

## I'm Afraid To Marry Her

--Glenn Colley

Perhaps the world's most famous break-up between a man and fiancée was between a man named Joseph and his espoused wife Mary. He clearly loved her, but she brought news to him that made marriage unreasonable and unbearable. Simply stated, she was carrying a baby. *He* had never been intimate with her. So he knew....or at least he thought he knew.

Somewhere there was a man out there who had fathered this unborn child, and Mary denied his existence. Furthermore, she proposed what must have sounded like the weakest attempt at justification that Joseph had ever heard: "This baby is of the Holy Spirit. I'm carrying the Messiah." Although tormented by her sin, he loved her too much to make a public spectacle of her or to risk her stoning, so he opted to put her away privately. She would then be free then to marry the other man.

Mary must have been a lovely person. Joseph had chosen her for his life-long companion for the same reasons God had chosen her to bear the Christ child. She was pure, sweet and honored God. But, this wasn't just

about cold feet with Joseph. Nervousness before a wedding is normal. This is much more; much deeper. She was pregnant, and he was not the father.

The Holy Spirit corrected this misdirection by reassuring him that Mary was telling the truth. The baby really was the Christ. For this article, focus on the interesting way the Spirit began the explanation to Joseph:

“Fear not...”

Fear not...what? Of what was Joseph afraid?

### **A sexually transmitted disease?**

Is that even possible? Did STD's exist back then? You bet. Proverbs 5, a chapter devoted entirely to the avoidance and consequences of sinful sex, shouts this warning a thousand years before Christ came to earth:

“...And thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, And say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof...” (Prov. 5:11-12). Sinful sex, since ancient times, has carried the danger of disease.

CareNet, a non-profit counseling and pregnancy center, reports these statistics:

□ 1 in 5 Americans has been infected with an STD (American Social Health Association).

□ The fastest growing population contracting AIDS is women. In 1985, 7% of AIDS cases reported were women. That percentage increased to 14% in 1992, and to 23% in 1999 (AIDS.ORG).

□ Sexually active adolescent girls have the highest risk of cervical infections because the ectropion, or delicate tissue that surrounds a young woman's cervix, is not fully formed until she is 18 years old. It is, therefore, very vulnerable to blood borne infections (Alan Gutmacher Institute, 1994).

□ Approximately 2/3 of all people who acquire STDs are under 25 (American Social Health Association).

□ PID or Pelvic Inflammatory Disease is the most rapidly increasing cause of infertility in the United States. Researchers have estimated that a sexually active 15-year-old has a 1 in 8 chance of developing PID. By the age of 24, the probability decreases to 1 in 80 (The Medical Institute).

□ There are presently more than 25 significant STDs (Center for Disease Control).

□ In the United States, more than 65 million people are currently living with an incurable STD. An additional 15 million people become infected each year (ibid).

□ While almost all STDs can be treated to relieve pain or minimize symptoms, there is no cure for viral STDs, including Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), and Herpes (ibid).

### **That he was about to marry a liar?**

You can imagine the conversation when Mary pled with Joseph to believe the fantastic story she unfolded before him. But it was too much for Joseph. It strained credulity. And if there was something in Mary's character that would let her lie with no hint of nervousness or regret, what would stop her from lying in the future? Does it matter that you can't securely trust the one to whom you are married? Of course it matters. Why do you think God comes down so hard on liars (Rev. 21:8)? It is because a liar, who selfishly deceives in order to get his way, will, selfishly perpetrate other kinds of sins. Marriage to a practicing liar is constantly in crisis and headed for disaster. Joseph was afraid of marrying a liar.

### **That she might be a wife that was inclined to commit adultery?**

Mary was apparently unwilling to obey God's sexual laws before now. While some have made mistakes that involved fornication in the past, and have repented, Mary was impenitent. She was not ashamed of her sin. Would she be faithful to her him until death parts them, or will she, in the fifth year, or tenth year, stray in search of a different kind of life which she finds more appealing?

**That there was another man somewhere out there that she still loves?**

Believing Mary was lying, Joseph may have considered this reality. Mary is carrying a baby and there is a father. Who is he? What kind of man is he? Does she still have feelings for him? In view of the fact that God's laws and Mary's love for Joseph weren't enough to keep her out of this man's arms before, what makes one think the future will be different? Of course people can change and forgiveness is available for all men (Titus 2:11-12), but she was not, in Joseph's eyes, penitent of sin, and this man's identity was still a secret.

**That there was another man somewhere who might want some involvement in the child's life one day, thus interfering with his own parenting?**

Is this biological father ruthless; a man who one day will use his “rights” to interrupt this marriage and the rearing of this baby? Is there any way to control his actions? Will Joseph be able to rear this boy in the way he should go (Prov. 22:6), or will this man prevent godly parenting?

**That she might make a terrible mother?**

From Joseph's vantage point, Mary was immoral and impenitent. What kind of mother would she be? Living inside almost every potential spouse is a potential parent. Obviously some are better prepared than others.

Every young man and woman planning matrimony ought to look at that future mate and ask this question: If my children turn out to be just like him/her will they be what I want them to be? Will they be faithful to God? Will they go to heaven? Sadly, some must answer no. If the answer *is* no, it's good to take a deep breath and reevaluate this wedding business. To ignore the lives of your future children is selfish.

In a world gone mad; a world with so many who have abandoned marriage altogether, suggesting that there are times when it's good to not marry may sound ironic. But the Devil destroys lives not only with the "living together" philosophy, but also within marriages poisoned by ungodly mates. Marriage is for two people who are ready for a life-time commitment; not for those who can only think of the honeymoon. Are you thinking of getting married? Are your parents opposed? Afraid? Ask yourself, "Of what are they afraid?" Spend time with the resulting list. Pray about this. Be honest about this. Again, people *can* change, and the mistakes of the past aren't always a prelude to the future. But, ongoing sin, or an impenitent attitude about sin, should scare you into waiting.

Marriage is wonderful when done God's way. God's restrictions exist, not for our unhappiness, but for our happiness. He is saying "Don't hurt yourself," and, "Let me show you the way to happiness." The Old Book plainly says, "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it" (Psa. 127:1).

My wife, Cindy, has designed a credit-card-sized reminder for teen girls to carry in their purses to keep them focused on dating with a clear head. Perhaps you'd like to laminate it for your daughter to keep through her dating years. It can easily be adapted for your son. Finding a person

with these characteristics will not be easy (maybe not even possible). But my daughter and yours should focus on finding that man with a tender heart and a willingness to develop characteristics reflective of true Christianity. Purity prior to marriage is a huge stabilizing factor in many facets of marriage itself. But purity is just part of a big package...a heart package. It is the heart that says, "Behold, the handmaiden (or manservant) of the Lord" (Lk. 1:38). Mary had this heart after all.

#### DATING CHECK CARD

Does he speak respectfully to and about his parents?

Does he pray in the restaurant?

Is he careful in his entertainment choices?

Does he avoid physical compromises in our relationship?

Does he like to talk about the scriptures?

Is there someone he is trying to convert to Christ?

Does he sing out in worship?

Does he take notes during the sermon?

Does he like to sit toward the front in worship?

Does he avoid alcoholic beverages?

Does he control his anger and avoid profanity?

Is he a faithful Christian?