

Middle School Sunday School Lessons by



Year 3: Session 3 – John the Baptist and Jesus

Class 8: MT 1:18-25 – The other birth story of Jesus

CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

- Joseph hears a message in a dream – this is different than Samuel or Elijah who hear God in prayer. In some ways, what this story is telling us is that Joseph is not paying attention to God as closely as the other characters that we've discussed this year. Therefore, God has to communicate with Joseph's sub-consciousness (which is different than the conscious contact/communication with God that we saw in the Samuel and Elijah stories).
- Joseph has his own plan, but God's plan is the exact opposite of what Joseph is planning to do. With that in mind, it is pretty impressive that Joseph changes his plan to match what God is telling him to do
- Because Joseph listens to God (even if it is sub-consciously), both Mary and Jesus have a much better life than if Joseph had followed through with his own plan to leave Mary.

MATERIALS needed

- Movie clip (on the rfour.org website)
- TV and player to show the clips
- On quarter inch flat metal washer and a fifteen inch string for each person in the class. Before class, for each washer and string, tie one end of the string through the hole of the washer.

THE LESSON

OPENING PRAYER

OPENING QUESTION

- Here's the opening question for today's class. One of the teachers will ask the question and then to give you some time to think of an answer, the teacher will answer first.
- Once the teacher answers the question, we'll go around the circle.
- When it's your turn, start with your name and then answer the question to the best of your ability.

- Here's this week's question: *What does it take to get you to change your mind when you've already resolved to do something?*

TRANSITION to Activity

- One of the things we'll be talking about in today's story is our sub-conscious mind and how it affects us
- We'll also talk about how it plays a role in this story.
- As a way to best explain what the sub-conscious mind is, we're going to do an experiment.

EXPLAIN/DO EXPERIMENT

- In just a minute I'm going to pass out a washer tied to a string to each of you.
- And then, I'm going to tell you what to do with it.
- *[Pass out the washers with attached strings]*
- Okay, the first thing I want you do is sit up straight. Your arms, elbows and hands must not lean on anything.
- Next, hold the string with one hand so that the washer is directly in front of your eyes and about six inches in front of your face.
- It should look like you are trying to hypnotize yourself. But that's not what we're going to do.
- In fact, what you want to do is make sure that the washer does NOT swing.
- Make sure the washer does not swing while doing the following:
 - Focus your eyes on the washer.
 - Next, move ONLY your eyes back-and-forth, from left to right and then back to the left and on and on.
 - While you do that, I'll say in a slow and steady voice, "Left, right, left, right, left, right."
 - We'll do this until I say "stop." It probably won't be for longer than 30 seconds.
 - And while we do that, make sure the washer does NOT swing.
 - Any questions?
- Alright. Ready? Set? ... Left, right, left, right, left, right....
- *[Do this until you see the washers start to swing; you might even want to videotape it so that they can watch themselves. About 80 to 90% of your kids will end up having swinging washers]*
- Then ask them: Have you noticed that your washers are swinging side to side?
- How could that be?
- You were supposed to keep them still!
- Do you want to try again?
- OK, let's set up the same way. Sit up straight, no leaning on things, get the washer in front of your face, etc.
- This time, we're going to move our eyes up and down. And I'll say, "Up, down, up, down , up, down."

- And while we're doing that, make sure that your washer does not move
- Alright. Ready? Set? Up, down, up, down , up, down..
- *[Do this until you see the washers start to swing; you might even want to videotape it so that they can watch themselves. About 80 to 90% of your kids will end up having swinging washers]*
- Have you noticed that your washers are swinging front to back?
- How could that be?
- You were supposed to keep them still! :)

ASK/TELL

- So what we just saw happen is a good example of how the subconscious mind listens to and responds to what is going on around us differently than our conscious mind does.
- Our conscious mind was all about keeping the washer from moving.
- But our subconscious mind responded to the movement in our eyes and for most of us, our hands slowly and slightly started to mimic what our eyes were doing.
- In today's scripture story, we'll see how both Joseph's conscious mind and subconscious mind are at work.

