
IMMANUEL – GOD WITH US

Matthew 1:18-25
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INTRODUCTION

Tis the season is not it. It is Christmas. This is the season of great joy. People tend to give a little more. They tend to smile a little more. Hearts are softened. We snuggle up together with families and friends watch movies warm that our hearts. It is a Hallmark heaven for those who those Christmas movies. It is the time of peace, love, and joy.

But there is a dark side. For some the weight of loneliness is heavier during this time of year than any other. For others depression seems to attack with a greater vengeance. And sadly, more people take their own lives during this time of year than any other.

But there's Advent. This gives hope to the hopeless, peace to the troubled, and love to the lonely. As we continue our study in the Gospel of Matthew, we arrive at one of the most encouraging and comforting texts in the gospels. What greater message is there than God with us? This is the Christmas message. God became a man and dwelt among us. And this is what we proclaim during this advent season. God became one of us. He came as a child.

But, there is a dark side to advent too. It's in our text this morning. Albeit it is hidden but it is there. We won't see it initially. And because it is colored with Christmas cheer, and the season, makes it even more elusive. But it is there. Both the wrath of God and the redemption of God. This season is like a double-edged sword. In order to enjoy the good, we need to know the bad. People can only be found when they are lost. They are only healed when they are ill. They are only saved when they are dying. This morning, we will be faced with this double-edged sword, the good and the bad. But before we begin, let's pray.

A DIFFICULT SITUATION (v.18-19)

Take your copy of God's word and turn with me to Matthew 1:18-19. Last week read of the genealogy of the Messiah. It had wicked kings, immoral people, Gentile blood and promiscuous women. In Jesus genealogy we see His humanness. He had a bloodline. This morning we will read of his divinity. Follow along as I read verses 18-19.

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with

child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

Matthew wastes no time in clearly setting this man, Jesus, apart from any other in human in history. He may have had an interesting genealogy, but what is more interesting, is the thought of a human being impregnated without any human intimacy. Although with our technology today, this may not surprise as much. But Matthew eliminates all other possible explanations by confirming how Jesus was conceived. It was from the Holy Spirit. Right from the onset, God is establishing the divinity of Jesus. It was a supernatural fertilization. Matthew uses the same Greek word here for birth as he used for genealogy. It translates to genesis. Jesus is the new man. The second Adam. There is no other explanation how Jesus could be divine. And Joseph, unaware what took place, is now placed in a very difficult situation. For the most part, you cannot hide a pregnancy. It eventually will reveal itself.

THEIR RELATIONSHIP

Before we move into the cultural context, I want us to think about what Matthew shares or actually doesn't share about how Joseph discovered Mary was pregnant. Matthew does not tell us. And although Luke spends over 80 verses giving us the background, Matthew will use only seven. So, it is safe to say, it is not pertinent to the readers of Matthew's gospel. He is not concerned with those details. I bring that up so that we don't spend our time contemplating them. You can read more of those in Luke. But Matthew has a different intent with his Gospel.

Now, let's talk about culture context. For the Jewish audience, they didn't need much more description on what Joseph was facing. They knew what the law said. They would quickly recognize the predicament Joseph found himself in. But as Gentiles, we need a little more information in order to feel the weight of Joseph's plight.

Joseph and Mary are essentially engaged. In our culture, it is time for planning and celebration. But in our culture, engagements are broken off with no real loss. Right? Well, I guess it depends when they are broken off though. But it wasn't as if you were married yet. But to the Jewish culture, engagement equated to marriage. During this time they waited for a period of about a year before they actually physically consummated the marriage. But by no means did this year long period diminish the commitment the couples had to each other. If there was a violation in that period, as this appeared to be at first, then it would take a divorce to end the engagement-marriage. Or, worse...

HIS DILEMMA

So this places Joseph in a predicament. But Joseph is a "just man". He is faithful to the law of Moses. And according to Deuteronomy 22, the law says if a woman is found to be

unfaithful, which Mary appears to be, she is to be stoned. By doing this, Deuteronomy sees this as “purging the evil from their midst.” Her “infidelity” would be viewed as evil. That’s one option.

