When Mary tells Joseph: A play based on Matthew 1:18–19

This play looks at a summary in Matthew 1:18–19. The summary discloses that Joseph learns of Mary’s pregnancy and chooses to divorce her. The play, based on this summary, investigates how he may have learned of her pregnancy, that is, from Mary herself. The play combines scholarship and the standard literary features of a drama-character, conflict, plot, setting, point of view, tone and dialogue. It includes material from Luke 1, Deuteronomy 22:21–29 and Numbers 30:6–8. The play encourages and engages the imagination of the cast and the audience.


The characters

**Announcer:** He or she is a modern person in modern dress.

**Mary:** A young woman betrothed to Joseph; she is young, pretty and graceful.

**Joseph:** A carpenter in Nazareth; he is bearded and handsome and a bit older than Mary.

**Time:** Daytime. About 4 BC

**Place:** The carpentry shop and home of Joseph in Nazareth of Galilee, a Roman Province.

**Set:** A carpenter’s shop with wooden tools and wooden implements like a yoke for oxen and a shepherd’s staff. Wooden sawhorses with lumber on them are upstage left and upstage right and are part of Joseph’s home and shop. Simple wooden tools are spread on them. Two wooden benches adorn centre stage. There is ample room to move around the wooden furniture on the stage. An imaginary door is downstream left. A black stage curtain marks the exit.

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1. Forde (1990:15) observes ‘It is a mistake to believe that there are two different sorts of art: Christian art and everybody else’s art. Art is not different in this respect from, say, cooking. Good bread made by a pagan is just as nourishing as good bread made by a Christian. The worth and validity of a piece of art stand separate from the beliefs of its creator. And that is true even when those beliefs are embodied in it. Art is not a matter of content but of form.’
2. Edyevan’s definition, this play, based on Matthew 1:18–19, is Christian drama. One way to look at a text and the theology it contains is to view it as a sacred experience, specifically as a range of sacred experiences ‘accessible to the contemporary heart and mind’ (Wells 2004:35–36). Wells (ibid:37) advises against denying the narrative and overemphasizing a ‘propositional truth’. In other words, drama can express a text.

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the horizontal upstage boundary of the single room stone house.

**Costumes:** Mary and Joseph wear sandals and old, loose, long clothes. Mary wears a graceful head covering. Joseph’s hands are those of a working man. (Mary is upstage left with her back to the audience. Joseph is stage right with his back to the audience. He quietly works with his tools at the sawhorses. The Announcer enters carrying a Bible. The Announcer greets the audience warmly.)

**Introduction**

**Announcer:** The Holy Scriptures contain many silences. Often a writer squeezes together events and summarises them. The scriptures in both testaments are known for their brevity, their conciseness. This play investigates one such silence in the Gospel of Matthew. The silence involves when Mary tells Joseph she is pregnant with the Son of God.

This short play relies on supplemental information about the birth of Jesus the Messiah from the Gospel of Luke. Listen to the summary from the Gospel of Matthew.

6. **I am a writer of a drama based on the biblical text. Therefore, I followed these guidelines:**

1. What do I want to cover in the play? (See Pitzele 1998:117.)
2. What opportunities do I see for providing sound commentary on the text?
3. Who are the characters in the scene and what are their normal emotions?
4. How do I build accurately upon the parts of the play, taken from a summary in scripture, to reflect other sections of the scripture?
5. Where is God in the drama? (See Pitzele ibid.222–224; Branch 2009:189–184.)
6. The Announcer has to provide the correct page number as it differs from the reference list.

7. Anderson (2006:9–10) believes that there are two ways to approach a study of the Bible. The first is an academic study in the classroom. The second is what he calls an ‘attempt to stand within the Bible and to look out at the world through the window of biblical faith’ (Anderson’s italics). Anderson (ibid.12–13) continues to write that the Bible presents historical drama. Like any great drama, biblical drama grows on a unity, because it moves from a beginning to an end and from one creation to a new one. Although the Bible has many different authors, many different historical situations and many kinds of theological expressions, it combines this great variety into dynamic movement, something ‘similar to the plot of a drama, that binds the whole together’; Anderson (ibid.13) maintains. However, that ‘God appears in the cast’ makes the Bible unique. Furthermore, ‘not only is God the Author who stands behind the scenes prompting and directing the drama, but God also enters onto the stage of history as the Chief Actor – the protagonist’, Anderson (ibid.13) says.

8. Whilst I was writing this play, I remembered the insights and definitions that Quash (2006:4–6) gives: Drama always has human actions and temporal events in specific contexts. Theatreplays concern itself with human actions (people), temporal events (time), and specific contexts (place) in relation to God’s purpose. (Quash’s italics). According to Lostracco and Wilkerson (2008:1), the central idea of a story ‘reveals the author’s point of view on some aspect of life’. My academic work has been largely on obscure portions of Scripture and often on silent and unnamed women. I investigate silences in the biblical text instead of reading quickly over the scriptures in both testaments. Furthermore, many Jewish women must have lived in fear and uncertainty, because divorces eventually and quickly would become well known. Furthermore, many times. Childers (1998:9) comments that, whilst preachers and the theatre share much in common, ‘the vast, fertile country where preachers and actors may tip back their chairs in the sun and enjoy what the other knows is largely unexplored’. She (Childers ibid.11) believes that theatre is the ‘closest cousin’ to preaching. Therefore, this play is a theatrical event (Childers ibid.21) and, therefore by its very nature, drama.

9. The conversation between Mary and Joseph must have provoked Joseph’s anger, because he decides to divorce Mary. In deciding to write a play about this conversation, I realised that drama has advantages over succinct prose in the following ways (see Clark, Brubaker & Zuck 1986:545–546):

1. A story often becomes real and alive with enactment.
2. A drama on the stage conveys honest emotions and feelings. A reader may miss these feelings with just a casual read.
3. A drama provides a teaching venue and a learning venue quite different from a classroom.
4. A drama promotes friendships on levels different from those in a classroom.
5. Becoming actors in a play enables people to think outside themselves.
6. Taking part in a drama allows an actor, via imagination, to gain insights into the thinking and actions of another person.

