The Two Fathers of Jesus

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[0:00] When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him, and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son, and he gave him the name Jesus. So, we're going to think together about the two fathers of Jesus that we find in this text. Angels feature heavily, of course, in the Christmas story. We commonly think of the angel Gabriel coming to bring a message to Mary, or the angels in the great choir in heaven singing joyfully to the shepherds. But here we have another appearing as the angel comes to Joseph. And in this message, we hear that he brings valuable things for us, revealing truths about the identity and the work of Jesus. Matthew is wanting to show us that Jesus is utterly unique. He is more than a wise man. He's more than a good man. He is none other than the God man. So, already, Bob was sharing with us last Sunday evening that in the family tree of the first 17 verses, we are introduced to Jesus, son of Abraham. He is the source of God's blessing to all peoples. He is the son of David, the eternal and righteous king, and he is the one who will rescue from exile to restore a people back to God. And now, in the message of the angel, we discover that Jesus is God. And we discover that Jesus is human, and we learn that Jesus is God with us. Today, we're going to hear so much good news in this reality of the two fathers of Jesus, that he is truly God and truly human. So, let's think first that Jesus is God. Look with me at verse 18, where we discover that before Mary and Joseph came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. And then in verse 20, the angel announces to Joseph that what is conceived in Mary is from the Holy Spirit. So, Matthew records, the angel announces the supernatural conception of Jesus, that the human life growing inside of Mary is from the heavenly Father, that God himself is the real Father of Jesus. As we confessed, our faith as we shared the apostles' creed. We declared that Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit who is present at creation, pictured hovering over the world, bringing life. The Holy Spirit who works in power at new creation, so that we are born again by the Holy Spirit. And now, the Holy Spirit is born again by the Holy Spirit, powerfully working in the supernatural conception and the birth of Jesus.

Jesus is God. Verse 23 records a section from that prophecy in Isaiah 7, that promise that God would deliver, that God would save, that God would be with his people. The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanuel. The people knew that prophecy, but they never would have expected it to come true, literally. You know, you imagine, they would imagine God with us, like God was with us when he sent us Moses, or God was with us when he sent us David, a king or a leader to deliver us. But Matthew reveals that in Jesus, this prophecy is indeed fulfilled literally. The Savior that we follow is God. Is God come to be with us.

So, when we read Matthew's very brief summary of the birth of Jesus, verse 25, she gave birth to a son. What we're thinking about there is the birth and the babyhood of the Son of God, the one who holds the one who holds the one who holds the one who holds the one who holds the universe in place, being held in the arms of his mother Mary.

[5:01] J.I. Packer, a theologian, writing on this says, the babyhood of the Son of God was a reality. Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as is the truth of the incarnation. What's he saying there? He's saying, you couldn't make this up. And that's important because Matthew definitely didn't make this up.

I wonder today if we struggle with the idea of the virgin birth. Does it seem too fantastic to be true? Now, here's a few thoughts. First of all, think about who writes this gospel, Matthew. Think about how Matthew was raised, raised as a Jew, never to make an image of God.

God is holy. God is far above us. He is not to be represented in any physical form. But here is Matthew. He's been an eyewitness to the life and the death and the resurrection of Jesus. And he

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will say from the beginning quite categorically, this one is God. The tiny baby in the manger is the eternal Son of God, is the agent of creation, is the agent of salvation. Think about the virgin birth from the perspective of God. We worship a God who can speak the universe into existence, who can bring everything out of nothing. All the mighty miracles we read about in the Old Testament and indeed in the New Testament done by our God, if he can do that, of course he can cause Mary to conceive by the power of the Holy Spirit. And think about the virgin birth from all that is revealed about Jesus. We struggle with his beginnings. Think about his life, the evidence of his power. Here is one who has power to heal. He has power over nature. He has power over demons. He has power over death. Think about his claims of authority. All those I am statements when he happily testifies of himself that he is God.