Or he has another option. According to Deuteronomy 24, he could divorce her. This would clear his name but undoubtedly bring her shame. They lived in small community.

HIS DECISION

This is the option he chooses. But he will do this with mercy. He will do it quietly. He is unwilling to put her to shame. That is difficult for us to imagine. Any sign of infidelity sends most people immediately to divorce court. Not Joseph. Whatever was his motivation, he is unwilling to put her to shame. Maybe it was because she told him about her encounter with the angel. Who knows? What we do know is that at some point, her secret will be revealed and shame will be brought to her regardless. To a Jew reading this story, it sounds scandalous. But to the Gentile, this is impossible.

A DIVINE REVELATION (V.20-23)

And it is with man, but with God, all things are possible. So, He intervenes.

²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ *“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel”
(which means, God with us).*

THE MESSENGER ESTABLISHES GOD WITH US (V.20)

The messenger will establish, this Jesus is God with us. And so as Joseph is considering the situation, possibly how he will divorce her quietly, or about his future and/or her future, the whole course of human history weighs in the balance of his choice. And I say that because if Joseph rejects Mary, he cannot adopt the boy. Which is significant.

Therefore it will take supernatural intervention. Mary nor Joseph could have known how her pregnancy happened if not for the supernatural intervention of an angelic revelation. Otherwise, there it would have destroyed their relationship and caused her insanity. How did I even get pregnant?” But Matthew prepared us for this in verse 16. Look at it, it says, “and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.” After 15 verses, Matthew was to be clear not to mention Joseph, the father

of Jesus for that was not true. But this was all there in the Old Testament. It had been there from the first pages of scripture. It was the seed of the woman that would “bruise the head of the serpent”. But up to this point, it was hidden. It was a mystery. Jesus said this when he talked about parables. He reveals truth because He is the truth. All of the typologies, prophecies, and foreshadows pointed to this anointed one.

THE MESSAGE ESTABLISHES GOD WITH US (v.20)

The message establishes this is God with us. The message is short but loaded with OT hyperlinks. Matthew will continue to connect the dots that will end with a mosaic of Jesus as the Messiah. Let’s follow along with Matthew as he begins to paint this beautiful picture beginning with the message from the angel.

“Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

BY THE ADDRESS – SON OF DAVID

First, look how the angel addresses Joseph. He calls him son of David. Joseph is not Jesus legal father, yet. But remember what the LORD declared to David, “I will raise up offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son” (2 Samuel 7:12-14). In order for the promised Messiah to be legit, he has to come from the line of David. At this point, Joseph is not his biological father. But he is the link. In order for Jesus to be legally grafted into the line of David so to speak, Joseph has to become his father. This phrase not only draws attention to Jesus lineage, but also his rightful path to kingship. Joseph, is the link that will connect the son of God to the human bloodline of the promised king.

BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Notice also how Matthew uses the phrase, “from the holy spirit” twice in this section of text. Although the Holy Spirit creates and renews, and Jesus is preeminent so He is not created, we do see both at work together here in the manifestation of the Son of God. There is no explanation for such an event. No other man has been born in such a way as Jesus. Matthew is being very clear, Jesus is divine. But why?

Because there is no way any mere human could bear and fully satisfy God’s wrath. By nature, this wrath is infinite in quality. In order to bear the weight of wrath, it is essential that the Savior be divine. But also, in order to satisfy this wrath, he had to offer a sacrifice of such a value that God would be pleased to accept it. Only Christ as God could bring a sacrifice of infinite and eternal value to God that he would propitiate heaven’s wrath. By

virtue of his divine nature, he is able to earn for us eternal life and favor with God. But also His divinity means that he is able to be raised from the dead and therefore apply the benefits he has earned for us. Praise God for that.

