

*Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom God's favor rests." Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us run with perseverance the race marked out before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.*

Abraham. Isaac. Jacob. Joseph. Moses. Aaron. Joshua. Caleb. Gideon. Samson. Deborah. Saul. David. Solomon. Isaiah. Jeremiah. Ezekiel. Daniel. Matthew. Simon Peter. James. John. Philip. Nathanael. Paul. Silas. Timothy. You can't wait to meet these heroes of the faith in heaven, can you? For all of them don't just play a major role in the Greatest Story Ever Told that's contained within the pages of Genesis through Revelation. They have also been part of the great cloud of witnesses whose stories have inspired you in this life to keep the faith. But I'd be willing to bet you a Red Ryder BB Gun on Christmas Morning that you probably haven't spent much time thinking about what you would say to these individuals when you meet them in heaven: Seth, Enoch, Methuselah, Melchizedek, Asa, Hezekiah, Uzziah, Josiah, Matthias, Barnabas, Apollos, Aquila, Priscilla, Phoebe, and Epaphroditus. For none of those individuals play major roles in the Greatest Story Ever Told that's contained within the pages of Genesis through Revelation. And even fewer of them serve among the cloud of witnesses who inspire you to keep the faith. But, friend, the major difference between the two groups has nothing to do with the sincerity of devotion to Jesus. It has everything to do with the amount of ink on the Holy Pages devoted to each one.

If I asked you to name your favorite Christmas characters in the Bible that do not start with "J" nor end with "S," some of you would say "the Virgin Mary" while humming the words to *Mary Did You Know*. Some of you would say "the angels" while humming the words to *Angels from the Realm of Glory*. Some of you would point towards the Magi and the Star while humming "Star of wonder. Star of night. Star of royal beauty bright." Others might even point towards the prophet Simeon and his wife Anna and smile widely as they did while humming "O Come. O Come Immanuel. And ransom captive Israel." But few, if any, would point to Joseph, the one God the Father appointed to be the stand in father for the Lord Jesus Christ while here on this earth. And, friend, the major difference between Joseph and the rest of your favorite Christmas characters in the Bible has nothing to do with the sincerity of devotion to Jesus. It has everything to do with the amount of ink on the Holy Pages devoted to them. So today, church, I want to draw your attention to the one person in the story of the incarnation of the Son of God who is the most overlooked. He's the Bethlehemite carpenter whom God appointed as the stand in Father of the Lord Jesus you and I know as Joseph. He has no speaking parts. But he wrote the book on the phrase: "actions speak louder than words." The Lord spoke to him on 4 separate occasions in the Christmas narratives. And each time Joseph obeyed without question. But here is what will pique your interest the most today: each action Joseph took because of a divine directive foreshadowed something about the divine child God entrusted Joseph to raise. So, our objective today is to look at the 4 divine directives to Joseph and see what those divine directives foreshadow about the child God entrusted Joseph to raise.

### The Directives to Joseph and What They Foreshadowed About Jesus:

#### 1. "Marry Her" — Bearer of Shame (Mt 1:20-21, 24)

- **Being on the Wrong Side of Proverbs 19:21:** (1) I've been on the wrong side of Proverbs 19:21 many times in my life. (2) It says this: "many are the plans in a man's heart. But it's the purpose of the Lord that shall prevail. (3) I think we can all bear witness how true that Proverb is. (4) Joseph certainly could.
- **Matthew 1:20-21, 24:** <sup>20</sup> But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." <sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** God gave Joseph the directive to marry Mary. In so doing, Joseph bore her shame. Jesus bore our shame. For the chastisement that brought us peace was upon Him and by His stripes we are healed.
- **Joseph's Struggle:** (1) Matthew tells us in 1:19 that he was: (a) faithful to the law: the Law of Moses permitted permanent dissolution on grounds of infidelity. But this situation in his mind would have been worse because Mary and Joseph had not yet consummated their marriage. (b) and he did not want to expose her to public disgrace: Israel was an honor/shame society. And, regardless of the truth, Mary would face public ridicule and shame in the days ahead for her "perceived" actions.
- **God's Intervention:** (1) Was through an angel of the Lord. (2) In great scenes in the Scriptures, angels often announce the plans of God (Abraham; Jacob; Daniel; the Shepherds; the Book of Revelation). Now Joseph is on the receiving end of that. (3) But the will of God for both would be difficult. Mary was already facing shame. Now God's will for Joseph was to bear it with her. He would have been on the receiving end of "why are you doing this, Joseph?"
- **Joseph's Decision** – (1) No words are recorded. (2) Just his obedience.
- **App:** The will of God for Joseph was the bearing of Mary's shame. It was costly and hard for him to obey, just as it is for us when our reputation is at risk. And just like it was for Jesus.

