

The birth of Jesus

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[0:00] Well, how are your plans shaping up for Christmas? Maybe you're the sort of person that keeps lots of lists and has been preparing for a good while.

! Maybe you feel like things are pretty much in order. You're on top of things. Or maybe you're feeling a little bit less organized. I think that's where we're at at the moment. And things are sort of getting into place, but it still feels like quite a long way to go. Ten days feel like a long time still. If only we had a bit longer, a few extra days. According to one article I read this week, which was written in August, they reckon the 16th of October was the best day to begin planning for Christmas.

It's ten weeks before Christmas, that date, so you better get started on the Christmas prep. Another article I read suggested you start in January. You go out into the sales, you buy stuff, ready for the following year, and you've got to keep a note to remind yourself what you've bought.

So you get later in the year to remind yourself, oh yes, I bought that in the sale in January. So there's some ideas of how far along we need to be planning.

[1:28] About 700 years ago. Has anybody been planning for Christmas for 700 years? I thought not. But we are told in our passage this morning that what we read is the fulfillment of plans revealed 700 years plus before to the prophet Isaiah.

Do you see that there? Verse 22 and 23. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet.

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel which means God with us.

What we read here has been 700 years in the making and more. and they are extraordinary things that are being fulfilled that we read of here.

They speak of impossibility. They speak of a miracle. They speak of a virgin giving birth.

[2:50] No, no Isaiah, surely we think this can't happen. What do you mean? A virgin's going to give birth. And what do you mean he's going to be God with us?

Reading Sinclair Ferguson this week, a pastor, theologian, he points out that if we struggle to get our minds around the virgin birth, what about the resurrection?

Or the parting of the Red Sea? Although the earth was created out of nothing. Let's remember this is God at work and he can do the impossible.

And that's what we have here. An account of the most miraculous birth in history. We might think of our own children if we have them as sort of a miracle.

As you know, Becky and I are looking forward to a baby's arriving. It does feel like an extraordinary thing, an amazing thing to have a child that we're preparing to bring into this world.

[4:11] And every child is unique and every child is special, but there's something about this one that we read of here that feels completely extraordinary.

What other child has the world been waiting for for 700 years and more, actually, since the creation of the world? So how did it all come about?

How did these Christmas plans come to be fulfilled? Well, this morning we're going to focus on how it looked for Joseph in this story.

What was his involvement? Because his plans, as we're going to see, are thrown into tatters.

They're thrown into a complete mess, which encourages me as I think about our plans for

Christmas.

But then we see how they are slotting just perfectly into the Lord's plans. So let's have a look. First of all, Joseph's change of plans.

[5:20] Can you imagine looking forward to a wedding day, making preparations, eagerly anticipating the day, anticipating spending the rest of your life with the one that you love, but then bam, the news comes in, your wife to be is pregnant.

You know it's not your child's. How would you feel? Maybe you'd feel enraged. Who's the father? Let me at him. Maybe you'd feel confusion. I thought, she loved me. Maybe you'd feel compassion. Is she okay? Has someone hurt her? so many questions, so much confusion there would be if that was a situation you were facing.

Though these days in our culture, it might be quite normal for a couple to have a baby together when they're not married. In these days, it would be an absolute disgrace.

[6:31] We read these words here, verse 18 19. This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about. His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph.

But before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. 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.

Joseph was thinking about divorcing Mary.

They weren't married, but that's because engagement looked different then. We call it a betrothal. Some measure of promises had been made. The couple were as good as married.

They were just waiting for the wedding day when it would all begin. But Joseph here has a real problem, doesn't he? And so he must be thinking, whatever Mary's done here, I don't want to disgrace her.

[7:41] I'll just quietly arrange for this betrothal to end and hopefully we can all move forward with some measure of peace. He has good intentions here, given the situation.

He doesn't want to embarrass her. But his plans of marriage very much have gone to ruin.

But then we see secondly, God's plans are revealed to him. God's plans revealed to him. Have a look there in verse 20.

