

## Middle School Sunday School Lessons by

**rfour.org**

**Year 3: Session 3** – John the Baptist and Jesus

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

### **CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson**

- Discuss how God changes the rules of society for Joseph
- Highlight that Joseph listens to God's changes to the rules
- Note the outcome of Joseph's listening: Both Mary and Jesus have a much better life than if Joseph had followed through with his original and plan to leave Mary.

### **MATERIALS needed**

- Some way to play and show movie clip on rfour.org site for this lesson (from *Charlotte's Web – 2006 version*)
- One die (as in: singular form of dice)
- Notecards and writing utensils for the class

## **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**

- Last week we discussed the birth story (of sorts) of John the Baptist

- And, part of the announcement of John's birth was that he was going to be of great help to Jesus.
- So, today, we're going to read another birth story, this one is about Jesus, and it involves Jesus' soon-to-be dad (step-dad, if you will)
- The main thing we'll be talking about today is how God tells Joseph to do something that pretty much goes against all the rules/expectation of the Israelites
- So, to get us ready for these significant rule changes, let's do our opening activity, which is all about changing the rules.

## **EXPLAIN ACTIVITY**

- The name of the activity is called, "Nomic."
- Here's how one person sums up the activity:
  - "Nomic is a game in which changing the rules is a move. The primary activity of Nomic is proposing changes in the rules, debating the wisdom of changing them in that way, voting on the changes, deciding what can and cannot be done afterwards, and doing it. Even this core of the game, of course, can be changed.
- Goal of the activity is that the first person to get to 100 points by rolling the die wins the game.
- Play consists by a person taking the die and rolling the die.
- Whatever number that person rolls is added to that person's score
- The die is then passed to the person on the left and that person then rolls.
- IF A PERSON WISHES TO CHANGE OR ADD A RULE
- A rule change can only be raised by the person with the die and only before they've rolled.
- That person is allowed to propose one rule change to the group
- After the proposed rule, the rest of the class can ask questions
- Positions can be stated ("Sounds great!" or "I'm not voting for that" is allowed)
- Suggestions can be made and the dice roller can make one change to their proposed rule before voting
- Teachers will decide when enough discussion has taken place and the vote should be taken
- Voting happens by each person (yes, teachers get to vote, too) showing a "Thumbs up" for yes or a "Thumbs down" for no.
- A simple majority (51%) is needed to pass the vote (meaning a tie fails the vote)
- Regardless of the outcome of the vote, student with die should then roll the die to get their points
- If a rule passes it will be written down on a notecard and followed until it is changed or deleted by the group
- Any questions!?

## **DO ACTIVITY**

*Note: The activity can go forever, really, so place a time limit and hold to it. Tell the group they can continue the activity at the end of class if there is time.*

## ASK

- Was it hard to think of new rules or rule changes to propose?
- What type of rules didn't seem to ever pass?
- Were you surprised by how many rules didn't pass?
- What type of rules seemed to be passed on a regular basis?
- Were you surprised by how close (or not close) the votes were?

## TRANSITION to scripture story

- In today's scripture story, one of the rules/expectations of the society that Joseph and Mary live in is that a pregnant, single (that is "not married") woman is to be publically shamed, no man is to marry her, and even death by stoning of the woman was allowable
- We will see that Joseph is going to follow along with the mildest of those expectations
- We will also see that God complete changes those rules for Joseph
- Let's see if Joseph listens to God's rule changes or not

## 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*)

- Is there anything you find interesting or weird about this story? [*to teachers: You don't necessarily need to answer what they notice or have questions about – sometimes just agree with a, "yep, that's interesting" or a, "Yeah, I find that to be weird, too" works*]
- Verse 18: What was Mary "found to be" with? (with child – she was pregnant)
- Also verse 18: There's something scandalous about Mary's pregnancy – do you know what it is? (She wasn't married to Joseph, only engaged. In verse 18, "lived together" means "married" in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine. Since she and Joseph weren't living together yet, that means they weren't married yet).

- Verse 19 – What was Joseph going to do about this? (Dismiss her quietly – meaning he would cancel the marriage without making a big deal about it)
- Any thoughts about what kind of effect this would have on Mary? (pretty significant in a negative way – women had a hard time finding work, so money would be scarce, and no other man would be want 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.”)
- Do you think this change of plan for Joseph was difficult? (hard to say)

## TELL

- Here’s a summary of what a single mother would’ve faced in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine from [http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/history/virginmary\\_1.shtml](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.*

- In other words, even with Joseph dismissing Mary quietly, things would NOT have gone well for Mary.
- Which is why God gave Joseph a new plan.
- And, God’s plan was the exact opposite of what Joseph’s society agreed with.
- 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.
- Here’s how big of a deal God’s change of plan for Joseph is:
  - God is saying that a pregnant, single woman is not discardable
  - In fact, not only is God saying a pregnant, single woman is not discardable, God is saying a pregnant, single woman is very very important
  - That message goes directly against everything the Israelites believe
  - And, if God had asked people to vote on this rule change at that time, the rule change would've been voted down, probably by a large margin
- But, God didn't ask the people to change their rules
- God told one person -- to Joseph – to not listen to society’s rules
- And because Joseph agreed with the change of rules, because Joseph listened to what God was saying to do, then both Mary AND Jesus had a much better chance at survival.

## **TRANSITION to Video Clip**

- Although Mary does not have a speaking part in today's story, she was probably very scared about what was going to happen to her.
- She could probably guess what Joseph was going to do and had very few hopeful options to choose from once he did what was expected.
- We're going to look at a movie clip, then, that shows in a pretty similar fashion, what type of future Mary was facing and how drastically it changed because of one person, because Joseph listened to God.
- The clip is from the 2006 version of 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.
- Next class, we'll discuss the start of Jesus' ministry – which begins with John the Baptist's help.

## **CLOSING Prayer**