



# VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

## Christmas Is Trusting God

**Matthew 1:18–25**

**Tim Badal | December 17, 2023**



Today is a very special Sunday in the life of our church. If you've been around Village Bible Church for a year or longer, you know that we've designated this Sunday as "All in" Sunday. For 51 weeks out of the year, we say very little

about giving back to God and the ministry here. But on one Sunday out of the year, amidst the celebration of Christmas, we take time to say as a congregation that Jesus is truly what Christmas is all about, giving back to Him as a sign of our love and affection for the indescribable gift that was given to us at Christmas. As a church family, we see this as a great opportunity.

Maybe you're new to Village Bible Church this morning; maybe you're a visitor. What you're going to see happen later in our service is an opportunity for our church family to come forward and give their gifts. We are not obligating you in any way to join us in doing this. We're so glad you are here in the service to hear how you can grow in your trust of God and how you can experience Jesus this Christmas.

I want to use our time in God's Word this morning to speak to the very emotion and process by which one gives a gift like this. What's behind this is trust. We'll be talking through the life of Joseph to see what it means to trust God.

We're in a series we've entitled "Christmas Is..." Last week Pastor Phil got us started by talking about Christmas being about giving. Let's be honest. I love how our creative team has put these thoughts together. When we say "Christmas Is...", we can put all kinds of things in that space. Christmas is food. Christmas is festivity. Christmas is songs or movies. Christmas is shopping. Christmas is decorations. We can fill our Christmas season with all kinds of good things. I am not demonizing those in any way. Our family loves those things. But as Christ-followers, we must recognize that Christmas is Jesus. It's all about Him. Everything we do, everything we sing, every piece of food we eat is to the glory of the One Who has set us free.

As we talked about this as a teaching team, I was struck by the different sermon titles. We can say Christmas is giving, and someone might say, "No, Christmas is Jesus. Why would you say it's giving, trusting, sharing, or serving?" These are the four things we'll look at because these are how the Bible brings out the truths of this most stupendous event—the incarnation which is Jesus coming, putting on flesh and making His dwelling among us. Surely we should have a book of the Bible that talks about this in very theological terms. It should describe how we should go about celebrating this incredible and miraculous event. For those of you who are Bible students, you would think that the story of Christmas would be told in epistle form, that the apostles Paul or Peter would have dedicated a letter to the church about that. But that's not how we're introduced to the Incarnation. That's not how we're given the story of Christmas.

In fact, the Gospel writers, except for John, speak of the Incarnation through the lives of people, how Christ's coming changes the way we look at things, changes the way we live, changes the way we worship. In light of these, we hear stories of people's lives. We see how they encountered the Jesus of Christmas and then did something. The wise men gave. The shepherds shared. Mary served. Joseph trusted. The way we celebrate Christmas is how we respond to the truth of Jesus. Yes, Christmas is Jesus. But it also means we give. It means we trust. It means we share. It means we serve.

Can I ask you this morning: is this your response this Christmas? In your calendar of things to do, do you include giving more, trusting more, sharing more and serving more? Do you include these for Jesus and about Jesus? This is how people celebrated Christmas.

As we come to Matthew 1 this morning, which will help us recognize and remember—especially on “All in” Sunday—what we’re talking about is trust. Here’s what Matthew says about the birth of Jesus:

<sup>18</sup> Now the birth of Jesus Christ<sup>1</sup> took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. <sup>20</sup> But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” <sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

<sup>23</sup> “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel”

(which means, God with us). <sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, <sup>25</sup> but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

In Joseph we have one of the best human pictures of what it means to trust God. Did you know that trust in our world today is at an all-time low? We don’t trust like we used to. In fact, our trust in almost every institution has dropped precipitously in the last few years. Maybe it’s because of the pandemic. Maybe we’re just becoming more and more cynical. In almost everything involving life, we’ve lost confidence and trust, whether it’s something right before us or far from us. I’m sad to say that number five or six on the list is the church or organized religion, which has lost 5% of trust in just two years. In some ways, as a small business manager, I have people trusting me more in my catering realm than they trust me in the preaching and pastoring realm.

We’re having a hard time trusting people. As Americans, our trust is eroding in many ways even more quickly than in other parts of the world. We are by no means the leader in the trust department. There are other countries, including the country just to the north of us, that have a higher level of trust for its neighbors than we do. The Norwegians carry a higher level of trust for the world around them. I don’t know why that is. Maybe there’s something to be learned there. But we lack trust.