10. The accounts of Matthew and Luke differ in that Matthew emphasises Joseph, ‘whose dreams and actions stretch the natural limits’, whilst Luke places ‘centers on Mary and parallels the births of Jesus and John the Baptist’ (Brasau 2007:220). However, both gospels focus on themes of fulfilment and promise, on Jesus as the descendant of David, the one coming of Jesus as the fulfilment of the hopes of the Jews (Strass ibid.220). Brown (2008:184) believes that ‘unusual stimuli’, like a drama that portrays a text, ‘can sometimes deepen engagement rather than undermine it’ for an audience. A purpose of this play is to pause and reflect on two significant verses in scripture.

11. This play refutes the charge that the birth of Jesus in the way it came about is myth or imagination on the part of Matthew, because Luke records similar details in a different account. Furthermore, the tone of both Matthew and Luke is different from the tone of pagan stories that recount when the gods had intercourse with women (see France 1989:76–78). It has been genealogically agreed many times. Childers (1998:9) comments that, whilst preachers and the theatre share much in common, ‘the vast, fertile country where preachers and actors may tip back their chairs in the sun and enjoy what the other knows is largely unexplored’. She (Childers ibid.11) believes that theatre is the ‘closest cousin’ to preaching. Therefore, this play is a theatrical event (Childers ibid.21) and, therefore by its very nature, drama.

12. The story begins. The details of the action, the structure of the dialogue and the evidence of Mary’s pregnancy eventually and quickly would become well known. Furthermore, people would assume that her divorce was because of her adultery and the evidence of her adultery was the child (see Brown 1979:128). Brown (ibid.284) concludes that to divorce quietly may have been due to a phenomenon in the Bible. Children (2008:4–5) comments that, whilst preachers and the theatre share much in common, ‘the vast, fertile country where preachers and actors may tip back their chairs in the sun and enjoy what the other knows is largely unexplored’. She (Children ibid.11) believes that theatre is the ‘closest cousin’ to preaching. Therefore, this play is a theatrical event (Children ibid.21) and, therefore by its very nature, drama.

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15. Few scholars write on how Joseph learned about Mary’s pregnancy. Bailey (2008) and Barclay (1958) are the exceptions. Bailey (ibid.63–65) speculates that Joseph followed the word of Jesus upheld this view. Hilbel interpreted the Deuteronomy text to mean that a man may divorce his wife for any infringement of his likes and dislikes – even if she burned the soup! Consequently, many Jewish women must have lived in fear and uncertainty, because divorce may have meant a life of hardship, starvation and prostitution. Perhaps remembering his mother’s predicament, Jesus opted for Shammai’s version, yet added that God’s original plan was a lifelong union of one flesh between a man and a woman. Joseph, who became Jesus’ legal father, also chooses Shammai’s view and decides to divorce Mary because of her perceived marital unfaithfulness.

16. The scene is home of Joseph of Nazareth. [Joseph quietly starts sawing. It is a small stone house. The door is over there. The Announcer greets the audience. Joseph is a carpenter. He is around 4 BC. Herod is king in Judea. The Romans occupy the land. Mary turns and walks toward the imaginary door, downstage left, and starts knocking. The Announcer turns and smiles.] Ah, someone is at the door. [The Announcer walks stage left and opens the door. If the Announcer is a man, he bows to Mary. If the Announcer is a woman, she nods her head. Mary enters; she wears a headaddress and or could gracefully over her head. The Announcer leaves and returns either to a seat in the audience or goes off stage. The imaginary door remains open.]

17. The characters in a play may remind us of ourselves or differ from us. They may or may not appeal to us (DiYanni 2008:920). Mary and Joseph are both major characters because the action revolves around them. They are both dynamic
Mary: Yes, I did. It was a good trip. Elizabeth is pregnant and is due any day now.

Joseph: I had heard that! What awesome news! And at her age!

Mary: [Encouraged, yes.] Yes! The Lord is truly moving again in the lives of his people!

Joseph: [His shoulders sag.] Israel has waited so long! We are so oppressed by the Romans! [He makes a spitting noise in disgust. Mary notices. She is calm and gentle. She moves slightly away.] The Messiah truly needs to come! [Mary nods a bit knowingly.]

Joseph: Yes. Well. Tell me about your trip. Won’t you sit down? [He smiles and steps closer to Mary.] I’m sure you told her about our wedding. 1968. It’s next month!

[He sets her on one of the benches.]

Mary: [To Joseph] There is a hard edge to you. It’s not in the spirit of the wedding. I’m sure you told her about our wedding.

Joseph: [Interrupting.] Yes, a son!

Mary: [Continuing.]—and at her great age.

Joseph: Yes! It’s quite a miracle for her and Zechariah! They are known as upright people in the sight of God. They are known as the barrenness of one mother and the unmarried social status of the other.

Joseph: [To Mary]– and at her great age. Yes! It’s quite a miracle for her and Zechariah!

Mary: [To Joseph] Yes. You see, Joseph. An angel told Zechariah that he and Elizabeth would have a son. The meeting took place when Zechariah was serving in the Temple. Elizabeth and Zechariah

Mary: Yes.29 We did talk a lot about our wedding. Elizabeth and I became quite close, Joseph, probably because wonderful things are happening to both of us.30

Joseph: Yes! She’s expecting a child—

Mary: [Interrupting.] Yes, a son!

Joseph: [Continuing.]–and at her great age.30

Mary: Yes! It’s quite a miracle for her and Zechariah! They are known as upright people in the sight of God.31

Joseph: Paising, considering, and cocking his head.] Ah, Mary, you sound so certain that it is a son. You sound as if you know it is!32

Mary: [Emphatically and confidently.] Well, yes, I do. It’s all involved in what I have to tell you. Elizabeth told me I had to talk to you.33

Joseph: [Joseph is very pleased that she is here. He obviously enjoys her company and loves her.] Well, tell me about your stay! You left so suddenly and were there about three months, right?34

Mary: [Mary rises.] Yes. You see, Joseph, an angel told Zechariah that he and Elizabeth would have a son.35 The meeting took place when Zechariah was serving in the Temple.36 Elizabeth and Zechariah

Mary: [To Joseph]—betrothed, was the husband, but the woman, the bride, remained in her father’s home. (France 1989:77). When the betrothal time ended, the man took the bride to his home in a public ceremony. It was then that they could come together and enjoy sexual intercourse (France 1987:77).

28. Throughout this conversation with Joseph, Mary displays an underlying sense of joy, an emotion consistent with the material contained in Luke 1 (see Craddock 1990:22–33).