He will declare himself to be Lord of the Sabbath. He will say, your sins are forgiven. And everybody knows only God forgives sins. Think about the evidence for his resurrection. When you put it all together, who else could he be but God in the flesh? We struggle with the idea of the virgin birth. We have so many reasons to consider it seriously. And for us to recognize how important it is that Jesus is God. Here's just a couple of reasons. One, it means God wants to be known. It means that God can be known. Think about it.

We don't need to speculate and wonder, what is God like? Because in Jesus we have revelation. We see God in the face of his son Jesus. In the maze of religion and spirituality where people are longing for something greater and are looking for God, we can see from the Bible that we have found the center. We have found the goal. We don't need to go around in circles searching for some great experience or some higher truth. We find all that we need, Jesus. God wants to be known, has made himself known in his son. Jesus is God. That means God has given the world hope. We know from the Bible that God is holy. And we know from our own conscience and our own experience that we are sinful, that we break God's law. And that God is holy means he must deal with sin, he must deal with wickedness, he must be just.

[9:35] And so we find ourselves by nature separated from God and doomed to eternal punishment. But we know from the story of Jesus that God comes in humility.

That the Son of God enters into this world that he has made and he comes in weakness and he comes as the servant king and he comes to die on the cross in order, verse 21, to save his people from their sins.

There's the hope that in the coming of Jesus, God has come that he might draw us home. That Jesus takes the curse. The curse because of sin, it falls on him so that we can know God's blessing.

Jesus knew on the cross separation from his Father so that we could be drawn near, so that we could have heaven as our home for all eternity. The Son of God came down to raise us up, to take us home.

There is good news and the truth that Jesus is God. That God is his Father. But secondly, we discover here that Jesus is man. Now this visit from the angel here reveals that Jesus' birth is totally unique. Now if you know your Old Testament, you will know that there were different occasions when God sent angels to announce births of children. But never like this. Never the declaration that in the birth of this child, the invisible God would become visible. This is something unique.

[11:31] This is a remarkable act of God's condescension of stooping down to our level as we discover the eternal Son of God will be adopted by a carpenter from Nazareth named Joseph. Think with me about what this all meant for Joseph. We go back to verses 18 and 19. His first instinct is that this is a disaster.

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. His fiancée is pregnant, and he's not the father. Because Joseph, her husband, was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace. He had in mind to divorce her quietly.

Now remember, this is a very religious society. The penalty for adultery would be dead. And notice Joseph's reaction. So he wants to show compassion. We see care for Mary.

But recognize that he is not ready to live with the shame. He is not ready and willing at this stage to raise another man's child. But then comes the dream. The angel appeared. Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid. He had real fear, didn't he? Do not be afraid. Mary is not guilty of adultery.

This is a miraculous act of God. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.

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[13:31] Now, the name Jesus, I guess, for us is really unusual in our culture and society. We don't probably ever come across any Jesuses. But in a Jewish context, there was lots of Joshua's, Jesuses, and it was a name that spoke promise to them. Jesus means, you know, God saves, God who saves.

And when a child was given that name, it was given with that hope and expectation. God is our deliverer. But there was no Jesus ever like this Jesus. He truly is God. He truly is the one who saves. He is the alone hope for God's people. And he discovers this, Joseph discovers this, in his dream. So then he has a decision to make, doesn't he? Plan A, divorce her quietly.
Okay. And now he hears the dream. What's he going to do? Verse 24, when Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. He is a righteous man. He's a man of faith. He obeys. He takes Mary home. Now he's ready to bear the shame, to experience the whispering campaign. And notice at the end of verse 25, when he gave him the name Jesus. This is really significant. This is a seal of Joseph adopting Jesus into his family. And notice how the angel speaks of Joseph, Joseph, son of David. So now here we find Jesus adopted into the royal line.
And Joseph gets joy. Joseph gets joy. This carpenter, as he looks after Jesus in his infancy, in his early years, he will, in the fullness of time, make furniture with his maker and Messiah. Imagine that privilege.
He is called to care for the Christ child in his weakness and vulnerability. This message meant a lot for Joseph. But think about what it means for Jesus.
[15:57] It means that our God is uniquely wonderful. There is no other faith that has a God who knows the human condition by personal experience. No other religion has a God who rescues us from the human condition by becoming fully human themselves. This is utterly unique. Jesus fully God, fully man.

