

Rarely Told Origin Stories of Jesus: The Odd Way He Got His Name

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[0 : 00] Father, you know how sometimes we're very afraid of questions. Sometimes we're very afraid of our own questions. You know, Father, that some of us are afraid to let people around us know that we follow Jesus.

Father, you know that some of us have problems with addictions or with bills or just things in our life that make us very, very fearful. Father, you know that some of us are just fearful about the way society is.

And Father, we give you thanks and praise that you know our fears. And we ask that you would gently but deeply pour out your Holy Spirit upon us so that your word, Father, might enter deep into us, that we might be free and courageous as your word enters into us and we might live not only in this city but to the ends of the earth, free and full of courage to bring you glory.

And this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. Some of you have been to my house over the years and for 14 and a half years we've had a little, a tiny little white dog named Pixie, only weighed about three and a half pounds.

We have two other dogs that are far bigger but we have this little dog, Pixie, that we've had for 14 and a half years. He's been part of our family and on Friday night he died.

[1 : 35] She died, I should say. Her name was Pixie and she died and it was very sad. She has been sick for a couple of months and we could see her fading and she'd probably become blind and probably become deaf and wasn't eating but it's still very sad when she dies, when she died.

And yesterday my daughter Emma dug a hole in the backyard and we buried her. And last night I had a dream. And in my dream, and I wasn't always the biggest Pixie fan, by the way, but in the dream, I had a dream about Pixie last night.

And in the dream it was like Pixie on steroids. She wasn't three and a half pounds, she was at least 10 pounds or maybe even 11. So quite big for Pixie and quite muscular and frisky and I had a dream about her.

And that's all very, ah. But what on earth does that mean? I mean, what does it mean? So I had a dream about Pixie. You know, if you think about it, on one hand, if we were to go to a party and start telling people about our dreams and maybe what they mean and all of that type of stuff, you know, our neighbors would actually think, wow, you know, you Christians aren't quite as anal as I thought. Like, you know, you have cool dreams and stuff and you talk about them. On the other hand, like what's going on with this in the story? Like if one of you was engaged to be married to somebody, like I would, you know, you're engaged to be married to a woman, you're a guy and you're engaged to be married to a woman, and she's pregnant.

[3 : 12] She gets pregnant after you're engaged, and you know that the baby's not yours. I mean, you probably wouldn't go ahead and marry her.

And if you told your buddies that you'd had a dream the night before and because of the dream you were going to marry the woman, they'd go, oh, come on, dude, bro.

Like, it's just a dream. Like, the dream just means you like her. It doesn't mean, it means you still have some feelings for her. It doesn't mean you marry her. I mean, she's pregnant with another guy's baby, and she did that when she was engaged to you.

How on earth could you go ahead? Like, the dream just doesn't cut it. I mean, and the other thing about this story which we just read, which is also very odd if you think about it, like, what's going on with Joseph?

Like, I don't know. Like, he never had a dream before in his life, and this was a complete surprise, so he went ahead and did it. Like, did he move every time he had a dream that told him to move? [4 : 16] Like, did he name every one of his kids, you know, like, after a dream? Like, what's going on with Joseph? Like, why on earth would he take a particular dream and think that that means he has to do something like, go against his own inclinations and the inclinations of all of his friends and all of his family and probably all of the village?

And like, why on earth, out of all the dreams, would this particular dream be any type of significance for him? Like, you know, apart from the fact that there's sentimental attachments to this story, it's like it's really odd and weird if you think about it.

So we're going to look at it. Like, what was it that in this dream that would have changed Joseph's complete and utter life? So let's look.

If you have your Bibles, it's Matthew 1, verse 18. If you don't have your Bibles, there's at least one Bible there. We can get more as well. If you'd like, you can just get up and get it. And if you have a phone with data and you're on YouVersion, you go to events, the notes and all are there as well if you want to follow along.