After he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, Joseph, son of David, do you not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife?

Because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. Do not be afraid, Joseph. It's okay, you can take Mary to be your wife.

[8:45] what would Joseph be afraid of? Well, if Joseph goes ahead and marries Mary and then, say, three months later, a baby arrives, everyone will know the baby was conceived outside of marriage and people ask questions.

Perhaps he's fearing that. What will others think of him? Yet the angel reveals to Joseph that this is a plan from God.

And so the angel says, don't be afraid. Don't be afraid of what the public might think of your wife giving birth.

Don't be afraid that you might be grieving God here. Actually, this is God's plans. Actually, you're doing his will. God is using you and Mary to bring about his plans prophesied 700 years and more before you.

Unlike Joseph, being told by the angel here, do you not be afraid to do God's will. This is good for us to hear this morning.

[10:00] Because we don't need to be afraid either of doing God's will. We might be afraid of what others think as we follow God, as we take seriously the call of the Lord Jesus to take up our cross and follow him.

We might think about what others may think of us. Why would you waste your life doing that? And yet, if this is us following God and his words, we don't need to be afraid.

Examples of what that might look like. we know in God's word, he tells us to honor our parents. And sometimes there might be a situation in life as it has for people I've known and we know as a

church, it's right for us to actually stop work or change how our work is so we can honor our parents by looking after them as they grow older and weaker and frailer.

And to that, I think God would say, don't be afraid of following my words. Or nowadays, at the moment, a big issue in our culture, a big issue that's being debated in Parliament is the whole assisted dying stuff.

life. But if we choose to stand up and say, hey, God says in His Word that life is precious and life is given by Him and that He is the giver and taker of life, then know that we're being obedient to His words.

[11:47] We don't need to be afraid to speak up and email our MPs and sign petitions and pray about this. don't be afraid of doing God's will.

We get more information about the birth, about the son that Mary is going to give birth to here. It's absolutely extraordinary what's going on.

Joseph is told what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. God's plans and ways and means are not ours.

God is doing something remarkable here. the father is sending the angel to tell Joseph that Mary is going to give birth to the son whom the Holy Spirit is conceiving in her.

It's remarkable that we're seeing the Trinity at work here. a rather mind-blowing mystery, isn't it?

These words came to mind from another song, which, not singing this morning, but sometimes we sing, oh, what a mystery, meekness and majesty, bow down and worship for this is your God.

[13:28] These are God's plans here. This is truly, remarkably God. at work. Don't be afraid, Joseph, of following his will as he's working these extraordinary things out for you and for your people.

And Joseph, in submitting to these plans, gets a front row seat of what God is doing in terms of the salvation of the world. Have a look there in verse 21.

she will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.

Joseph, this baby that's going to be born to marry is Jesus the saviour of sins.

He's coming to save you, Joseph. He's coming to be your saviour. I'm sure Joseph knew his sins.

He certainly knew fears.

[14:43] But in being obedient to God's commands here, he would see his saviour being born.

In being obedient to God's commands, he would have the privilege of raising under his roof the saviour of people's sins.

The saviour his people were looking forward to as we saw that Abraham and David last week who were in Joseph's and Jesus' family line, they were looking forward to this one.

Joseph, you're seeing these promises from the past come about. And as we ourselves live, seek to live in obedience to God's word, we are being obedient to the one who has come to save us, to rescue us from the kingdom of darkness and who has brought us to the kingdom of the son that he loves.

Though following God's word at times might feel hard for us, though like Joseph it may feel like a costly thing we're doing in being obedient to God and his words, we don't need to be afraid.

[16:17] Joseph here, think of the cost it was for him, he was laying his reputation on the line. He was going to parent a child who wasn't biologically his.

It's a brave and costly thing to do for Joseph. Joseph. But Joseph, you don't need to be afraid. This is God's plans being worked out.

These are good plans. And not only is Jesus Savior, he's also Emmanuel, God with us.