Dorothy Sayers, novelist and essayist, captured it well when she wrote this. He himself has gone through the whole of human experience. From the trivial irritations of family life and the cramping restrictions of hard work and lack of money to the worst horrors of pain and humiliation, defeat, despair, and death. He was born in poverty and suffered infinite pain, all for us, and thought it well worthwhile. Consider the reality that Jesus is man.
Recognize that in his coming in weakness, Jesus bore suffering and shame to save us. Jesus, to read his life, we know that he was spoken against by many people, rejected by most of the people in his day as a fraud, as a blasphemer, abandoned by his friends at his moment of greatest need, faced injustice in mock trials, ultimately tortured and killed on a Roman cross.
And yet Jesus did it and did it gladly. He did it for the joy set before him. The joy of being faithful to his Father, completing the Father's plan of salvation.
The joy of knowing he would purchase a people for himself through his blood shed on the cross.
The joy of knowing he would welcome his people home to an eternal feast.
[18:19] Jesus bore suffering and shame to save us. In light of that, am I willing, are you willing, to bear shame and disgrace for him?

In the first place, to be humble enough to say, I am a sinner. Set against God's holy standards.
To acknowledge that we don't love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. To acknowledge that we don't love our neighbor as ourself. To acknowledge that we need God's mercy.
We need God's rescue. Are you ready to confess that you need Jesus to forgive you and to save you? And are we ready, if we are Christians, to live for him in the face of opposition and exclusion? To serve him, even if it brings that kind of suffering. This week, I was listening to Spotify and an ad came up from Open Doors.
[19:31] That ministry that looks to support and encourage persecuted Christians. And it was a reminder, a stark reminder, that for many of our brothers and sisters around the world, when they go to their Christmas services, yes, they will go with joy.

But they will also go with real fear. There are always more attacks on Christian churches by extremists at Christmas time. For us, we don't know that.
But are we willing to bear shame for the sake of following Jesus, our Savior? Jesus is God. Jesus is man.

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And Jesus is Emmanuel, which means God with us. We hear that title, don't we, in our Christmas carols and hymns, O come, O come, Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel.
We'll sing that this evening. What are we singing? We're singing that He is fully God, fully human, and He has come to be with us.
[20:44] Sometimes, you know, when we're singing, it's there and then it's gone. But it's worth slowing down to think about the reality of Jesus, our Emmanuel, and to understand that in His coming, it changes everything.

Three words that can help us. Jesus, our Emmanuel, is our representative. So, as we said, the problem that we all face is the problem of our sin and its consequences.
Our moral guilt before God that we can never by ourselves repay. Then we understand that the good news of the gospel, that Jesus, the Son of God, God with us, comes as God's solution to that problem.
And we need Jesus to be both fully God and fully man. We need Him to live a perfect life on our behalf, to satisfy the demands of God's law, a law that we break, a perfect life we can never live.
We need Him to be fully God and fully man, because in that condition, He is the only one who is worthy to pay the penalty for our sins. His suffering has infinite value.
[22:14] To understand that in Jesus, God Himself takes the debt of sin, absorbs it into Himself, pays it in full, and thus is able to forgive us.

When Emmanuel is your representative and my representative, His perfect record of righteousness is credited to your account.
His resurrection life belongs to you. He has redeemed you from the curse and has given you God's blessing. God with us stood for us.
Have we experienced? Are we living the joy of that wonderful exchange, knowing Emmanuel is our representative?
Secondly, Jesus is God with us means He has come to bring us into relationship with God. You think about the birth stories of Jesus, and we understand from the beginning, God has come to be with His people.
[23:29] Of course, there's Mary and Joseph. There's Joseph's extended family, who would also be there gathered for the census, but there's also the shepherds. There's also the wise men.