In fact, with our rule of law and all the peace we have, you would think it would be easy for us as Americans to trust. However, a study was done that asked, “How many people do you as an individual trust?” The number came in—can you imagine this? The result was 1.6 to 1.8 people. I take this to mean most people trust their spouse, at least I hope that’s true. Then they trust another a half a person, or maybe three-quarters of another person. This study tells me that with all the family and friends we have, that we can only trust an average 1.6 to 1.8 people in our sphere of acquaintances. Trust is also different depending on one’s age group. The Baby Boomers are far more trusting than others. Not to demonize you, but for some reason, you Millennials struggle with trusting. You’re also more cynical about people and institutions.

So this leads us to ask what does the Bible say about trust? It’s pretty unusual. The Bible speaks about trust 134 times. Usually it speaks well of trusting God. It seems to minimize the idea of trusting other people in general. It does imply that we should trust people when we’re in close relationship with them, but the Bible reserves ultimate trust for God. That’s why the psalmist wrote, “Some trust in horses and chariots, but our trust should be in the Lord” (Psalm 20:7).

The Hebrews had seven different words to describe trust, where we only have one. They saw trust as more complex than we probably do. We do have a cousin word to trust as believers—the word faith. When we have faith in God, it means we trust Him. We believe what He has said. If I were to whittle down the word trust to its biblical meaning, it literally means to throw one’s self down upon. That doesn’t seem to make much sense, but you’ve actually already done that this morning. You came in and threw yourself down into the chairs you’re sitting in. You did that because you trusted the chair. You were confident that it would hold you. I don’t imagine any of you are hovering above your chair right now. What’s also amazing is that I didn’t see any of you come in, pick up the chair, look at it to make sure it was welded just right. You didn’t check to see the seating capacity of the chair. Why? We sit in a lot of chairs and it’s a very rare thing for a chair to break. That’s why we blindly sit in these chairs without even thinking about it. So we are trusting. We are throwing ourselves down upon something, believing it will hold us. However, it is amazing what happens when something we trust fails.

My mother-in-law had invited us to Christmas one year at their new home in Galina and she had a new dining room set. You know where this is going, right? I remember sitting at the table when dinner was being served, but my seat wasn’t just right. So I moved the seat, not really getting up but just shuffling the chair. I remember hearing an ominous sound and I went down. My mother-in-law said, “What did you do?!” Can I tell you, there is not a dinner experience since then when I don’t think about the

chair I'm sitting in. Why? Because trust has been broken. I don't have confidence in those chairs like I should. They have let me down.

Friends, we have a passage in front of us where a man felt completely let down. His confidence and trust in the woman he loved was lost. Beyond that, he was a man who followed God up to that point, so he must have wondered, "God, how could You allow this to happen?" Yet as we see, he still trusted God. He threw himself upon God.

Trusting God means abiding and resting in Him. It involves discerning His goodness and greatness. You will not trust God to the level He wants you to until you have seen, tasted and experienced Him. You've heard what He has said and seen what He has fulfilled. As you grow in your knowledge of God, your trust in Him will also grow. You will know that when you put yourself in God's hands, you will be protected, embraced and surrounded by His goodness and greatness. This will happen regardless of the circumstances.

So let me ask, do you trust God? Do you trust God in the quiet times and in the loud times? Do you trust Him when things are easy? Do you trust Him when things are hard? Do you trust Him when things make sense? Do you trust Him when they make no sense at all? Do you trust God when you know what to do? Do you trust God when you don't know what to do? Do you trust Him when everybody is doing what they're supposed to be doing? Do you trust Him when nobody is doing what they need to do?

How do we know if we're trusting God? Let me give you three things. These are three tests I want you to take regarding trusting God.

## Priority

You know whom or what you trust based on where you turn when you're in need. What is your priority? Who is the first person you call? Who is the first person you turn to? What is the thing you go after when you're in need? For some, it's a person—maybe your spouse, your parent or your child. They're your first call. For others of us, it's our bank accounts. As long as there's money in the bank, we're good. Money can take care of a lot of woes. For still others, although maybe we won't admit this, we trust that bottle of booze or that bottle of pills. We trust those things to change the condition of our lives. But God says, "Put all those things away. I want you to trust Me. I should be your priority."

## Proximity

Secondly, trust is found in close proximity. We trust the things we're closest to. Maybe you're not trusting God. So how close are you to God? Do you know Him? Are you experiencing Him? We have difficulty trusting things that are far away. That's why some of the things we don't trust are big business and politicians. Why? Because they are so far from us. The greater the separation, the greater the lack of trust. Some of us are separated from God because we're not abiding and resting in Him, therefore our trust in Him is lacking.