BY HIS NAME

And, as Matthew continues to do, he provides us with another OT link with the name of Jesus. You see in biblical times, names meant something. They carried purpose and meaning. They were not mere badges of identification, but they told others who you were and what purpose God had for you. And, keeping with Jewish tradition, this Son, is given a specific name, Jesus. In the Hebrew is Yeshua or Joshua. It's meaning, is "Yahweh saves". That name would have pricked the hearts and minds of the Jewish readers. Joshua was the one who lead their people to the promised land. The sound and image of salvation would have rung heavy in their ears with that name. This God-man, has a name, and that name means salvation. For in His name, you have life (John 20:31); In no other name under heaven can one be saved (Acts 4:12); and one day, every knee in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil. 2:9-11). Praise God for His great name.

BY HIS PURPOSE

From what will he save his people from? He will save his people from their sins. Mathew once again, adds to his Messiah mosaic with an allusion to Jeremiah 31:31-34:

Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. ³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Sin was the enemy. Sin is the barrier. Sin is the reason they cannot know God. What caused the deportation in the genealogies? It was the sin of Israel. Just as it kept the Israelites wandering in the desert, it is what keeps us from knowing God. IT breaks fellowship with the father. They thought it was the enemies and Roman government. No, it was their sin. And this child will be the sacrificial lamb of God. He will bring his people home by forgiving their iniquity. And who are His people? People from all nations, both Jew and Gentile.

THE MEANING ESTABLISHES GOD WITH US (21-23)

Yet, there is more. Matthew will begin to explicitly connect the life of Christ to Old Testament texts. This is the first of many in this gospel.

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

*²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel”
(which means, God with us).*

BY ITS FULFILLMENT

I would like to take a moment and investigate this verse in its original context. Let’s turn to Isaiah 7.

We don’t have time to review all that is occurring here. So I will attempt to summarize. Ahaz, the king of Judah, is being threatened by two kings, one from Israel, the northern tribe, and the other from Aram. Their plan is to overtake him and replace him with a puppet king. Ahaz and his people are terrified. They cannot win if these kings come at them. God intervenes through the prophet Isaiah. He tells him the attack will not happen. God even offers Ahaz the opportunity to ask for a sign to bring assurance of God’s promise. In fact, God says, you can ask any sign that you desire. Anything! But Ahaz refuses. He refuses God. Which if you read 2 Kings 16, this is par for the course for Ahaz. He is a very wicked king. So, this brings us to the Isaiah 7 prophecy. God responds saying he is going to give sign whether he wants one or not. Sorry, Ahaz, you don’t have a choice now. Let’s pick up in Isaiah 7:14-17.

¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. ¹⁵ He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶ For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted. ¹⁷ The Lord will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father’s house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah—the king of Assyria!

Now, I know there is much debate and speculation on the meaning of virgin and to what specific child at the time is being referred to. I leave that for another time. The point here, Ahaz was given a choice, believe God’s promise, or not. God was even willing to provide him a sign of his choice. But every Jew would have known what happened with Ahaz. He ran to the Gentile enemy king of Assyria for protection and help. He sought salvation from man rather than from God. He fails to believe in the sign of the child. Consequently, Judah will later be overrun by the Assyrians.

Now, let's bring it back to Matthew. God's people are once again surrounded by foreboding enemies, and these are both religious leaders and government authorities. So when they read this passage they are thinking about Ahaz. And how he rejected God's promise. And remember that promise was fulfilled. But that was only a type of Christ. That prophecy to Ahaz, had a much deeper meaning. It has its complete fulfillment in Jesus Christ. There is no debate about virgin and/or who this child was. IT was a foreshadowing of Jesus. Therefore reader, believe on Him.