But here's how it goes. Just look. Like, is there some hint or clue within the biblical narrative as to why on earth Joseph did something which, if we're frank, like if it was your brother, if it was your best friend, if it was your son, and he came and told you that it was because of a dream that he was going to go ahead and marry the girl, like, you'd give him a hard time, right?

[5 : 46] So is there some hint in the biblical text about this that helps us try to understand what's going on so it's not just weird? And so here's how it goes. Matthew 1.18.

Now, the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, and some of you, if you're a guest here and you have never come to a Christmas service before, in the ancient world, there were sort of two very formal events.

It's not like today, where basically the big thing is just the wedding. In Jesus' time, there was like a very formal ceremony that made you engaged.

And it was so formal that if you broke the engagement, you'd actually have to have a divorce procedure. And it was so formal that if your fiancé died after this ceremony, you'd actually be considered a widow or a widower, even though you hadn't actually been married.

So Mary and Joseph had the first solemn event, but the second solemn event where they actually live together, have sexual relations with each other, where they're, you know, in a sense, in our sense, fully married, that hasn't happened yet.

[6 : 58] Okay? So that's just a bit of background. So we'll say it again. When his mother Mary, in verse 18 still, had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

And just pause there again for a second. There isn't, if you're wondering, there's no ancient category of people claiming to have children from the Holy Spirit. Basically, it's a summary of what, Matthew just giving a very short summary of what Mary told him.

You can hear more about that if you read Luke. But Mary has obviously, she's probably about four months pregnant, so she's starting to show. And it can't be kept secret.

And she's come back to the village. And she goes and she has what must have been the world's most awkward meeting imaginable, where she tells Joseph that she's four months pregnant, or five months or whatever, she's four or five months pregnant, and that she'd never slept with another man, and that in fact God had come to her and asked her permission for him to do a miracle of creation in her womb, and in our language to put a fetus in her womb.

And that would have been a very, very awkward conversation. And Matthew just very touches by saying a child from the Holy Spirit. And then we see in verse 19, and her husband Joseph being a just man, that means he was fair, he was just.

[8 : 32] Everything that we take with this idea of being a just person, that also would include for us a sense of compassion. That's how Joseph's described. And unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

Now just sort of pause here for a second. This is one of the things which is really important for us to remember is just because Joseph didn't have BuzzFeed in Instagram doesn't mean he's stupid. In fact, you could even say that if you use too much Instagram in BuzzFeed, it makes you stupid.

So he might have been smarter. But just because he didn't use flush toilets doesn't mean he's stupid. Those are just technological things. It doesn't mean they, you know, it's very, very interesting.

If you go and try to read old books, like if you go try to read Augustine or older writing, it's hard for us to read it. And part of the reason it's hard for us to read it is that they're so logical. And they think so deeply upon slight nuances in words. And we don't realize it, but in fact, we've lost something that they were very smart. And he knew how babies came about.

[9 : 35] And basically he didn't buy it. Yeah, right. God came to you. We're here in Nowheresville. And you're nobody.

Your parents are nobodies. Your grandparents are nobodies. You're a nobody. I'm a nobody. We're in Nowheresville. And God came and spoke to you and said he was going to make an act of creation in your womb to make you pregnant.

And Joseph didn't believe it for a second because he's not a dumb guy. But he's a just guy. I don't know what he was thinking. And it doesn't tell you whether he ranted and all that type of stuff privately or how depressed he was.

Maybe he wanted to, I don't know, whatever he wanted to hurt her. But he comes to his senses because fundamentally he's a just guy and he decides I'm going to divorce her. That's the right thing to do. But I'm going to do it quietly and to try to minimize her embarrassment and shame. And then verse 20. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying, Joseph, son of David. So this is with the angel.

[10 : 42] This is Matthew's, Joseph's summary that Matthew would have learned much later. 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. Now, look again here how it says, look at verse 20 again, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying, now it's, you can sort of see it in English.

It's more obvious in the original language. But if you could put the first point up, that would be very helpful. Here's the point. Joseph did not dream about an angel. The angel of the Lord took over Joseph's dream and spoke to him by name.