29. One of the main sources of pleasure in a play is surprise (DiYanni 2008:921). In this play, the audience and Mary know more than Joseph knows. Joseph expresses many aspects of surprise throughout the drama.

30. Although Luke 1:6–7 emphasizes the couple’s outstanding character, it also stresses their outstanding humiliation and outstanding need: they were childless! Childlessness was a valid reason for divorce— and even for excommunication. The rabbis said that seven kinds of people were excommunicated from God. The first two lead the list: ‘A Jew who has no wife or a Jew who has no child’ (Barclay 1964:8). According to Bauckham (2002:72), barrenness is the essential social fact about Elizabeth and her great, ongoing disgrace.


32. The stories of the births of John and Jesus with abundantly more. The Gospel of Matthew presents the situations surrounding Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem as filled with intrigue (see Burre, Cohick & Green 2009:169).

33. Mary was fortunate to have the guidance and confidence of Elizabeth, an older woman. Mary probably sought her counsel about how to tell her betrothed, Joseph, about her situation that definitely affects him: she is a virgin, yet pregnant. Drane (2011:55–57) discusses the difficulties modern readers have with the concept of a virgin birth. ‘To be a virgin and pregnant is a contradiction in terms’; he (Drane ibid:55) begins and that concept was ‘quite unacceptable in any form to orthodox Jews’ (Drane ibid:57). Matthew seems to draw from the LXX version of Isaiah, which translates 7:14 as virgin whilst in the Hebrew text the term may refer to a young woman (Drane ibid:56–57). Both Luke and Matthew present the material about Jesus’ birth in the same way that they present other material about Jesus: straightforwardly and without elaboration.

34. By this point in the play, we hope that those playing Joseph and Mary have forgotten that they are anybody but Joseph and Mary. Great theatre means that the actors experience a kind of self-forgetting. The actors, performers or preachers become so absorbed in what they are saying that the hews and whys of the performance recede (Childers 1998:96).


36. Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah, was chosen by lot to minister to the Lord in the temple and burn incense. Whilst going about his duties, an angel of the Lord appeared to him and stood at the right side of the altar of incense (Lk 1:5, 8–9, 11). Gundry (2002:117) says that the division of Abijah was one of 24 divisions that served in the temple twice a year and for a week at a time.
are to name the child John.37 [She takes off her shawl/ cowl and neatly folds it. She places it on the corner of the work centre, stage left. It remains there until Joseph picks it up again at the end of the play.]  

Joseph: An angel?38 [Laughing39 and rising.] Our people have not seen angels since Gabriel interpreted a vision for Daniel.40 It concerned the end of time. Mmm. Zechariah is quite old, Mary, has he lost his mind? [Joseph walks stage left toward his other work centre.]  

Mary: [Laughing and following him.] No! He hasn’t lost his mind, but he has lost something else.  

Joseph: [Laughing, too.] Really! What?  

Mary: [Slowly and looking at Joseph carefully.] He’s lost his speech.  

Joseph: What? His speech? Why?  

Mary: [Quickly.] The angel—and it was Gabriel—told Zechariah that he and Elizabeth would have a son in their old age.41 Zechariah did not believe it, and the angel silenced him.42  

Joseph: Amazing!  

Mary: [Laughing] Yes! He’s been listening to Elizabeth now for nine months! The angel said he would be silenced until the boy was born.  

Joseph: [Still laughing.] Well, good! He used to be so pompous43 [He walks stage right toward the other work centre.]  

Mary: He has totally changed. I would say he has something extraordinary.  

Joseph: Gabriel.44 [Thinking she is joking.] My goodness! It runs in the family!45 Does everybody on your side see angels?46  

Mary: [Seriously but smiling.] No, not everybody, just the ones Gabriel visits.  

Joseph: [Dropping her hands and stepping back.] The ones Gabriel visits? [His voice trails off.]  

Mary: Yes, Joseph. Gabriel visited me.47 [Joseph is amazed. He walks around. Mary gives him time. She's stationary.] He told me things, Joseph, amazing things.  

Joseph: [Seriously. Suddenly knowing he’s about to hear something extraordinary.] What things, Mary?  

Mary: He told me things that made me rejoice. I must say this: ‘From now on all generations will call me blessed!' The Mighty One has done great things for me and holy is his name!48 Yes, that is what I have been singing now for three months.49  

Mary: [Mary goes toward him. A work centre separates them.] You do such a good job, Joseph; that’s one reason I have grown to love you so much. [Joseph is very pleased. He comes around the work centre to her and takes her hands. Mary looks at him intently.] Joseph, I have something to tell you.  

Joseph: [Enjoying holding her hands] Tell me, Mary! But first let me guess! It’s about how you’ll redecorate my house? [Joseph gestures around his stone house. Mary laughs and shakes her head after each guess.]  

Mary: No? You’re going to ask how I like a leg of lamb cooked?  

Mary: [Laughing.] ‘You like a lot of spices!  

Joseph: [Nodding.] Right. I know! You’re going to talk about the wine for our wedding that your father has been saving!  

Mary: [Laughing but showing some concern.] No, Joseph, although those are all good guesses! [She pauses and lifts her head to him and draws back a little.] Joseph, what have I to tell you is this: I also saw Gabriel.49  

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Joseph: Well, Mary, tell me what the angel said.

Mary: [Walking around to give herself time.] He greeted me by saying I had found favour with God. Oh, first of all he told me not to fear. I guess that was out of courtesy, because he startled me; he arrived so suddenly.

Joseph: [Mystified, running his hand through his hair.] An angel arrived suddenly. Mmm. What were you doing, Mary?

Mary: [With bravado. She is very positive.] Well, nothing much. Just sort of sitting and sewing. [She goes to a bench, sits, and pantomimes the encounter.] I remember dropping my sewing. It was then he told me not to be afraid and that I had found favour with God.

Joseph: [With bravado. He is very positive. He speedily comes to her at the bench and kneels. He takes her hand.] Well, of course, you would find favour with God! Everybody knows you are the best young woman in all Nazareth! Everybody respects you.

Mary: Mmm.

Joseph: [Confident now and in control.] Well, what else did the angel say?

Mary’s shocking announcement

Mary: [Taking a deep breath and looking at Joseph.] The angel said this: ‘You will be with child and give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus.’

Joseph: [Relieved and pleased. Joseph is choosing to believe her. He rises and walks during these lines as he thinks through what Mary has told him.] My goodness, Mary! We will have a son! That’s wonderful news! Everybody knows you are the best young woman in all Nazareth! Everybody respects you.