## History

Finally, trust involves a history test. We trust the things we've known for a long period of time. We don't trust strangers at the same level we trust people we've lived life with for years. If you think about the person you trust most, I would imagine it's not someone you met two weeks ago. Rather, it's someone you've known for a long time. Someone you've logged a lot of hours with. Your trust grows as your history with this person grows.

God wants us to set Him as our priority. He wants us to stay in proximity with Him, so our trust can increase. And He wants to log a history with Him so we'll trust Him in both good times and bad.

Now, let's turn to the story of Joseph. We know very little about his life, but we do know that he was from the city of Nazareth and was of the line of David. He was a carpenter. That's all we know about his background. He's now pledged to marry a woman named Mary. In the Middle East, engagement or betrothal was a serious thing, as it still is today. In some ways the engagement is even more important than the wedding itself. The wedding is kind of an exclamation point on the whole marriage process. The engagement of Joseph to Mary could have been something he chose, or it could have been arranged by their families. Either way, he was committed to her. The engagement ceremony involved his family, friends and the entire community. He pledged to her, "I will prepare a place for you, then when it's done, I'll return to take you to be with me forever."

Does that sound familiar? In John 14:2, Jesus was using Middle Eastern betrothal language, *"I go to prepare a place for you..."* That's what husbands-to-be did. They would build a house. Joseph, being a carpenter, was building his home, even before he could receive his bride.

Now with that on the horizon, Mary came to Joseph with her news. We're not told how that happened, but it seems likely that she didn't tell anyone but him, so he did not hear it through the gossip mill. What must have taken place that she heard from Gabriel, then the first person she went to was Joseph? She told her fiancé, "I am with child."

Joseph probably thought, "Hold it—you're what? This whole time I've been building our lives, building our home, and you're galivanting with other men? Am I hearing you right? You seemed to be a righteous woman. You seemed to have all your spiritual ducks in a row. And this is the word you bring me, that you've been unfaithful?"

The Bible says that Joseph was a just man. He was righteous and morally upright. He held himself to the highest standards and upheld God's laws. He did what was right in the eyes of God. But now he found out that his life had fallen apart. This man was standing in front of a woman who had ruined his life. From what he can tell, Mary had made him a laughing-stock in the community. After the blood, sweat and tears of building a home, she had trampled it all underfoot. But the Bible says Joseph was a just man because he trusted God. Joseph was just before this unfolded with Mary, and he continued to be a just man going through it.

## **Trusting God involves the calm and chaotic moments of life.**

You will not trust God in the chaotic moments of life if you're not trusting Him in the calm moments of life. Some of us think, "I'll trust God when the accident happens. I'll trust God when the big problem comes. I'll trust God when the storm clouds come my way." Well, you might not. In order to trust God, you need history with Him. You need history with Him in the small things of life.

Can I just tell you a couple things Joseph did? Number one, he trusted God's ways and not his flesh, so he remained pure before marriage. Matthew tells us they had not been together. Many people today think, "Isn't that what dating people do? Surely they were engaged—Isn't that what engaged people do?" They might even think, "God doesn't really care."

No, Joseph was a righteous man and he trusted his sexual life to the God Who created him. God tells us sex is for one man and one woman, a husband and wife, for a lifetime—and that's where it stays. Joseph waited. We don't usually talk about moral purity at Christmas. Why did Joseph choose this? Because he trusted God and not his feelings. He trusted God and not his buddies. He trusted God and not what he saw in the media. I know I'm stretching that a little bit. But he trusted God.

Number two, he trusted God when this news came to him. He trusted God and followed the law. Our trust in God includes trusting His Word. We read, *"Being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, [Joseph] resolved to divorce her quietly."* The law said if a man discovers that his fiancée is unchaste, he could get a certificate of divorce. That was the nicer way to deal with this. The more difficult option would be to put her under public scrutiny, taking her before the religious leaders in that community, after which she could be stoned. We see that brought up in the Gospel of John regarding the woman caught in adultery. That's what Joseph could have done to Mary.

A private divorce would only have involved the two fathers. There could have been a variety of reasons for that. If it was a divorce that was amicable between the fathers, then the offense was considered to be settled. In essence it would wipe the slate clean and Joseph could go his way. Mary would have the child, the family would take care of it and no one would speak further about it.

However, Joseph did not want to put her to shame, so he chose the law that allowed him to divorce her—and he also chose to do it quietly. He was a just man because he trusted the law of the Lord. God said, "It's okay to do this. I've created this provision," so Joseph followed it with more grace than even was required.