Joseph did not dream about an angel. The angel of the Lord took over Joseph's dream and spoke to him by name. In the original language, all of the language is passive.

It's not about Joseph waking up the next day and saying, I had a dream and in my dream, I saw an angel and in my dream, I heard an angel say this. Everything that mentions Joseph is in the divine passive sense, which is a tense in the original language, that something or another, Joseph, rather than being the dream coming from Joseph's mind or his unconscious or his subconscious and emerging out of it, all of a sudden, he becomes passive.

[12 : 22] And the active person in the dream is the angel of the Lord. The implication is that Joseph isn't dreaming of an angel. The angel takes over Joseph's dream.

Now, it doesn't describe psychologically what that's like, but it would be a little bit like if you watch certain types of movies, of which I am prone to watch, I must confess, where there's a terrorist or some evil criminal mastermind who happens to have an unbelievable computer hacker who can effortlessly take over systems or it's an alien invasion.

And, you know, you've seen those types of movies that all of a sudden, I don't know, they're watching the NFL or they're watching The Crown on Netflix or something like that. You know, maybe your wife's upstairs watching The Crown on Netflix, you're downstairs watching the NFL and all of a sudden you see some crazed Russian megalomaniac giving you some message about how he's going to destroy the society.

And you see that in the NFL game and your wife upstairs watching The Crown on Netflix, she sees it as well and then you kind of change the channel and every channel you go to, just like in the movies, all of a sudden every single channel it's the same guy.

And then you go to turn the TV off and you can't turn the TV off, it's the same guy. And this megalomaniac terrorist has taken control of your television and every single television channels and even the internet feeds that give you news flick and you know, and in the movies they go, it's on every channel.

[13 : 51] And then you all look panicked. And of course, there's some, you know, former loser, drug addict, alcoholic with his nerdy buddy who'll save the movie at the end of the day. But that's

the movie.

Here's the real thing. But the implication is, right, if you saw that TV, you'd know that somebody had taken over the television and taken over all of the feeds.

Impossible in real life, by the way, but that's a separate thing. In this thing, the language is that the angel takes over Joseph's dream and while it doesn't tell you all the psychological things about it, I mean, I'm sure he had all these conversations with Mary and his buddies about it, the scriptures are very, very sparse.

But the angel takes over the dream. And Joseph, who's probably had many, many, many dreams, hundreds, thousands of dreams, this is not like any other dream, all of a sudden he's passive. The angel has taken over the dream and Joseph knows it. Why would Matthew believe this, do you think? And why should you and I maybe believe this?

[14:59] You know, here's the thing about Matthew. Those of you who are long-term Christians might know a little bit about it, but Matthew, he was a hard-headed businessman. He was a tax collector and in those days that meant he would have had staff, he would have had to work, he would have been literate because he'd have to read financial documents and he was one who would have gone around to the different people in the region to collect the taxes from them.

It means he would have been very, very shrewd in telling when a person's giving him a whole pile of, you know, bull and he would be very, very shrewd at trying to look at and figure out just from the way you were living in your house how much money you had and how many crops you had and be able to get the right taxes and he would have been able to understand that he had to get a, you know, the more he could get, the more he would pocket because he just gives a lump sum to the Romans and that's Matthew and in the Gospels it never goes into too much about how it is that Jesus, there was just something remarkable about Jesus that was so remarkable that Matthew was willing to leave his tax collector stuff to follow Jesus but then, you know, when it came time at the end when Jesus dies upon the cross, Matthew, who's a shrewd guy, he knows how the world works, he knows how money works, he knows how people work, he's literate but he doesn't believe that Jesus rose from the dead and so Matthew just like all of the other apostles, he leaves Jesus, it's the complete end of all of his dreams.

Matthew has taken a sabbatical from making his money, he's probably thinking I'm just going to go back to making money because I thought Jesus was special, he was special, there was something real about him, something that was sane about him, something that was compassionate about him and now he's dead and what changed Matthew is the resurrection.