TRANSITION to scripture story

- Last class, we started a new set of stories about John the Baptist and Jesus.
- Our first story was of Zechariah (John the Baptist's soon-to-be father), who was told about the son he was about to have.
- This son was to grow up and prepare the people for "the Lord."
- Zechariah didn't really believe the messenger from God, and was therefore muted until John was born.
- In today's story, we have another messenger from God, talking to another soon-to-be father.
- Let's see what happens:

READ Matthew 1:18-25 (*recommend class reads it out loud; one person per verse*)

18 Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. **19** Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. **20** But just when he had resolved to do 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 as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. **21** She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." **22** All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: **23** "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with

us." **24** When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, **25** but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

ASK (*answers are in parenthesis*)

- Note: In verse 18, "lived together" means "married" in 1st century Palestine.
- What was Mary before she and Joseph were married/living together? (pregnant)
- In verse 19, what was Joseph going to do? ("dismiss her quietly" which means he was not going to marry her)
- In verse 20, what was the basic message from God to Joseph? (*Mary did **not** cheat on you, Joseph. Good things will happen with this child. Take care of her and this child.*)
- Verse 24: What was Joseph's response to this dream? (he did what he was told. He married Mary, and named the child, "Jesus.")

TELL

- Joseph hears a message in a dream – this is different than Samuel or Elijah who heard God in conscious prayer. In some ways, what this story is telling us is that Joseph is not paying attention to God as closely as the other characters that we've discussed this year. Therefore, God has to communicate with Joseph's sub-consciousness through a dream.
- It is better that we pay attention to God in conscious ways, but even when we don't, there are still ways that God will reach out to us and communicate with us. A dream is one way. Messengers ("angel" simply means "messenger of God") are another way God talks to us when we're not paying very close attention to God.
- God's plan was pretty much the exact opposite of Joseph's plan. God's plan was also the exact opposite of what Joseph's society would tell him to do as well. God's plan probably hadn't even occurred to Joseph (on his own) because Joseph was only aware of/conscious of what his society was telling him to do.
- Because Joseph listened to God, then both Mary AND Jesus had a much better chance at survival.
- Here's what "public disgrace" would have most likely consisted of for Mary (as mentioned in verse 19):

(a summary of what a single mother would've faced in 1st century Palestine from http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/history/virginmary_1.shtml)

A girl who became pregnant out of wedlock would have been terrified. The whole social structure was set up for children to be born within marriage. Genealogy and ownership of children was seen as very important. Girls who became pregnant outside marriage would probably have had to leave their homes and their families. There was the potential of being sold into slavery or of being stoned to death. She may have been married off quickly (to someone else) or banished from her home and village, which may have led a woman to prostitution or slavery when she had no way of supporting herself.

So, even if Joseph had “dismissed her *quietly*,” things would NOT have gone well for Mary.

TRANSITION to Video Clip

- Although Mary does not have a speaking part in today’s story, it is clear that she is in trouble.
- She’s probably very scared about what is going to happen to her. She can guess what Joseph is going to do and has very few hopeful options in front of her.
- We’re going to look at a movie clip, then, that shows, pretty clearly, what Mary’s future would have been, and how it changed because Joseph listened to God.
- The clip is from the movie, “Charlotte’s Web”

Watch Video Clip

ASK

- What was the dad going to do? (He was going to kill the piglet because it was the runt of the litter. Being a runt meant he was the littlest of litter and couldn’t fight for a place to eat)
- Why was the piglet not killed? (Because the young girl, Fern, wouldn’t let her dad do it. She said she would feed the piglet)
- Did the dad listen to his daughter? (yes)

TELL

- Today’s scripture story and the video clip have a lot in common.
- Just like the father was going to do something that would make the pig’s life much shorter, so too was Joseph going to do something that would make Mary’s life shorter.
- But then, just like the daughter intervenes with the father’s plan, so did God intervene with Joseph’s plan.
- Neither Joseph or the father HAD to listen. They were not forced to listen.
- But listen they did.
- And because Joseph listened, there was life. Jesus was born. And Jesus lived.

CLOSING Prayer