BY HIS PRESENCE

But what about Immanuel? Was not God with Judah back then? Back to Isaiah. IF the child born back then was Immanuel, God with them, then what happened? What ended up happening is that because Ahaz failed the people in not believing the promises of God, Judah eventually experience arduous times. They were overrun numerous times by enemy invasions. But even still, Davidic line was protected, and a remnant preserved. So, God was with them all along. God was fulfilling His promise to David and His people. It didn't seem like at the time, but he was. And the reason it didn't seem like it was because the fullness of time had not yet arrived. They were to continue to look forward to the "One."

This brings us back to Matthew. Matthew is making this point. Not only is this child born of a virgin, but He is also Immanuel. He is God with us. He is the Messiah. This is fullness of time is now here. This is what the Old Covenant was heading toward. The kingdom, the temple, the throne, the priesthood would all reach their fulfillment in Christ. He is the kingdom, he is the temple, he is the priesthood, yes, He is everything! "For all the promises of God find their yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory" (2 Cor. 1:20) This infant child, would have within him all the fullness of the Creator of the cosmos. He was willing to humble himself to the point of being born in a fallen kingdom led and served by his enemies. He dropped himself into enemy territory in order to save us.

Matthew is teaching us how to read and understand our Bibles. He is beginning to show us there is so much more to what he has written than just the words on the page and his proclaimed prophecies. We could spend another 40 minutes speaking about the implications of what it means that Jesus was Immanuel. But we need to complete this section of text.

A DECISIVE OBEDIENCE (v.24-25)

In stark contrast to Ahaz, Joseph hears the prophetic word of God and obeys. Follow along as I read verse 24-25.

24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, 25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

IN THEIR MARRIAGE (24)

The morning he gets up, he goes and gets Mary and finalizes their marriage. I don't know what kind of difficulty this causes for the family. Normally this ceremony was a time of great celebration. It required enormous planning. But Joseph recognizes what is at stake. His marrying her immediately will do much to protect her reputation.

IN THEIR INTIMACY (24)

He also understands the importance of what Isaiah wrote. He will in no way jeopardize the virgin birth of Jesus. Mary's is not only a virgin conception, but also a virgin birth. His firm resolve is to authenticate Jesus' standing as fully man, fully God and without sin.

Listen, let's also recognize what this would have meant. For nine months, the newlyweds do not have physical oneness. This took an enormous commitment to carry out God's plan. I marvel at the grace of God in such patience.

IN THEIR CHILD (25)

The final act of obedience is in naming Him at birth. When the boy is born, he is called Jesus. This is faith, believing God in an obeying way. This is a stunning affirmation of what God has promised. This boy, this baby, will deliver his people from their sins.

This child was conceived, named, and sent with a spiritual purpose from God himself. The only human connection was the womb of a humble woman.

REFLECT AND RESPOND

So now what?

Trouble comes as both testing and temptation. Notice that Joseph (and Mary as well) are faced with temptations. God is testing them through this trial. Will they believe God and His Word? Will they do so in a way that obeys? Will Joseph succumb to anger and vengeance? Will he love God and Mary in such a way that God is glorified in what He chooses? Will you?

Jesus is our only means of salvation. Do you believe? I began this message with the bright and cheery side of the Christmas season and of Advent. But I also said there was a dark side to all of this. And so I must address this. The thought of an infant being God with us, warms our hearts and encourages us. And Christians read this as a univocal promise of salvation. But if we look deeper we find a more complex and dark side to his coming. For not only does

he bring salvation for those who believe but he also brings judgment to those who do not. A king brings his reign, but he also brings his rule. Just as Ahaz disbelieved and ran to human means of salvation, if you do the same, then you are without hope for there is no other way for your sins to be forgiven.

He is with to the end of the age. But those of us who believe, praise God for His Son. Because every day we chase idols, we disbelieve, and failure to honor God with our lives. We are not “just” people. We in fact are unjust, unrighteous, and wicked. But the promised Son has arrived. But the story obviously does not end with that prophesy. Because the evangelists end his gospel the same way he begins. Jesus was God with us, and he still is. Turn with me to Matthew 28:18-20:

“¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Emmanuel is with us. And he will never leave us. Praise God.