It changed Matthew so much that the records are that Matthew never went back to making lots of money and rather than making lots of money he spent the rest of his life telling people that Jesus came from God and that Jesus had died upon the cross and he rose and he defeated death and not only does Matthew do this in Jerusalem but he eventually does it in what we now call Iran and he does it in what we now call Ethiopia and it's in Ethiopia that because of his proclamation he's murdered as a direct order from the king who didn't want him disturbing their pagan society.

What changes it for Matthew is the resurrection. That's what should change it for you and me. The resurrection changes everything and it's not just that there's this odd conjuring trick with bones that's done to the body of Jesus but the resurrection Jesus tells us that in his all of the historical documents record how Jesus tells people that he's coming he's come to earth to die upon the cross and after he dies on the third day he will rise from that he tells his disciples that he tells people that and it's not just that there's this odd conjuring trick with bones but it all takes place Jesus said he's fulfilling what we call the Old Testament and Jewish people call the Tanakh that it fulfills the Tanakh in other words that it's not just some idle prophecy that just may it's not like Jesus is some type of David Blaine but that there's this there's thousands hundreds centuries and centuries of stories and of narrative and of philosophy and of theology and of wisdom and of insight and it's in all of this context that Jesus says he comes to fulfill it

[18:34] I'm going to die on the cross I'm going to rise from the dead even though the cross is a sign of shame I'm going to rise from the dead and it vindicates Jesus it vindicates its message and it means that Matthew is willing to completely and utterly turn his life around because he's an actual witness on many occasions of the resurrected Jesus and so these stories that he would have heard from his early days of following Jesus that Mary never knew a man that God did a work of a miracle in Mary's womb and now these stories of Joseph of how he was because you know Matthew would have said come on dude why on earth did you marry her when she was pregnant and Matthew

would have said I mean Joseph would have said or told people you know and Matthew would have heard eventually that it was all you know that the angel took over my dream and he spoke to me by name and he told me what's gone on angel took over my dream and Matthew then would have believed it Matthew would have believed it that's that's in a sense why why we can believe it as well now just one other little thing here this is really more of a bit of a timeout I just want to share something with you you know I one of the things which is so wonderful for this story if you're a

Christian when I get asked to pray for somebody who has dementia when I get asked to pray for somebody who's in a coma and they're unresponsive stories like this give me so much hope I can have the people I can have the family members and I can say you know what we cannot reach this person but Jesus can reach them wherever wherever they are lost in dementia lost in the coma Jesus can speak to them in their dreams so why don't we pray we'll pray for healing of the body we'll pray for healing of the mind we'll pray for healing but let's also pray that Jesus will meet them where they are he can do what we can't and I find that a profound comfort when I have to pray for somebody who's lost in

Alzheimer's or lost in a coma that Jesus could speak to Joseph the angel in a sense could take over the dream and speak let's pray that God will do this for a loved one but back to this one of the problems that many of us have with what the angel said is that the word saved is corny like you don't think it's corny go to an office party this week and say hi I'm George I'm saved the whole room would probably stop talking everybody's eyeballs would hit the top of their right through the eyes heads would all shake chiropractors would have to be visited within the next few days because people would go oh you're saved and if you wanted to make sure that you went to a party and nobody talked to you for the rest of the night just begin by saying hi I'm George or whatever your name is I'm saved and you can have a nice quiet party for the rest of the evening because nobody will talk to you because it's corny it's the sort of thing that if a comic wants to get a laugh he can talk about yeah I met this guy at a party said he was saved oh the whole room laughs so it's corny so it's a bit of a problem for us

Canadians if we're honest about this language let's but you know let's look look again at this at the text and we'll see what we can do with it look again at verse 20 but as he that's Joseph 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 she will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus and Jesus by the way means God saves for he will save his people from their sins all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet in the prophets Isaiah it's about 700 years earlier behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name

Emmanuel which means God with us so part of that's what the angel said and part of that's what Matthew said right but here's the first thing if you could put it up Jesus alone I'm going to make it worse for you okay I'm going to make it weirder for you because the Bible here doesn't actually leave us any option Jesus alone saves me from my sins and he alone saves you from your sins Jesus alone saves me from my sins and he alone saves you from your sins he doesn't come along and say I'm going to work with you as you get saved from your sins he doesn't say I'm going to help you get saved from your sins he doesn't say I'm going to inspire you to get saved from your sins and he's not saying I'm just going to help you get saved from sin in general, as if somehow or another you're some noble soul trapped amongst a whole group of idiots in the world, although you might feel like that day after day. He's not saying, you're a noble soul trapped in a world filled with idiots, and I'm going to save you from it.

