

Study Questions for Chapter 2

1. In the Gospels, Joseph is, at best, a one-dimensional character. How did you react to Ms. Thomas' "messy" portrait of him?
2. How does Joseph's decision to accept Mary's pregnancy compare to her choice?
3. Has a "mess" of some sort complicated your life? How did you respond? In hindsight, would you change anything?
4. Is "Do not be afraid" a reasonable expectation of Joseph or Mary?

Here is some supplemental material if you are interested.

Was Joseph previously married?

The idea that Joseph might have been a widower when he became engaged to Mary is not explicitly mentioned in the canonical Gospels or in most historical sources. The New Testament provides limited information about Joseph's background and personal life. However, the belief that Joseph was a widower when he married Mary has been a topic of speculation and discussion within some Christian traditions and non-canonical writings, including apocryphal texts.

One of the sources that discusses Joseph's potential widowhood is the "Protoevangelium of James" (also known as the "Infancy Gospel of James" or "Gospel of James"), an early Christian apocryphal text believed to have been composed in the 2nd century. This text provides additional details about the early life of Mary, including her betrothal to Joseph. In the "Protoevangelium of James," Joseph is depicted as an elderly widower with children from his previous marriage when he is chosen to be Mary's guardian. This idea is not accepted by all Christian traditions and is considered apocryphal, so its historical accuracy is debated.

It's important to note that the canonical Gospels, which are accepted by most Christian denominations as authoritative, do not specifically mention Joseph's marital status or previous family. The primary sources for information about Joseph's role in the Nativity story are the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, which focus on his betrothal to Mary and his role as Jesus' earthly father without providing details about his previous marital history.

In summary, the notion that Joseph was a widower when he became engaged to Mary is based on apocryphal texts, particularly the "Protoevangelium of James." This idea is not part of the canonical biblical account and is not universally accepted among Christian traditions. It should be understood as a tradition and interpretation rather than a definitive historical fact.

Selections from the *Infancy Gospel of James*

Chapter 13: Joseph Questions Mary

(1) And she was in her sixth month. And look! Joseph came from his building, and came into the house, and found her pregnant. And he struck his face and flung himself on the ground in sackcloth and wept bitterly, saying, "How can I look to the Lord God? What prayer can I say about this young girl, since I took her as a virgin from the Temple of the Lord God and didn't protect her? Who has set this trap for me? Who has done this evil thing in my house? Who has defiled the virgin? Aren't I reliving the story of Adam? For as Adam was glorifying in the hour of prayer, the serpent came, found Eve alone, and deceived her, and now it's happened to me!"

(2) And Joseph stood from the sackcloth and called her and said to her, "God cared for you. Why have you done this? You've forgotten the Lord your God. Why have you humiliated your soul? You were nourished in the Holy of Holies and received food from the hand of an angel!"

(3) And she wept bitterly, saying, "I'm pure, and I haven't known a man!"

And Joseph said to her, "Where then did this thing in your womb come from?"

And she said, "As the Lord my God lives, I don't know where it came from!"

Chapter 14: Joseph's Dream

(1) And Joseph was very afraid and kept quiet about her, considering what to do about her. And Joseph said, "If I hide her sin, I'll be found resisting the law of the Lord, but if I reveal her to the people of Israel, I'm afraid that what's inside her might be angelic, and I'll be found handing over innocent blood to the judgment of death. So what will I do about her? I'll secretly set her free from me."

And night overtook him. (2) And look! An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Don't fear this child, for the one in her is from the Holy Spirit. And she'll give birth to a son, and you'll call his name 'Jesus,' because he'll save his people from their sins."

And Joseph arose from his sleep and glorified the God of Israel, who had given grace to him. And he protected her.

Chapter 15: The Chief Priest Questions Mary and Joseph

(1) And Annas the scribe came to him and said to him, "Joseph, why haven't you appeared among our traveling group?"

And he said to him, "Because I was weary from the trip and rested the first day back."

And Annas turned and saw Mary pregnant.

(2) And he quickly went to the priest and said to him, "Joseph, about whom you bore witness, has acted very lawlessly."

And the priest said, "What's this?"

And he said, "The virgin that Joseph took from the Temple of the Lord, he's defiled her and has stolen her wedding and hasn't revealed it to the people of Israel."

And in response the priest said, "Has Joseph done this?"

And Annas the scribe said to him, "Send officers, and you'll find the virgin pregnant."

And the officers went and found her just as he said. And they led her together with Joseph to the court.

(3) And the chief priest said to her, "Mary, why have you done this? Why have you humiliated your soul and forgotten the Lord your God? You were raised in the Holy of Holies, and received food from the hand of an angel, and you heard its hymns and danced before it. What is this that you've done?"

And she wept bitterly, saying, "As the Lord God lives, I'm pure before God, and I haven't known a man!"

(4) And the priest said, "Joseph, what is this that you've done?"

And Joseph said, "As the Lord my God lives, and the witness of God's truth, I'm pure toward her."

And the priest said, "Don't bear false witness, but tell the truth. You stole her wedding and didn't reveal it to the people of Israel, and you haven't bowed your head under the mighty hand that should bless your offspring."

And Joseph fell silent.

Chapter 16: The Test

(1) And the priest said, "Return the virgin you took from the Temple of the Lord."

And Joseph was tearful.

And the chief priest said, "I'll give you the water of the Lord's rebuke to drink, and it'll reveal your sin in your eyes."

(2) And taking (the water), the priest gave it to Joseph and sent him into the wilderness. And Joseph returned unharmed.

And he gave it to Mary and sent her into the wilderness. And she returned unharmed.

And all the people were amazed that their sin wasn't revealed.

(3) And the priest said, "If the Lord God hasn't revealed your sin to you, neither do I judge you." And he set them free.

And Joseph took Mary and went to his house, rejoicing and glorifying the God of Israel.