God with His people. And remember, Matthew's never going to make this up. As a Jew, of course, he knows God is personal, but he also knows God is infinite and transcendent and far above us.
But he can write because of what he has seen and lived with, that He is also God with us, God in a manger. Matthew knew by experience that Jesus was God with him.
He was one of the disciples. Jesus was with him, walking with him, talking with him, teaching him, serving him, loving him, dying for him.
In other words, when Matthew talks about God with us, he is talking about being invited into, introduced into a personal, loving relationship with God.
[24:43] And that's what Emmanuel still means for you and I today. Emmanuel means that Jesus, God with us, has come into the mess and the brokenness of our world and of our lives in order to fix and to restore.

He has come to restore the relationship between God and man. And God has come near to bring us near, to bring us into that loving, personal relationship with God that you and I were made for.
So that He would talk with us as we hear God's Word, as we read it. That we would talk with Him as we enjoy our prayer life.
That we would know His presence. His presence as we worship. His presence through His people.
God has come near so that we might draw near to our God.
And so with the coming of Emmanuel comes a whole new reality. I get to teach the ETS access course with Bob and it's been exam time recently.
[25:59] And he set a wonderful question for the students. Here was the question. Jesus Christ changed the course of human history. Discuss.

A great thing to discuss. It was a great lunchtime, dinner table topic. Jesus Christ changed the course of human history. But isn't that what we discover in these verses?
That because Jesus has come as God with us, truly nothing can ever be the same. To really hear the reality of what's going on here calls for a response of faith.

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Like the response of Joseph. Now he will gladly bear shame for the greater honor of knowing Jesus.
That Jesus who will forgive his sins, who would bring him into personal relationship with God. Will we follow in Joseph's footsteps? Will we turn from sin and trust in Him?
[27:01] And walk by faith in this Jesus. And it calls us also, as Christians, for a life of faith on a mission.

So Matthew, early on in his gospel, talks about Jesus who is God with us. And that's how he chooses to end his gospel also. At the end of Matthew's gospel, there's the Great Commission. Jesus is about to return to heaven. And Jesus sends his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations. And Jesus knows that this will not always be easy.
Jesus knows that this will involve suffering for them. He knows it won't be easy for us either. It can be really difficult. But he sends them and he gives to us a promise.
Emmanuel gives a promise. I am with you always. Always. To the very end of the age. And it's in that power, and it's knowing his presence, and it's receiving his grace.
[28:08] It's then that we're invited to go. And to go and bear witness to the good news that we have in Jesus. So Christmas speaks hope for the world.

Into the suffering and the sadness and the loneliness and the fear that seems to be all around us. Perhaps as we live with our own guilt or despair, or even as we're facing up to death, the angel announces good news because in Jesus' birth, we have God with us.
The Son of God has come to forgive sin, to end separation, so that we can know personally the God of love. And as we find ourselves in this Advent season, both waiting to celebrate together the first coming of Jesus, but also looking forward to his return, let me close with these wonderful words from Revelation 21 verse 3.
Here is the future for the people of God. I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Look, God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them.
They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. Perfect life forever.
[29:46] Resurrected physical bodies, a renewed and perfected physical world, a feast of joy and love, and there at the center is Jesus, God with us, and us with him for all eternity.

Let's pray and give thanks. Father God, we thank you for this priceless gift of Jesus our Emmanuel. We thank you for your being willing to come, to live among us, to live for us, to suffer and die for us, rising again for us.
We thank you for Jesus, our perfect representative. May we place our trust in him alone. We thank you for Jesus through whom we're called into fellowship with you, our God.
Lord, thank you that we get to pray in Jesus' name and know that we can boldly enter your presence, that we're accepted and loved because you love and accept Jesus, and we are in him.
[31:11] Lord, we thank you for this new reality that we live in. Help us to live with faith, to live on a mission, and to live with hope.

that one day we will both be with Jesus and we will see him face to face, and we will have a joy that will last forever and ever.
Give us strength, give us hope, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Now let's close singing another Christmas hymn, O Little Town of Bethlehem, and we can stand as we sing this one together.
Amen. O Little Town of Bethlehem, How still we see thee lie.
Above the deep and dreamless sleep, the silent star

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