[24 : 36] No, the message is very, very clear, very, very simple, very, very pointed, very, very angular, and for us Canadians, very, very uncomfortable. But if it actually is God saying it, and you see, that's the implication here. It's not just that there's some interesting spiritual being called an angel. It's the angel of the Lord. The implication is that all the angel is is God's mouthpiece to say what God wants to say to Joseph. And then Matthew makes it clear by saying that God actually does the same thing through the prophet Isaiah and says something very, very similar, that it's one God who speaks, that this is God. And the significance of it is that it's God interpreting the meaning of the action that he has done. So the text is saying that God is the one who does a miracle, a miracle of creation in the womb of Mary, so that Mary, who has never known a man sexually, now she becomes pregnant. It's a miracle of creation within the womb of Mary, that God does this. He does it completely. And then he gives the interpretation, the meaning, the significance, what was

going on in his mind, what was going on in his heart, what is his understanding of why he did what he did. And he said, I'm doing this so that you,

George, will be saved not from sin in general, but from your sins. Now, when I share about Jesus with people, I don't usually use the language of save from their sins, because for many people, that's a bridge too far. It's too hard for them to understand.

But it, and when I became a Christian, when I was in grade 12 and I became a Christian, what led me to becoming a Christian wasn't the sense of my sin, but it was a sense of, in my case, it was a sense of profound emptiness and probably a large dose of despair.

And a sense that as I came to know some Christians, and as I came to understand more about Jesus, that there was a type of fullness and wholeness that I needed, that I could only get from Jesus. And that's what led me to go to give my faith to Jesus.

And so often when I talk to people, but here's why the language is so important for us. You see, eventually we need to be gripped with this language, even though it's something that would cause people to mock us. The thing about sin, which is significant, is it specifically entails God.

[27 : 15] You see, I might be very conscious of the different ways that I've wronged my wife, or the different ways that I've wronged my children. And I might think that I've done something wrong.

I might say that I've done something bad, and I might feel guilty about it, but it's very easy for me to go through life feeling bad about things that I've done, but God is still completely and utterly absent. It's entirely a universe of me thinking I've done things wrong, or me thinking I've done things right, but it's an universe where there is no God, or if there is a God, he's very distant, he has no particular views on anything. But the language of sin specifically entails God.

It's the language of saying that there are things that I do that either cause me to turn my back on God, or ignore God, or push God away, or resent God, or just continually live my life as if God does not exist.

And the language of sin encompasses that, and that's why it's so important for us to keep it, even if it becomes something that it's hard for us to share with another person trying to become a Christian, but it's important for us to always keep that before ourselves, that we don't live in a universe where God doesn't exist.

[28 : 28] We don't live in a universe where God is off on a vacation, and everything is running on its own. We live in a universe where God created all things, and where God sustains every single atom, every single molecule, every single planet. God sustains everything in existence.

He keeps it going. It's ordered, and it's not closed to him. And that's why he can speak through angels, and that's why he can speak through his word, and that's why in this universe that he keeps ordered, he can do acts of creation within it.

It's how he has to come to do something to save us. Why do I have to be saved? I'm not just being saved because I live in a world filled with idiots. I mean, you're saying that about me, right?

I mean, you know, just, you know. It's that I live my life in such a way that my posture towards God means that I am in the greatest possible danger, and I cannot do anything to deliver myself from that greatest possible danger, and that God needs to do everything that's required to be done for me to be delivered from the grave danger that I personally am in.

