I'll tell her what I failed to do. The thing I had to do.

The thing you counted on me to do. And somehow with all the things going on I didn't do it. It's hard. Because we make choices.

So when we have to make choices that are hard to make how do we find a way to live at peace? How do we start to feel okay about it? Do you follow?

[ 20 : 46 ] Because it's not just knowing how to make the decisions it's living with those decisions. that we know are going to cause somebody to say we did the wrong thing.

And I would suggest to you that we find that peace when we turn to God. When we live to God's plan and then it says the peace that passes all understanding will be born to you.

The child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit and the child conceived in us is from the Holy Spirit. The power of God to change us.

You know what the symbol of peace is in this world? It's a dove, right? Do you know why? Because the dove is a symbol of the Holy Spirit of God which brings us peace.

peace. Because our plans won't always work. And what we do will cause sometimes failure.

[ 21 : 53 ] And it does matter what people think and we will feel disappointed. But if we are living to what God wants and letting God live within us it will change things. John tells us there's no fear in love.

Perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment. the one who fears is not made perfect in love. Do not be afraid to make the decisions to live into the plan God has for your life because God will drive out the fear the anxiety the disappointment the worries the troubles that we have because God's answer always works.

We'll never fail. about a week and a half after I had this conversation with God and I told my girlfriend the one I loved and I was going to marry that we were breaking up because she didn't believe in God you know most young girls think that's nuts and there must have been another girl or something there wasn't but a week and a half later there was.

I met this brunette at church camp she was like more gorgeous than Marsha Brady the perfect woman and she was interested in me well kind of I thought she was for the time being for camp we both knew we had girlfriends boyfriends back home but somehow in the midst of my confusion and my disappointment God showed me what I needed to know said the shepherd boy to the mighty king do you know what I know do you know what I know do you know who I know that God will conceive through the Holy Spirit and unto us a son is given unto us a child is born to you not just to the world not in a stable in Bethlehem but in our own very hearts and beings and lives to transform and change who we are so we can get through the broken struggling times knowing that God will give us peace

Jesus isn't born to us through religion religion is good by the way it's the manger that holds the baby right without the manger the baby would be flopping around on the ground we had a preschool pageant earlier in the week and there was a little girl playing Mary and she had the baby it was just a you know it wasn't a real baby but she has this little baby and she starts like swinging Mary you know and you can see the teacher I didn't see her face but I can imagine what it looked like and so she's pointing to the little girl so the little girl put the baby in the manger and everything was at peace there's nothing wrong with religion it's the cradle that holds the Christ child without it we wouldn't have any boundaries we wouldn't have any place to pass it on we wouldn't have a place to worship or praise God religion is a wonderful thing but the power of what we believe in is not a religion it's an experience of the living God to us a son is given to us a child is born and God is calling us to that experience do you know who I know and when the

[ 25 : 37 ] Messiah is born to us he becomes Emmanuel God with us and that changes everything now Joseph had a plan and he had figured it out and he had thought it through and he knew what he was going to do and it took an angel to change his mind an angel that appeared in his dream and he did what the angel told him in the dream I don't want you to really show me your hands but how many of you would actually change your life based on a dream you had most of you would say oh that doesn't happen that doesn't occur which is why I'm telling you this story about my life again because it was about three or four years later after I had married this young woman and we were standing at Camp Watson Homestead looking out this picture window at the meadow and I said I've been here before I did this I remember this oh my gosh you're my dream girl what a cool thing

God showed me what my life was supposed to be in a decision that was critical and essential to who I would be and what I would be in life and 43 years later she's still my dream girl and she's still a lot prettier than Marsha Brady because I've seen Marsha and she hasn't held up as well as my wife I didn't say that sorry Marsha I don't know Marsha but sometimes we have to wait for God's plan to occur I want you to take another twist on this story because we rarely think about what Mary was feeling at this time she was so excited coming home from her cousin Elizabeth's house expecting that Joseph was going to be like oh really this is great and Joseph's like I'll forget you and so Mary could have gone back to Elizabeth at least there she was supported but she waited because she knew God had a plan

I had a plan about the Christmas tree I knew I wanted it to look a lot like this not exactly but other people worked on that too but with the white ornaments however I had this Charlie Brown tree to contend with so one year God took care of it we had a fellow donate the tree now what they did was they took the top of the tree off for their own house and gave us what was left so we had a 20 foot Christmas bush and when we put the Charlie Brown stuff on it it was the ugliest tree you've ever seen and I could say without insulting anybody don't you think we could do better than that they were like yes I said I've got a plan a couple fellows in our church made up the ornaments and we ended up with what I knew would be good so that we as a family could gather at the tree with all our names written on it on the symbols of faith sometimes we have to wait but the plan of

God will happen it was set in place before Mary and Joseph were even born God had an expectation although he allowed Joseph to make his choice just like he meant all of us make a choice either we'll live into God's plan or God will find somebody else that will either we'll live with that peace which passes all understanding or else we'll let someone else have that great gift it's our choice but Romans chapter 8 says to us that we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him and have been called according to his purpose so don't be afraid to live into the plan of God don't be afraid to hear what God has to hear say don't be afraid to listen to angels don't be afraid of what others say when you know that God is your God because God has a plan and when we live to that plan the blessings of God will blossom into our life forever and forever do you hear what I hear do you see what I see do you know what I know

I believe there are angels among us sent from glory to bring us a message of peace and hope and possibilities I've lived that in my life I've experienced the voices of God telling me what I should do and why I should be and it helps me to have peace even when I know all the plans I make may not even work out but God's plan will always work and we can live into that peace into that dream that God has for us so may God go with you may God help you to hear the voices of God may God help you to see what God has planned for you and may God especially make sure you know that God loves you and to you a child is born given to you that your life might be whole go in his peace and his grace today and always amen are they to have to have as that your life as is as with a ws

[ 31 : 19 ] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.