



DESCRIPTION

THE SIX WORD CHRISTMAS STORY

For most of us, the Christmas story, while beautiful and meaningful, has grown more than a little stale. But the truth is that we often miss the tension of what Mary and Joseph experienced when Mary became pregnant with Jesus. Six little words from the Christmas story reveal a tension and scandal that we often overlook.

The **Goal** of this teaching is engage students with the power of the Christmas story.

Grab the Room by telling the story of Ernest Hemingway and the six-word story.

The **Initial Tension** is this: the Christmas story isn't as tidy as you were thinking.

The **Problem that needs to be Solved** is this: students often miss the meaning of Christmas.

Engage the Text: Matthew 1:18-25, Luke 1:26-39, John 1:46

The **Bottom Line** of this teaching is this: the message of Christmas is grace.

Clear Application:

- Be like Joseph, holding high moral standards and mercy in tension.
- When life is unclear, obey what is clear.
- Respond to God's grace

MANUSCRIPT

THE LEGEND OF THE SIX-WORD STORY

According to legend, Ernest Hemingway was once at lunch with a few writer friends and he made them a bet. “I’ll be you \$10 that I can write a novel in six words.” They took the bet. Then he said, “For Sale. Baby shoes. Never Worn.” These were such painful, haunting words. It was a powerful story in six words.

GREAT SIX-WORD STORIES

Whether a real event or not, the legend of the six-word story started a movement. Many have attempted to write a meaningful six-word story. Here are a few that I came across. [[Leader note: Google “six-word stories” and you’ll find a lot to choose from.](#)]

SIX-WORD CHRISTMAS STORY

You may be thinking, “This is interesting but why in the world are we talking about six-word stories? Isn’t this supposed to be a Christmas teaching?” Good point. Here’s why I bring this up: I think that there is an incredible six-word story within the Christmas story that we find in the Gospels. And, this six-word story unlocks some of the tension and drama that Joseph and Mary experienced. Want to know what it is? Here you go:

“...she was found to be pregnant...” (Matthew 1:18b)

This was entirely unexpected. They weren’t married. It was a scandal. And Joseph was convinced that Mary had committed adultery. It turns out the Christmas story is a little more like a soap opera than we were thinking!

OUR GOAL

So, here’s what we’re going to do in this teaching: we’re going to look at this six-word story from three angles: 1) how Joseph responded to Mary’s pregnancy, 2) how Joseph responded to God’s plan, and, 3) why God chose Mary in the first place.

JEWISH MARRIAGE

As we jump into this story, I want you to try to put yourself in Joseph's shoes. Try to imagine what this was like for him.

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. — Matthew 1:18

Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph. What does this mean? Jewish marriage in the first century had three phases. First, there was **engagement**. This usually took place in late childhood. Your parents would arrange your marriage. Sound good? Probably not. But this is how it worked in their culture. So, imagine that you're Joseph. You've known that you and Mary would eventually get married since you were around 8- or 9-years-old. Basically, you've been looking forward to this for years.

That was the first phase of marriage. The second was called **betrothal**. This phase began with a formal contract between the engaged couple. Legally, there were now married. This phase lasted for about a year and although you would be legally married, you did not live together. And in this extremely traditional culture, you absolutely did not sleep together in this phase. This is the phase Joseph and Mary are in as we jump in to the story. This is what it means when the text tells us that they are "pledged."

The third phase is what we would call "**marriage**." The groom and his groomsmen would come to the bride's parent's home and take her to the groom's home. Everyone was dressed up and it was a fancy procession. At his house, there was a marriage ceremony, they consummated the marriage in a special little temporary house that is, essentially in the yard. And, everyone just sort of waits... awkward, right? Then, there as a big party for, sometimes lasting an entire week. So, there you go. The three phases of Jewish marriage.

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