Mary: Yes, he will be famous, Joseph. [She looks at him intently.]

Joseph: There’s more, isn’t there, Mary. [She nods. He senses the soberness of the event.] Well, tell me.

Mary: This drama does not mention the legends about Mary that include her delayed birth, her holiness, her childhood and her participation with other virgins in making the veil of the temple. For a fascinating account of them see Holy Apostles Convent 1989:1–73.

Mary: [She begins to walk quickly. She touches her head and then her belly. She seems to be talking to herself. She ends with a prayer with her hands raised and her eyes toward heaven.] Elizabeth said to just tell him straight. Oh, God, be my help!

Joseph: [Taken aback. Absolutely amazed. He looks around and glances toward the open door. He whispers loudly.] What? Mary! You are speaking blasphemy! Shh! The neighbours might hear!

Mary: [Positively. Honestly. Forthrightly.] No, I am not! I am telling you the truth. I’m telling you what happened. Please believe me, Joseph. [She pauses and slowly continues.] Elizabeth and Zechariah did.

Joseph: [He moves away, stays standing, and folds his arms across his chest.] Continue.

Mary: [Understanding the body language.] The angel kept saying wonderful things about this son, Jesus. He said, ‘The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.’

Joseph: Well, you and I both are from the house and lineage of David. My line comes through his son Solomon and yours through Solomon’s brother Nathan, also David’s son.

Mary: Yes, Solomon and Nathan were the sons of David and Bathsheba.

Joseph: [Musing. Talking to himself. Walking around. He begins to talk things out slowly.] So if what you say is true, God is on the move and will restore the Kingdom of Israel once again!

Mary: [Text continues...]
wonderful news! And we are to be the parents of the King! [Joseph muses. His joy is apparent! He walks around shaking his head and lifting his hands in amazement. He is stage right. In jubilation he claps his hands; comes toward Mary. She is centre stage. He grabs her around the waist, twirls her, shoulder to shoulder, once or twice. He releases her. He does a grapevine step toward stage left. His hands are in the air clapping. He twirls by himself once or twice and ends facing the audience. Mary watches, stationary.]

Joseph: Oh, Mary! I believe you! You could not have made me happier! The King of Israel is coming! [Dropping her hands to lap, Joseph continues to be very happy. Mary is very silent. Joseph notices. He lowers his hands and turns to her.] Mary, there is more, isn’t there?

Mary: Yes. [She turns to Joseph.] Joseph, my betrothed, my darling, I must tell you what more the angel said.

Joseph: [Smiling and very happy.] Continue! I believe you! I am excited!

Mary: Joseph, the angel did not mention you. [Joseph is startled.]


Mary: [She speaks slowly.] I asked how I could have a son since I am a virgin.

Joseph: [Kindly, taking her hands.] Mary, I have no doubt you are a virgin. [Trust you completely. The whole town knows your character. Ah, we will be great parents of the great king!]

Mary: Yes. Well, I asked how I could have a son since I am a virgin. The angel answered that the Holy Spirit will come upon you.

Joseph: [What? Dropping her hands.] What does that mean? The Holy Spirit will come upon you?

Mary: [Patiently and trying to understand it herself.] Well, it’s hard to explain, but it happened. Let me continue telling you what the angel told me. The angel said, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.’

Joseph: [Puzzled, drawing away.] What? The Most High will overshadow you? ‘So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.’ What do those statements mean?

Mary: I’ll tell you. But let me continue what the angel said. Then the angel immediately told me that my relative Elizabeth was going to have a child in her old age and was in her sixth month. It was as if Elizabeth’s pregnancy was to be a sign that everything the angel said was true.

Joseph: Well, Elizabeth is pregnant.

Mary: [Taking a deep breath, walking over to him.] Joseph, this is what I must tell you. I am pregnant.

Joseph’s anger

Joseph: [Astounded!] What? [Many emotions cross his face. Disbelief. Amazement. Anger, especially anger. He backs away from Mary. He storms around the stage. He rubs his hands through his hair. He returns to Mary.] Pregnant? You? Who has done this? [Who has defiled my betrothed?]

Mary: No man has defiled me. No one has raped me. I am still a virgin.

Joseph: [ Loudly. Beginning to show anger.] But how can you be pregnant?

Mary: [Also loudly.] It was as the angel said. The Holy Spirit came upon me. The power of the Most High overshadowed me. I am pregnant. I am in my third month. I am a virgin.

60. The child Mary carries is the fulfilment of God’s design, because a prophet had spoken generations ago that ‘a virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’ (Burge et al. 2009:169).

61. Respect and awe for God’s plan of salvation are factors in Matthew’s description of Joseph’s characteristic of uprightness or justice (Brown 1979:126).

62. France (1989:76) also notices that there is no mention of Joseph. He expresses the view that Mary’s question shows wisdom and prudence, because she wants to know how this is possible (Holy Apostles Convent 1989:101). However, Ceroke (1957:342) sees Mary’s question as showing she already had thought about virginity during marriage. He argues, cautiously, that she had prepared herself psychologically for a lifetime of virginity. A apostles Convent (1989:134–135; Proteoangelion, which records the interview between Joseph and Mary, recounts Joseph’s distress, his view that she has been seduced, Mary’s tears and his confrontational manner to his betrothed (see Holy Apostles Convent 1989:134–135; Proteoangelion: The Last Books of the Bible 1966).

63. Mary’s response to the angel, ‘How will this be, since I am a virgin?’ (Lk 1.34), shows wisdom and prudence, because she knows how to want this is possible (Holy Apostles Convent 1989:101). However, Ceroke (1957:342) sees Mary’s question as showing she already had thought about virginity during marriage. He argues, cautiously, that she had prepared herself psychologically for a lifetime of virginity. globe (1985:54) emphasises the description of Mary as a virgin in both Matthew and Luke. She conceives not by a man, but by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. Smith (1975:417) sees Mary’s question, ‘How can this be?’ as our question when we think about Jesus and the promise to humankind that Jesus’ story presents.

64. The biblical narrative mentions Mary’s virginity twice, once by the narrator and then by Mary herself because of its importance. It is the singular descriptive element about her (Lk 1.27, 34). Consequently, this play stresses her virginity. Both Luke and Matthew are more interested in a virginal conception than a virginal birth (Spivey et al. 2010:127).

