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The Christmas dreamer nobody knows

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I find it interesting that so little is said about Joseph in the Gospel narrative. And yet, without his immediate obedience to God, Jesus may have been killed in his childhood. Here's what the Gospel writers tell us about Joseph:

- Jacob was his father.
- He was the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah" (Matthew 1:16).
- He was a righteous man (Matthew 1:19)
- He was a carpenter (Matthew 13:35)

That's it. Four verses describe Joseph. And yet, none of those verses tell you how he acted. But five other verses do. I call them "dream verses" because Joseph had four dreams. Of the eleven verses which make reference to Joseph, eight have to do with a dream and his response.

The First Dream

In the first, an angel of the Lord appeared with an amazing message: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:20).

Think about it, God the Father sent the Holy Spirit to deliver the masculine DNA of Jesus and the divine DNA of God to the egg of Mary. At the moment of conception all three members of the Godhead were involved—Father, Son and Spirit. Of course, Joseph knew nothing about DNA. But he knew Mary's pregnancy was an act of God. That he knew.

Two Years Later

Two years later an angel told him in a dream: "Get up and take the young child and flee to Egypt. Stay there until I bring you word, because Herod will hunt for the boy to kill him" (Matthew 2:13-15). Several months later, after the death of Herod, the angel told him to return to Israel with Mary and Jesus (Matthew 2:21).

The Fourth Dream

The fourth dream is different because no mention is made of an angel. In Matthew 2:22-23 we read, "And being warned by God in a dream, he departed for the regions of Galilee, and came and resided in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, 'He shall be called a Nazarene'" (Matthew 2:22-23).

After Each Dream

After each dream here's what happened.

- Joseph, "took Mary home as his wife."
- Joseph, "left that night for Egypt."
- Joseph, "took the child and his mother and entered the land of Israel."
- They "made their way to the town of Nazareth."

Until the angel spoke to Zechariah, announcing the birth of John the Baptist, nobody had heard from God in hundreds of years. And yet, when the angel spoke to Joseph he had no questions. He expressed no doubts. He heard the message from God and obeyed. When God said for him to leave town, he didn't wait until morning. He got out of bed and left.

This Christmas as you contemplate the child born to a teenage girl in a manger, consider the man at her side. The man Mary knew heard from God and immediately obeyed. A man who lived to do the will of God, as the child he protected would do.

And the next time you think God is speaking to you in a dream, maybe he is.