Third, Joseph trusted God even when he heard what was no doubt heartbreaking news. Imagine that the woman you love, or the man you love, says, "I've been with another." Some men would trust their anger, lash out and even hit. Maybe he would demoralize her emotionally through things he could say. But we don't read that Joseph responded with any of that. How could he do this? He was trusting that when someone wronged him, it was God's role to repay the offense. Some of us have been

wronged by people and we're unwilling to trust God in that. We want revenge. Joseph received this life-altering, heartbreaking news, but he didn't resort to anger. He trusted God.

Matthew then says Joseph *"considered these things."* That word 'consider' is the Greek word *enthumeomai*. It means a deep and profound thinking on things. It's an active process. Joseph was wrestling with these things. "I don't know what to do!" Have you been there? "I don't know what to do. I don't know where to turn. I don't know what the answer is." Being a just man, no doubt he cried out to God, "Help me! Do I believe her? She's talking about an angel. She's talking about a Holy Spirit. She's talking about Messiah. I know what my buddies are going to think. I know what my parents are going to think. I don't know what to do."

James tells us that when we lack wisdom, we should ask God and He will give it to us generously, without finding fault. As Joseph continued to wrestle with these questions and his emotions, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. In his exhaustion, Joseph fell asleep and the dream came. In his dream, the angel said to him, *"Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins"* (verses 20-21). Verse 22 goes on to say, *"All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet."*

## **Trusting God involves listening and leaning on God's leading.**

In the chaotic moments of Joseph's life, he turned to God. In the chaotic moments of our lives, we need to listen to and lean on God's leading. Joseph had followed the Word of the Lord that was written in the law of Moses; now he was going to hear audibly the word of the Lord through a dream.

Now, right away, what do we do with dreams? I'm here to tell you that while dreams are used throughout the Bible in significant ways, the question we have to ask is can God still use dreams today? I would say yes, He can. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that dreams have come to an end. Of course, we have something those people didn't have—the completed Scriptures.

I personally have had a dream about someone else's life confirm something they had no idea about. I've experienced this. But I would say that if you're going to base your decision on a dream, it had better be confirmed by the Holy Scriptures. That's because dreams have a way of getting the best of us.

In Joseph's case, there was a confirmation. I believe, and I know scholars would agree, that what made this dream so powerful was not the vision so much as it was the confirmation of what Joseph had been told. He may well have heard Mary's own words in his dream. Something like, "You are to take me as your wife, for what is conceived in me is from the Holy Spirit. I'm to bear a son and we are to give him the name Jesus." The angel who appeared to Joseph no doubt confirmed that message. The dream was clear enough that Joseph now fully believed that what Mary had told him was true. He trusted the word of the Lord.

Brothers and sisters, we don't need dreams because we have the written Word of God. Do we trust it? Are we listening to it? Are we allowing it to lead us? Do we lean on this Book in the good times and the bad, the times that make sense and the times that don't? Do we trust God in His Word?

## **Trusting God involves doing what He tells you to do.**

How do we know that Joseph trusted God? Did he just wake up and say, "Okay, now I trust this"? No, the great litmus test of our trust is what we do. Matthew says in verse 24, *"When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife."*

Do you want to know if you trust God? Are you doing what He tells you to do? That's our third point today. Trusting God involves doing what He tells you to do. Don't tell yourself, don't tell others, don't tell God that you trust Him, but then do the opposite when He says something to you. Joseph did everything he was commanded to do. What was he commanded to do? Three things:

- First, he was to take Mary as his wife. Check.
- Second, he was to believe that what God was doing was unlike anything God had ever done before. Check.
- Finally, he was told to name this boy Jesus. Check.

What I find amazing in this story is that the prophecy the angel quoted to him was something Joseph was already familiar with. Being a just man, a man of God's law, he knew what the prophets had written: *"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel"* (Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:23). Immanuel means *"God with us."*

How awesome is it that the very verse that prophesies the coming of Jesus would use a title of God that we need in order to trust God more. Some of us don't trust God because we think He's far off. That proximity test has God far, far away. We too easily think, "He doesn't care about me. He doesn't know about me. He isn't concerned about me."

However, here the text says God does care about you. God is concerned about you. God is close to you. He is Immanuel, God with us. You can trust Him. You can go to Him. You can rely on Him. You can cast your cares on Him because He cares for you (1 Peter 5:7). Joseph knew this, so he trusted God. He did what Immanuel told him to do.

Can it be said of us this morning that, in the quiet and the chaotic moments of life, we trust God? We trust by leaning and listening to God's leading, through His Word and maybe even through other means. Do we do what the Word of God tells us to?

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All Scriptures quoted directly English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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