65. Smith (1975:417) sees Mary’s question, ‘How can this be?’ as very much our question, too, when we think about Jesus and the promise to humankind that Jesus’ story presents.

66. Mary’s account differs markedly from pagan god or man birth stories. Mary’s account of what happened to her, better termed a virginal conception than a virgin birth (Strauss 2007:415), emphasises the miraculous. There is no hint of a sexual union between Mary and the Holy Spirit’ (Strauss ibid.415).
75. A church tradition is that Joseph asks Mary the same question that God earlier asked Eve, 'Why hast thou done this?' (Gen 3:13; Holy Apostles Convent 1989:134–135).

76. Strauss (2007:415) discusses the theological significance of the virginal conception this way: 'Some have argued it was necessary to protect Jesus’ sinless nature, but the narratives themselves do not indicate this purpose. The Messiah could have entered human life free from sin with or without a virginal conception. Nor is Scripture explicit on the details of the conception. Did God create the sperm for Mary’s egg? Did he create a fertilized embryo? This latter question raises questions about how Jesus could have been fully human if he had no physical connection to Mary or Joseph. The former raises the question of how Jesus could have avoided Mary’s sinful nature. The Roman Catholic answer is the immaculate conception, whereby Mary herself was born free from sin. However, this doctrine has no basis in Scripture. In the final analysis, the details remain a mystery. What is certain from the text is that the conception of Jesus was a supernatural act of God, confirming that God himself was about to accomplish the salvation which no human being could achieve.' I do not believe that Mary was sinless. This presents her as a strong, normal young woman. I certainly agree that mystery abounds in the infancy narratives. However, the stories in Luke and Matthew give us enough on which to base our faith. It is a firm foundation. We know enough to trust the Lord.

77. Brown (1979:127–128) acknowledges that some may be offended that Joseph could regard Mary as an adulteress. However, ‘among first-century Christians of Jewish origin this would in no way distract from his upright character’.

78. Joseph immediately assumes she has been unfaithful (Brown 1979:127). Nothing Mary says from here on changes his view. After Joseph decides to divorce Mary because of her perceived unfaithfulness, an unspecified length of time occurs. The Bible does not state how long — a day, a week, an evening or an hour. It lasts until an angel of the Lord appears to Joseph and addresses Joseph’s assumption of Mary’s unfaithfulness. The angel commands Joseph not to fear to take Mary, his wife, into his home. The angel’s statement makes it clear that Mary has not broken the law and become an adulteress (Brown 1989:69).

79. The betrothal meant that people treated the couple as married. However, there had been no consummation. Consequently, matters of inheritance, death, adultery and divorce were handled according to the law. Only a divorce could dissolve the betrothal, as with a marriage (Holy Apostles Convent 1989:69).

80. Othello also does not believe Desdemona’s story or her innocence. He calls her foul and claims her chastity is cold (Shakespeare 2009:200).

81. Zechariah and Elizabeth represent the best of Israel. They show that there was true faith — a faith which the world could not shake. It is a foundation that cannot be moved (Brown 1989:69).

82. Isaiah 7:14 and Murphy (2005:145) point out that Matthew’s choice of virgin shows that he follows the Greek text and not the Hebrew.
much, Joseph."

Joseph: [Shouting.] Stoning, Mary, stoning! [Mary lifts her chin and looks levelly at Joseph. Joseph adopts a pleading attitude.] Mary, the law for a betrothed woman is the same as that for a married woman. Mary, you are deceived! Mary, admit it to me: You broke the Law! You committed adultery.

Mary: No, Joseph. I cannot lie. I am a virgin. No man has come near me. I am pregnant.

Joseph: [Dersison.] And you are pregnant. Who can possibly believe you? Who can possibly believe your, er, story, your explanation?

Mary: [Lifting her chin again. Composed. Smiling while remembering a happy memory.] Elizabeth did without my saying a word.

Joseph: [A derisive grunt.] Elizabeth!

Mary: [Knowing the battle, so to speak, is lost, but still calm, gracious, and loving.] As soon as I arrived, Elizabeth started talking. Actually she started shouting!

Joseph: [Patronisingly.] Well, what did she say?

Mary: [Remembering a good memory, she smiles with fondness.] Elizabeth said to me, ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!’ Then Elizabeth wondered something very unusual. She said, ‘Why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?’

Joseph: [The mother of my Lord?] [Aghast.] Mary, I am calling you the mother of God!

Mary: Yes, I guess she is. I hadn’t really thought of it that way. But yes, that is what she was saying.

I agree. It is amazing.

Joseph: Mary, everything you say about Elizabeth is against our culture. You are younger! She is the elder! You should be honouring her! Again, you are deceived, deceived!

Mary: [Sadly, because the man she loves does not understand.] No, I am not deceived. I agree that what I am telling you is hard to understand. Then something funny happened. [Mary’s face softens.] Elizabeth started holding her belly. She started laughing! There was lots of activity in her belly.

Joseph: [Not understanding.] How so?

Mary: Elizabeth told me that as soon as I called out her name, the baby in her womb started leaping for joy! She was filled with the Holy Spirit and started prophesying.

Joseph: [Incredulous.] Prophesying? No woman has prophesied in Israel since Huldah in good king Josiah’s time.

90. With this statement, Mary shows that part of the drama in this play involves practical theology. In technical terms, it is action-reflection and theory-praxis (see Dean 1983:23–24). Joseph has often been a ‘source of grace’. Mary’s words and actions clearly show a man distraught, disappointed and very angry.

92. However, Mary has not broken the law, because she conceived through the agency of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, her virginity remains intact (see Brown 1979:127).

93. Throughout the encounter with Joseph, difficult as it is, Mary conducts herself with poise and courage. She does not lie. O’Day (1985:2007) observes that ‘Mary speaks of herself in the same way as she speaks of those whom God exalts at the expense of the mighty. God did not choose a woman of wealth and standing to give birth to the savior of Israel, but a woman of low degree, a woman who stands with those who are poor, afflicted and oppressed.’

