

A Thrill of Hope: Devotions for Christmastime

Week 3: Hope has a plan

Focal Passage: Matthew 1:18-21

Focal Point: Trusting God's plan

Song for the Week: *"His Name Is Jesus (Heaven's Hope)"* by Travis Cottrell

Verse to Meditate on for the Week: Matthew 1:21

Devotional Thought:

I love how this passage starts. As if what is about to transpire is normal and will make easy sense to all readers. "The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way" But instead we get a supernatural experience, something no one expected or was quite ready for despite all the clues. **"When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly."** I don't think Joseph planned for things to happen this way. Joseph, like Mary, is living a normal life as far as we can tell. He's doing his best, he's a good man. And then one day, his fiancée gets pregnant and while he is a kind man, he is also a just man. He decides, out of his grace, to send her away quietly rather than bring the wrath of everyone upon her. Breaking an engagement was an incredibly scandalous ordeal, yet Joseph has no desire to place shame upon her. That is his new plan. But that will change, and for the good! God works His plan fully and never leaves His people alone. God had a plan just as He always does. So, he sends an angel to Joseph in a dream.

"...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 sins." God's plan takes care of Mary and Joseph. He provides a way. He allows for the virgin birth without scandalizing Mary and marring the name of Jesus. He brings the line of David into the picture with Joseph's adoption of Jesus. He provides for Mary by giving her a stable family. God's plan takes care of everyone. And all He asks is for Joseph to trust. It's not a light calling. Joseph is being asked to trust God and be a part of God's plan to save His people from sins. This is a huge calling. And you may not be Mary or Joseph, but God still has a plan for you. And His plan for you matters. You may be afraid, it may not make sense to you right now, but God is at work and has a plan. What He wants is for you to trust Him. So much of the story of the Bible is God's people trying to do things in their own power only to discover that if they would trust God, He would take care of them and work all things for good (Romans 8:28). As we head into this season of worship and waiting, let's give Him control and allow Him to reveal His plan rather than following our own.

Discussion Questions:

- *What does it mean to love those around you with grace and truth?*
- *How can you move in the direction of those in need?*
- *How does it make you feel to know God has a plan?*

Activity: Christmas Radio Game. This is a game that is fun and neat that my family have enjoyed. We play this game in the vehicle and it doesn't matter how long the ride is. During this time of year the radio stations are filled with Christmas music. The game goes like this: we turn the radio off and everyone picks a Christmas song they think will be playing when we turn the radio back on. If the song you pick is currently playing when we turn the radio on your prize is \$5. If no one's song is playing, then, if the next song that plays is your selection, then your prize is \$1. If still no one's song is playing, then whoever's song plays 1st after that receives a quarter. It's fun and takes our attention. You will on be out a little bit of money and rarely is the \$5 prize achieved. Feel free to adapt the rules.