

## FINDING CHRISTMAS GIFTS IN UNUSUAL PLACES

### The Gift of Disguised Blessings

Matthew 1:18-25

Dr. Doyle Sager, First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri

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In 1945, at the very moment when Allied Forces were finally winning WWII, defeating Hitler's war machine, Winston Churchill suffered an embarrassing and shocking defeat. He lost the British election in his bid to continue as Prime Minister. Lady Churchill told him, "It may well be a blessing in disguise." He replied, "At the moment, it seems quite effectively disguised."

Do you find that true in your life as well? Joseph could probably identify with it. We've read the Christmas story from Matthew 1 so often, we fail to grasp its shock. In a culture that dealt in the social currency of shame and honor, Joseph's fiancée was pregnant. For him this meant losing face, honor and reputation.

Deep beneath the surface of Matthew's calm words, Joseph was living a crisis. We see it now from the perspective of centuries, in historical context. But he was living it in real time.

But through a dream, Joseph was somehow able to stay calm and listen to God. He was able to believe that this crisis could be a blessing in disguise. In times of confusion and doubt, God's best gifts slip in the backdoor. Here is a truth we can never forget: We always grow more in tough times. Our faith grows more in crises than when things are going our way. A little boy once complained to his mom, "Why are all the vitamins in spinach instead of ice cream, where they belong?" Good question!

Yes, blessings sometimes come disguised. But will we trust the goodness of God? Barbara Brown Taylor offers a good analogy. "I am willing to thank my husband for a gift even before I have opened it—because I know him, because I trust his love of me, because I have faith..." [*Altar in the World*, p. 184].

But trusting God when blessings are disguised is more than a quiet, passive piety, sitting with hands folded in prayer and head bowed. It is more than quietly trusting; it is actively obeying. He obeyed in at least two concrete ways.

First, he did not abandon her or publicly shame her. According to the Jewish law in Deuteronomy 22, Mary could have been put to death or at the very least publicly shamed.

Second, Joseph demonstrated active trust in naming of the baby Jesus. In the Mediterranean world of this time, the naming ceremony was a big legal deal and religious deal. Like our birth certificate registration or adoption ceremonies at the court house. This was Joseph's public declaration that the baby was "legitimate." He officially adopted the baby, basically saying, "I don't understand all this, but I trust God."

What do we do with all this? Daily, we can pray, “God, help me to be like Joseph, trusting you even when I can’t see clearly what you are doing—especially when I can’t see it.” Remember the significance of Jesus’ name: Savior, Deliverer, Rescuer. Our salvation story is not about our search for God; it’s God’s search for us. If God has come after us with such passion, such love, then all panic in our lives should vanish, all anxiety cease.

When you’re on an airplane, you’re up so high that you can’t see where you’re going. You have to trust the pilot. You can’t see your destination but you don’t get online and try to cancel your flight or jump out of the plane. You trust the pilot. What is your disguised blessing? Where is the pressure in your life this morning? Can you trust the pilot?