95. Acts 2:44–50 and Lk 8:19–21). Evidently, in Catholic Church teaching, vowed virginity even after marriage (Ceroke 1957:329). Ceroke (ibid:342) concludes that ‘there is a natural mystery in many human decisions, and in particular those regarding state of life.’ It seems to me that the biblical text gives scant support to Joseph’s view. For example, Matt 1:1–35 talks about Jesus’ mother and brothers joining a crowd outside a place where he was teaching (see also Matt 12:46–50 and Lk 8:19–21). Evidently, in Catholic Church teaching, vowed virginity was ‘not a genuine patristic teaching before’ Augustine’s time and the scholastics later formalised it (Faley 1968:437). If one holds with Mary’s perpetual and intentional virginity, one must see it at its total dedication to the will of God (Faley ibid:438).

96. Elizabeth speaks as a prophet (Dean 1983:23).

97. Fitzmyer (1981:358) notes that Elizabeth gives a blessing and a beatitude over her young kin. Firstly, Mary is blessed (eulogeme) amongst women because of whom she carries in her womb. Secondly, she is blessed (makaria) because of her faith. With regard to Luke 1:39–45, Dean (1983:23–24) summarises my view nicely. ‘Mary was a recipient of grace, a source of grace. Her blessedness was the blessedness of one who became a willing channel of divine blessings to others.’

98. See Luke 1:42–43. Von Bathasar (1992:II:505–506) sees the biblical text and history as a drama of the living God. He calls history a theodramatic play, because, when seen in a Christian context, God actually appeared in the drama in Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father and the one possessing the Holy Spirit beyond measure.

99. Some view the doctrine that Mary is the Mother of God as the most important truth about Mary. Scripture, tradition, the teaching and authority of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches support this (see Holy Apostles Convent 1989:123–124).

100. Luke’s account of Mary’s visit to Elizabeth distinguishes the roles of the sons the two pregnant women bear. John will be a prophet to the Most High (Lk 1:76) and Mary’s son, Jesus, will be the Son of the Most High (Lk 1:32). See Strauss (2007:264–265) for an excellent and succinct explanation of the different roles, functions and ranks of these two baby boys.

102. The concept of theotokos (literally God-bearer) is not to give glory to the mother ‘but to guarantee that the life of Jesus was from its inception due to God’s act’ (Talbert 1985:291). Gomes (1998:15) argues that Mary, in her call from God and in her response to that call, ‘becomes the mother not only of Jesus but of our vocation, and of our calling as well. She shows us that it is possible for us to be gifted ones with her, the bearers of Christ in our world’.

106. We learn theology on the knife-edge of life. Theology must kneel at the cross, face death, wait for resurrection and adjust to a new season in God’s salvific plan. As Steuernagel (2003:110) notes, in his study of Mary, she stood by at the foot of the cross decades later.

108. Actually, Elizabeth correctly honoured Mary, because the son Mary was carrying outranked the son in Elizabeth’s womb. The meeting of these four — the two mothers and their two sons — produces ‘a new tradition of a super-hero’s birth’ (Brenner 1986:269).

109. See Luke 1:44. The leap of the baby John is a prophetic action (Fitzmyer 1981:357). The leap and the movement of the unborn child in Elizabeth’s womb ‘is intended as a recognition by him of his relation to Jesus’, Fitzmyer (ibid:363) notes. Luke seems to intend a parallel with the matriarch Rebecca. The LXX recasts Genesis 25:22, a similar in-the-womb moment and notes that Rebecca’s twins leapt (eskirton) [Fitzmyer ibid:363]. The two sons in this part of the story, John and Jesus, meet in their mothers’ wombs. They are coming, by God’s mercy, into history. Decades later, one proclaims the upcoming salvation and One is that salvation and takes people into that salvation (see Bock 1994:53).
Mary: [Confidently. Straightening her shoulders and lifting her chin.] Yes, indeed. Elizabeth prophesied this about me: ‘Blessed is she who has believed what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!’

Joseph: It’s almost the same as what you said the angel said.

Mary: Yes. The angel greeted me by calling me highly favoured. Their similar words and attitude toward me give me courage to go on.

Joseph: [Suddenly thinking there might be a way out of this dilemma. He loves her and here exhibits a beseeching manner.] Mary. Mary. Maybe you are not pregnant. I’ll give you a chance. Young girls don’t have regular cycles. Let’s agree to this: We’ll wait and see.

Mary: Joseph, I cannot agree to that, because I already agreed to something else.

Joseph: [Sternly.] What did you agree to, Mary? You know that as your betrothed am to be consulted on your vows.

Mary: [Slowly.] Well, when the angel came to me, he told me what I’ve told you. I was troubled. I was silent. I kept looking up at him and down at my hands. He gave me time to consider a response. [Sighing and laughing.] I felt as if all creation held its breath.

Joseph: [Slowly.] Well, what did you say?

Mary: Looking at Joseph. I told the angel this: ‘I am the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as you have said.’ Then I curtsied and bowed my head. I don’t know why I did that, but I felt as if I were in the presence of royalty. [Laughs quietly and kindly while Joseph looks on and shakes his head.]

Joseph: [Pausing.] Well, what happened next?

Mary: Then the angel left me, and I decided to go quickly to see Elizabeth. [They look at each other. Joseph paces. It is evident that he is a man with conflicting emotions. Gradually his face hardens. Mary sees it and raises her chin.]

Joseph: Mary, I could have you stoned. [Mary is alarmed, but nods her head.]

Mary: Joseph, no. Please believe me! How can I convince you that I am telling the truth? When I told these things to Zechariah and Elizabeth, Zechariah found another passage in the Isaiah scroll.

Joseph: [Petulantly.] Well, what is it?

Mary: [Quietly, confidentially.] The Lord is speaking. The Lord says, ‘Behold, I will do a new thing.’

Joseph’s decision

Joseph: [Shaking his head and his hand at her.] No! There is no ‘new thing’! You have committed adultery against me. I dissolve our marriage contract because of your unfaithfulness. That is my verdict. I will have a divorce decree written privately.

Mary: [Crying.] Oh, Joseph, oh, Joseph, no. You are a just man.

112. Saint Germanos recounts Mary’s anguish and her pleading with her betrothed: ‘Be penitent, O Joseph! Do not drive me in secret from thy home! I am now in a strange place, and am not accustomed to it. I know neither right from left, and I do not know with whom I might find refuge’ (Holy Apostles Convent 1989:136–137; Sermon to the Theotokos, PG 98).

113. Drama seeks to persuade. It is a vehicle for persuasion (DiYanni 2008:899). Mary tries to persuade Joseph that she is telling the truth.

