

Interruptions, Inconveniences, and the Unknown

Why is it sometimes better to not know the whole story all at once?

Can you think of a situation in which this would be the case?

God revealed His plan for Jesus' parents one step at a time. They did not know all that we know about their son when they were called by God to parent him. How did spoken truths and life experiences progressively prepare Mary and Joseph to do God's will? Let's look...

Stop and Pray—God, teach me something that will make this story fresh and amazing. Help me to appreciate how You orchestrate my life to bring about Your will.

Read and reread Luke 1:26-38 - Revelation through Gabriel

1. What does Gabriel tell Mary about her future son? (Note also what is not revealed at this time about Jesus' life and mission that is disclosed in the remainder of scripture.)

2. Imagine yourself in Mary's place. After receiving this announcement from Gabriel, what did Mary say (1:34, 38) and what might she have felt and thought?

3. God used Mary to bring about the possibility of salvation for the whole world.
 - a. What about Mary would have made her contemporaries consider her unworthy or inadequate for the task to which God called her?

 - b. How do Mary's qualifications coupled with God's ability and desire to use her encourage you?

Read and reread Luke 1:39-56 - Revelation through Elizabeth

4. Mary, seemingly by herself, then takes a very long and dangerous journey to see her aunt. Why do you think she made this visit?

5. Reflect on Mary's song. What is remarkable about the song's tone considering her life circumstances at the time? Support your answer.

6. After three months with Elizabeth, Mary returned to Nazareth until the last days of her pregnancy.
 - a. What might her experience have been like?

 - b. How would her experience during pregnancy have prepared her to be Jesus' mother?

Read and reread Matthew 1:18-25 - Revelation through Joseph

7. Let's think about why God chose Joseph and how God prepared him to be Jesus' earthly father.
 - a. What do we learn about Joseph's character from his pondering prior to and his actions following the angel's revelation?

 - b. List all the lessons about God and truths about Jesus that Joseph learned from his encounter with the angel. (Highlight any information about Jesus that would have been new to Mary and Joseph that might have changed their perception of "Messiah".

Read and reread Luke 2:1-20 - Revelation Through the Shepherds

8. The shepherds near Bethlehem were often in charge of the sheep used for the sin sacrifices at the Temple in Jerusalem.
 - a. What was announced to them by the angel?

 - b. When the shepherds shared their experience with Mary and Joseph, what new information about their son would they have received and how might it have continued to change their image of "Messiah"?

9. After visiting Jesus and thus confirming what the angel had told them, the shepherds proceeded to tell everyone what they had seen and heard and all were amazed. Mary "treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart". What might she have been pondering?

Read and reread Luke 2:21-35 - Revelations at the Temple

10. "When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the law required" (Luke 2:27) God revealed more information about Jesus through Simeon. (Again highlight any new information about Jesus.)

<u>What did he say (2:29-35)?</u>	<u>What did it mean?</u>
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Read and reread Matthew 2:1-23 - Reminder Through the Magi

Note: The Magi were a tribe of priests. They were Persia's version of the Levites who sought wisdom and truth. In those days many men believed in astrology. Therefore, when a new star appeared, it was as if God was breaking into His order of the heavens to peak the curiosity of those who interpreted life by the constellations. Several historians of that time recorded in those days an expectation of the coming of a king from Judea who would set up a universal empire. Thus, it was understandable why the Magi would have searched diligently for Jesus.

11. According to most scholars Jesus was between one and two years old when the Magi found him. List all the emotions that Mary and Joseph might have experienced during the Magi's visit and how those emotions could have served as a reminder or source of encouragement in their God-given task of parenting Jesus.

Emotion

Reminded / Encouraged Them

12. a. What was required of Mary and Joseph immediately following the departure of the Magi?
- b. Mary and Joseph were not planning a move. How have unexpected detours or interruptions to your well laid plans preserved and/or prepared you for your future life or ministry?

Note: Throughout the centuries before Jesus came, troubled Jews would find refuge in Egypt. Therefore, every city in Egypt had its colony of Jews in which Joseph and Mary could have raised Jesus with Jewish traditions.

14. Eventually God led Mary and Joseph to return to Nazareth instead of to Bethlehem. Herod's son, who succeeded him to the throne and thus ruled over Bethlehem, was even more harsh and jealous than his father. Nazareth, however, was not a random choice. Nazareth was located near the crossroads of one of the greatest caravan trade routes of the ancient world. How would Jesus' life in Nazareth have prepared him and his parents for his God-given task?
15. The revelations to Mary and Joseph, the interruptions in their plans, and their less than ideal circumstances were all orchestrated and used by God. What have you learned from Mary and Joseph's story that you can take with you to handle the unknown inconveniences and foiled plans:
- a. —during this holiday season?

—in your daily life?

- b. What assurances can we find that God is indeed orchestrating our lives in the following verses?

Proverbs 16:9

Proverbs 19:21

Proverbs 3:5-6 (What is to be our main occupation or concern?)

Final Thoughts: God revealed through word and circumstances the truth necessary to encourage His servants to trust His eternal plans. Their task would have been completely overwhelming if they had known all that would be required of them at the very beginning.

In our lives, too, God can lead us in ways we would never choose for ourselves. If we will only trust Him in obedience with the limited picture He has revealed and believe He will disclose what we need when it is necessary, God can use each of us also.

This Christmas season as you encounter interruptions to your plans or less than ideal circumstances will you trip over them or treasure them as coming directly from the plan book of God.

Pray—Just as Mary “treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart”, take five minutes to reflect on all God has taught you in this lesson. Then write a prayer in response to Your Lord.