And that's what the angel says. That's why Jesus is coming into this world to do what only God can do, because Jesus is also God.

[30 : 07] See, that's why some of you say, I've heard people say to me, you know, when I talk to people in coffee shops and stuff like that, you know, the Bible is so full of contradictions, George. Like, you know, I was in church, like, last Christmas, and they say, yeah, and you shall call his name Emmanuel, and then he named him Jesus.

Like, is there some way in Greek or something that Jesus and Emmanuel are the same thing? Like, and then they'll say, you know, gosh, you religious people and spiritual people can be so annoying. You don't even notice contradictions, you know? But just look at it again. Look at it again. What does it say? Verse 21, She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

That's the end of the angels thing. And then Matthew starts speaking. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel.

It actually says not that Joseph's going to call him Emmanuel. Notice that? It's what people will say. And what does Emmanuel mean?

[31 : 15] It means God with us. I mean, that's going to be what leads Matthew to leave making piles of money. And he would have had to not only, if he didn't already know, he probably would have already known Greek and probably Latin, but he would have gone to Persia, and he would have been, probably like good missionaries today, he would have learned what Persians speak so he could speak their heart language.

And then he would have been felt, led by God to leave there and go to what we now know of as Ethiopia and to not only speak Greek, but to learn their heart language, to tell people that the one God who created all things, that God in the person of his Son came and walked with us, that he's with us, that he is not against us, that he doesn't hate us, that he hasn't abandoned us, but that he's with us, and he came to be with us, and because he's with us for us, he died for us.

He died for you in Ethiopia. He died for you in Persia. Can you put up the next thing? Jesus is God with us to justify, sanctify, and glorify.

Jesus is God with us to justify, that sort of theological language for me, make you and me right with God, to give us new life, to be spiritually reborn, so that we're now God's child.

Sanctify means that he's with us as we do our day, to become more holy, to start to live a life that's more pleasing to him, where we don't keep him at a distance, but we recognize that Jesus redeems us, and then we live our lives, our 24-7 lives with him.

[33 : 10] And glorify means that Jesus, who comes into our life to be the Savior, to reconcile us to God, and then he walks with us throughout the life, and then when we come to the valley of the shadow of death, and we enter into death, that he's the one who glorifies us, that it's all Jesus.

It's all grace. It's all something that he does. And so there's no contradiction here. There's this just wonderful, God comes among us to save us.

He's with us. He doesn't despise us. He doesn't hope we fail. He knows us because he's with us, and he's with us.

Just one thing now in closing, a question to you and me. Are you brave enough to be a Christian? Am I brave enough to be a Christian?

You know, the reason many people don't give their lives to Jesus, and if you're here and you're not a follower of Jesus, I really don't, I mean, you might have lots of very, very good objections and questions and stuff that you need to be answered, and hopefully there's Christians in your life who are never afraid of questions and will answer them and will love you, but you know what?

[34 : 28] It's very countercultural to say that you're going to give your life to Jesus, and a lot of people, the problem they have in becoming Christians is they lack the courage because they're afraid of being mocked.

Is that you? Look what happens to Joseph in the dream. Verse 22, and all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us. When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. He took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son, and he called his name Jesus.

The very way that the angel opens is in verse 21. Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife. But often what keeps us from giving our lives to Jesus is we're afraid.

We're afraid of looking like we're stupid, like we're corny. We're afraid that if we say to somebody, I've become a Christian, they're going to say, oh, are you saved?

[35 : 36] And you're worried about how red you'd get and how embarrassed you'd be. Jesus died for you.

He will be with you. And he will be with you to walk towards your fear. And just as Joseph found, even though it didn't necessarily make him richer or happier, definitely didn't make Matthew richer or happier, but it was worth it.

It was worth it. Because Jesus is real. He really did die. He really did rise from the dead. He really can be the one to reconcile you to God and he really will do your day with you.

And for those of us who are seekers, there's nothing you've done in your life that will make Jesus want to turn his face away from you because he is with you.