114. See Isaiah 4:19.

115. ‘The Cherry Tree Carol’, a traditional English carol, notices Joseph’s anger and his sharpness toward Mary, both aspects that this drama mirrors. It also emphasises a tradition that Joseph was an old man when he married Mary. However, this play puts the couple at about the same age.

Cherry Tree Carol

When Joseph was an old man, an old man was he, He married Virgin Mary the Queen of Galilee. He married Virgin Mary the Queen of Galilee. Joseph and Mary walked out through an orchard wood, There were cherries, there were berries, red as any blood. There were cherries, there were berries, red as any blood. Then Mary said to Joseph all in a voice so mild: ‘Joseph, pick for me some cherries, for I am now with child.’ ‘Joseph, pick for me some cherries, for I am now with child.’ Then Joseph spoke up sharply, and angry words said he: ‘Let the father of the baby gather cherries up for thee!’ ‘Let the father of the baby gather cherries up for thee!’ Then up spoke baby Jesus. He spoke up from the womb. ‘Let the tallest tree bend over and give my mother some.’ ‘Let the tallest tree bend over and give my mother some.’ Then the tallest tree bent over, and into Mary’s hand, And she said, ‘Now see here, Joseph, I’ve cherries by command.’ And she said, ‘Now see here, Joseph, I’ve cherries by command.’ When Joseph was an old man, an old man was he, He married Virgin Mary the Queen of Galilee.

116. A private divorce before two witnesses is possible (Mishnah, Sotah 1:1, 5; France 1989:77). The formal process of divorce is the only way of breaking a betrothal (Babylonian Talmud, m. Ketub. 1:2; 4:2; Hagner 1993:17). A divorce means that the relationship ends. It is a kind of death. Death stands, unuttered, behind every play. Often it becomes its explicit subject matter and not only in tragedy (Von Balscab 1988:369).

117. The Patriarch of Constantinople, Saint Germanos (c. 635–733), in a sermon on the Annunciation, emphasises Joseph’s repulsion at Mary’s pregnancy and his order that she leave his home immediately and go to the home of her lover (Holy Apostles Convent 1989:136; Sermon to the Theotokos, p. 98).

118. Although Joseph chooses to divorce her — the words of the angel remain true. Mary has found favour with God, she is full of grace and filled with favour from God, because she is chosen by the will of God. God has conferred upon her, despite Joseph’s view that ‘grace sufficient for her new task’ (Gomes 1998:11).

119. Obedience to the law is a key component of Joseph’s uprightness (Brown 1979:127). A just man means that Joseph is law-abiding (France 1989:77). A severe legal system demanded that a young woman found not to be a virgin by her husband would be stoned. However, a less severe legal system demanded that you ‘purge the evil from the midst of you’ by divorce (Brown 1979:127). Yet
Josef: It is because I am a just man that I cannot marry you.127 I cannot say the child is mine.127 [Derisively. Brokenly. Defiantly.] The only ‘new thing’ I will believe is if an angel comes to me, too.127 [Mary leaves quickly, obviously broken.127 She exists through the open, imaginary door. She freezes with her back to the audience, upstage left. Joseph watches her (Footnote 129 continues ...).]

120. The medieval pageant play, The Annunciation, portrays Joseph as an elderly man who refuses to believe Mary’s story (Cawley 1959:74–76). He thinks he has played his part. Knowing the child is not his, Joseph says, ‘Forsooth, this child, dame, is not mine. Alas, that ever with mine eyeene I should see this sight!’ (lines 115–116).

Accusing her of beguiling him by saying the child is his (as have many other women in similar circumstances), Joseph says, ‘But, in faith, Mary, thou art in sin. So much as I have cherished thee, dame, and all thy kin, Behind my back to serve me thus!’ (lines 130–133).

Joseph then ties down to rest. An angel visits him, commanding him to arise and take Mary home again. He is to comfort her; because she is clean and has conceived the Second Person of the Trinity.

Joseph goes to Mary in haste, kneels before her, and asks her forgiveness. He says, ‘Ih, Mary, Mary, I kneel full low; Forgive me, sweet wife, here in this land. Mercy, Mary, for now I know Thy good governance and how it doth stand.’ (lines 155–159).

Mary replies, ‘Now, that lord in heaven, sir, he you forgive; And I do forgive you in your name For everyone.’ (lines 165–166).

Joseph’s doubt is a familiar theme in English pageantry and drama. Cawley (1959:69) notes that themes like Joseph’s doubt and Joseph’s troubles with Mary occur in English drama cycles.

121. The theme of the play follows. Joseph, because he is a just man, cannot say the child is his. The开着的play (see ibid 2008:934) is that he does not believe Mary’s story and must have a supernatural confirmation. Bock (2002:64) notes that the Matthew infancy narrative presents the dilemma as how shamefully it appeared to Joseph. The shame is contained in Matthew 1:19. However, before he can gather himself together, she was pregnant through the Holy Spirit (italics added). Bock (2002:64) continues that, because honour drives the culture, it is virtually required ‘that he take a look for a more faithful prospective wife’. The fact that Joseph determines to divorce her quietly tells ‘us something of the character of Joseph and are part of the Matthewian narrative portrayal of him’ (Bock ibid 64). However, I wonder how ‘quietly’ a divorce could be. Who would marry her? Where would she go? Would her parents take her back into their home? How would she care for the child? Quite likely, Mary wondered these and other things when Joseph told her he would divorce her. The Bible records no angelic visitation to Mary to comfort her, no hughes from Elizabeth and Zacharias who are miles away and no friends to whom Mary could go to whom she could confide. The Bible shows another of its consistent silences from God in times of acute distress. However, it seems to me to contradict the statements in Luke 1 and Matthew 1 about the divine incorporation of the child into Joseph’s family’ (Hare’s italics).

122. This play deliberately portrays Joseph as angry. He expresses his feelings of betrayal and loathing. Mary’s declaration seemingly shatters his dreams. Bailey (2008:46) wondered these and other things when Joseph told her he would divorce her. The Bible records no angelic visitation to Mary to comfort her, no hughes from Elizabeth and Zacharias who are miles away and no friends to whom Mary could go to whom she could confide. The Bible shows another of its consistent silences from God in times of acute distress. However, it seems to me to contradict the statements in Luke 1 and Matthew 1 about the divine incorporation of the child into Joseph’s family’ (Hare’s italics).