## 2. “Escape to Egypt” --- Provider of Refuge (Mt 2:13-15)

- **The House of Refuge:** (1) In Martin, there exists a house on the beachline that is one of the oldest houses in the State of Florida. It’s now a museum. It’s called the House of Refuge. (2) A house built for shipwrecked sailors and travelers along the coastline to be sheltered from danger and trouble. (3) Egypt became that shelter for Joseph and his family.
- **Matthew 2:13-15:** <sup>13</sup> *When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”* <sup>14</sup> *So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night, and left for Egypt,* <sup>15</sup> *where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”*
- **Main Idea of the Point:** God gave Joseph the directive to take the child and go to Egypt to escape from the sword of Herod. In so doing, Joseph provided refuge. Jesus is our refuge. He is our ever-present help in a time of trouble.
- **God’s Directive:** (1) Is a series of imperatives: get up; take the child and his mother; and escape. The third directive follows the same format, except that it is “get up;” “take the child and his mother;” and “go back.” (2) It was a hard command because it was in the middle of the night and Egypt was an 80-mile journey on foot.
- **Joseph’s Obedience:** (1) It was instantaneous and that in and of itself is significant. In those days, provisions of food, water, clothing, weapons for defense, etc. were necessary just to survive in such a journey. (2) Without these, Joseph still goes, trusting in God’s directive. (3) And there he would stay for 4 years, in the same place that Jacob’s sons traveled to for refuge during a famine in Genesis: Egypt.
- **App:** Joseph found himself in a difficult situation. He faced certain death in Israel. He faced possible death in the journey. But he faced spiritual death by not obeying. And he found it was far safer to obey God even when that obedience brought danger. For God was his refuge.

## 3. “Go Back to Israel” --- Deliverer of Sin (Mt 2:19-22)

- **Déjà vu** — (1) You’ve said that a time or two in your life, haven’t you? (2) It’s a French for “already happened.” (3) The third directive is a biblical déjà vu moment. It happened before, just with a different variation.
- **Matthew 2:19-21:** <sup>19</sup> *After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt* <sup>20</sup> *and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.”* <sup>21</sup> *So he got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel.*
- **Main Idea of the Point:** God gave Joseph the directive to go back to Israel after the death of Herod. Joseph’ obedience meant that a deliverer, Jesus, was coming out of Egypt and into the land of God’s people. Jesus is our deliverer. And he’s coming back in the future.
- **God’s Directive:** (1) To put this directive in its appropriate context, you must go all the way back to the Book of Exodus. Israel was in bondage in Egypt. Moses left and God called him to go back to Egypt to lead his people out of bondage. (2) In this one, Joseph and his family are not in bondage in Egypt. Egypt is the place of safety. (3) But God called him to leave the refuge of Egypt and go back to Israel where the people of God were in bondage to their sin. (4) The Bible is amazing, isn’t it?
- **Joseph’s Obedience:** Two thoughts would have run through his mind: (a) What child is this because the directive God gave me directly corresponds to Moses’ call. (b) But if he’s calling me to go back to Israel from Egypt this child must be greater than Moses because the people are in bondage.
- **App:** Can you imagine the 80-mile journey back and the conversation with Joseph and Mary? I can: I don’t know what our future will be. But the one thing I do know is this: our deliverer is coming. Friends, that’s still true. He will come again in the future.

## 4. “Settle in Nazareth” --- Object of Disdain (Mt 2:22-23)

- **The Hardest Verse in the Bible to Identify With:** (1) Moses regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ of greater gain than all the treasures in Egypt (Heb 11:26). (2) It’s hard to identify with because willingly trading glory for shame is a completely foreign concept. (3) But that’s what Joseph did when he moved to Nazareth. (4) Jesus did to on the cross.
- **Matthew 2:22-23:** <sup>22</sup> *But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee,* <sup>23</sup> *and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene*
- **Main Idea of the Point:** God gave Joseph, a Bethlehemite, the directive to settle in Nazareth. In so doing, Joseph moved from a town of glory to a town of ridicule and disdain. Jesus, the Nazarene, willingly traded his glory for disdain. He was willing to be ridiculed by the world — and even the people of God in the land — so that, by His work on the cross, we might become the very righteousness and glory of God in Him.
- **God’s Directive:** Calling Joseph to settle in Nazareth would have been a difficult pill for him to swallow because (a) he was from Bethlehem, the city of David. (c) He’s of the tribe of Benjamin, which means “son of my right hand.” (d) Nazareth, on the other hand, literally means “disdained, despised, and/or contemptible.”
- **Joseph’s Obedience:** He obeys without delay. And Matthew uses a play on words to signify what it means with Nazareth and Nazarene: Nazareth, a place of disdain has become the home of the Son of Man, the object of disdain.
- **App:** Jesus came into this world as a regal king. He died as a man of sorrows familiar with suffering. And he did this for you and me. So that, like him, we can be raised to eternal life. Praise the Lord. Glory to God in the highest for the cross in the Christmas story.