123. The tone of a play or story reveals an author’s attitude toward the subject (Lostracco & Wilkerson 2008:4). The tone of this play throughout has been favourable to Mary. Consider what she faces now. She has the splendid promises of God. She carries within her, God within her, the very nature of God within her. Her betrothed has told her that he will divorce her. It must really have been a terrible time in her life.

124. As Bock (2002:64) says, ‘Joseph’s plans are stopped by a dream.’ This is one of several other direct interventions in these two dramatic cycles. Bock (ibid 64) writes that ‘the angel comes to Joseph and announces that he is to take Mary home again. He is to comfort her, because she is clean and has conceived the Second Person of the Trinity. She exists through the open, imaginary door. She freezes with her back to the audience, upstage left. Joseph watches her (Footnote 129 continues ...).’

125. Joseph then ties down to rest. An angel visits him, commanding him to arise and take Mary home again. He is to comfort her, because she is clean and has conceived the Second Person of the Trinity.

Joseph goes to Mary in haste, kneels before her, and asks her forgiveness. He says, ‘Ih, Mary, Mary, I kneel full low; Forgive me, sweet wife, here in this land. Mercy, Mary, for now I know Thy good governance and how it doth stand.’ (lines 155–159).

Mary replies, ‘Now, that lord in heaven, sir, he you forgive; And I do forgive you in your name For everyone.’ (lines 165–166).

126. The angel’s visit in a dream provides Joseph with evidence of Mary’s veracity. The visit addresses the concerns heanguished over. ‘This afforded him an unquestionable sign and convincing proof that the angel came from God, because it belongs to Him alone to know the secrets of the heart’ (Holy Apostles Convent 1989:141).

127. The play does not end that way.128 Yes, Joseph sets his terms, and God meets them.128 An angel visits Joseph, too.128 Listen as Matthew continues the story.127

[Open the Bible.] Matthew 1:1-25: ‘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.”129 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,130 because he will save his people from their sins.131 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel—which means, “God with us.””132 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.133 But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son.134 And he gave him the name Jesus.135 [Closes the Bible.]
You know, the Bible in this passage gives another summary of a silence.116 It does not record the angel’s encounter with Joseph in a dream.117 It does not record Joseph’s conversation with Mary. It does not recounts when Joseph tells Mary of his own encounter with an angel. It summarizes all these meetings. But the Bible invites us to imagine them.118

A pantomime begins for Joseph and Mary.119 From the biblical text we see that Joseph must have believed the angel.120 [Joseph raises his head, listens, and indicates agreement.] Joseph must have gone to Mary. [Joseph gets up, runs through the imaginary door, and walks to Mary.] He must have told her of the encounter. [Joseph pantomimes the dream.]

Joseph must have asked for forgiveness.121 [Joseph bows or kneels and looks up at Mary.] And Mary must have given her forgiveness.122 [Mary indicates her forgiveness; she caresses his bowed head. Joseph rises, reliefed. Joining hands, they twirl. Mary smiles. They stop. Joseph bows and offers his arm.]123 Mary takes it. Together they come through the open door and join the Announcer at centre stage.

And the story goes on.124 [All three bow.]

133.Saint Germanos agrees with the timeframe this play gives. Everything occurred very quickly. Joseph changed his views within a day. The verification he needs comes in a dream from an angel. Joseph immediately repents, goes to Mary and even bows before her (Holy Apostles Convent 1989:142). Saint Germanos, in his homily, acknowledges that Joseph said, ‘Yesterday I had false suspicions and brought censure upon thy beauty and goodness. But today, having received a word from above, I apostatically and venerately thy magnanimity and bless thee name!’ (Holy Apostles Convent 1989:142). Saint Germanos, Patriarch of Constantinople, in his sermons on the Annunciation of the Most Holy Theotokos (in Greek), page 98

134.Joseph has four dreams that Matthew recounts. They propel the plot forward and confirm that God is in charge and protecting the child, Joseph and Mary. In addition to Joseph’s first encounter with an angel (Matt 1:20–21), Joseph has three more dreams. The first guides him to escape with his family to Egypt (Matt 2:13). The second guides him to return to Israel after Herod’s death (2:20). The third guides him to settle in Nazareth (Matt 2:22). An angel also warns the Magi, the wise men from the East, in a dream not to return to Herod (Matt 2:12). Matthew does not name the angel of the Lord. Luke names the angel that visited Zechariah in the Temple and Mary as Gabriel (Lk 1).

135.This play uses imagination within the framework the biblical text supplies. The active imagination of a person (at any age) provides a great tool for training in the faith (see Stonehouse 1998:158).

136.Whilst I was writing this pantomime, I remembered Pitzele’s (1998:243–245) three warnings about biblical drama: 1. At times, a director usurps a priest or rabbi, but a director can be a loose cannon even bows before her (Holy Apostles Convent 1989:142). Saint Germanos, in his homily, acknowledges that Joseph said, ‘Yesterday I had false suspicions and brought censure upon thy beauty and goodness. But today, having received a word from above, I apostatically and venerately thy magnanimity and bless thee name!’ (Holy Apostles Convent 1989:142). Saint Germanos, Patriarch of Constantinople, in his sermons on the Annunciation of the Most Holy Theotokos (in Greek), page 98

137.Please note that the angel is unnamed. Perhaps it was Gabriel.

138.Joseph risks scandal by marrying Mary. He does so because he has heard from an angel himself and has decided that he can honourably marry this pregnant woman – despite appearances and possible gossip (see Strauss 2007:225). Matthew closes this part of his gospel by affirming Joseph’s obedience (Bock 2002:65).

139.Throughout the ages, Mary has been portrayed as gracious. Von Balthasar offers this explanation (see Stonehouse 1998:158).

140.The angel’s visit confirms that Mary is innocent of sin and, therefore, freest Joseph to marry her (Hagner 1993:18). Joseph’s obedience to the angel’s directives in marrying Mary and in naming Jesus indicates ‘his formal adoption of Jesus and hence the establishment of his Davidic lineage’ (Hagner 1993:21).

141.The upcoming marriage of Joseph and Mary takes away any taint of illegitimacy, because an illegitimate child could not enter the assembly of the Lord (Deut 23:2). Significantly, the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus’ later enemies, never tantalized him about being born out of wedlock or that his mother played the harlot in Israel. However, another tradition is that both Mary and Joseph had to drink the waters of conviction (Num 5:11–30) to verify that Mary had not conceived the child she...