As verse 23 tells us, the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us. Jesus with us.

God with skin on, fully human, fully God. God stepped down into our dark world of sin. And Jesus himself would know what it's like to experience fears, like Joseph was experiencing.

[17:34] Jesus would know what it's like to be afraid of what others may do. If you're not sure that he did, think of when he was heading to the cross, where he prayed in the garden, if it's your will, take this cup away from me.

As he was thinking about the agony of the death on the cross that he'd experienced. He sweated drops of blood. He knew what it was like to be fearful.

As we sing in one of the carols, tears and smiles like us, he knew. For he is God with us. fear. If this morning you're somewhat fearful, fearful of what the future may bring, maybe fearful of what Christmas is going to bring for you, know that God with us means he knows what it's like to be fearful.

And so you can pray to one you can trust, one that you can know understands what it's like to be human in every way and yet without sin you can bring to him your fears.

[18:57] That wonderful verse, I guess many of us know it well, in Hebrews 4, 15 where we're told, for we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weakness, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are yet did not sin.

He understands, he understands the fears, he understands the temptations that come with these fears. Finally, in all this, as Joseph's plans looked like they were changing, but then as God's wonderful plans were revealed to him, we see thirdly and finally, a humble obedience to God's plans.

A humble obedience to God's plans. Verse 24, have a look. 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.

As Joseph woke up from that dream where he heard the angel speaking to him, he could have thought, it sounded all okay in the dream, but now it's reality, I'm not sure I'm going to obey.

Or he may have wondered whether it was a silly little dream, but actually instead we see remarkable obedience. Verse 24 again, when Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him.

[20:45] He did it. He didn't show any sign of hesitation there. He did it without holding back and took Mary to be his wife.

a remarkable obedience from the man that God was choosing to raise his son.

Jesus was, as we've already said, fully God, fully man, no sin found in him. And yet, in his humanity, he grew.

We sing at Christmas and through all his perfect childhood, day by day, like us, he grew. In his humanity, we're told in Luke's gospel, he grew in wisdom and stature.

And I'm sure as he grew up with Joseph and Mary as his parents, I'm sure he saw their sin. but at least from what we know here, we see that with Joseph, Jesus could learn remarkable human obedience to the Lord.

[22:09] I'm sure Jesus would have learned from Joseph. And this remarkable obedience that Jesus would have heard about and seen in Joseph is something we too can learn from.

Something that can challenge us and has certainly been challenging me. It reminds me a little bit of the story of Brother Andrew.

Maybe you'll know him as the founder of Open Doors, the ministry to persecuted Christians around the world. Maybe you support them or have supported them in the past.

He believed, Brother Andrew believed, that God's word was to be made known and given to all peoples on earth. As Jesus said, go and tell all nations.

And so he would take risks by bringing the Bible into closed countries, particularly countries but behind the iron curtain.

[23:19] Whilst being obedient to what he believed God was calling him to, he also told people that it comes with a warning.

Being obedient to God comes with a warning. He said this, before you say yes to God, he warned, consider the possibility that you might be arrested and put in a Soviet jail for spreading God's word. Your family may never hear from you. You may end up going to a country like Albania, the world's first officially atheistic state, where missionaries run the risk of being detected and killed.

Being obedient to God, he says, is risky. And yet, is something we're commanded to.

We're commanded to be obedient to his word, to follow him, to don't be, do not be afraid to follow his will. And Brother Andrew goes on to say, the Bible is full of ordinary people who went to impossible places and did wondrous things simply because they decided to follow Jesus.

[24:42] Jesus. And surely Joseph and Mary are two more of those ordinary people, ordinary fearful, sinful human beings who chose willingly to obey the voice of God who was calling them to serve him.

Calling them to be a part of his plan of salvation for the world. And so as ordinary as we may feel this morning, be encouraged by Joseph's obedience here, be encouraged by the words of the angel, don't be afraid.

Maybe we feel fearful about following the Lord. God's will. Don't be afraid to do God's will. And where we fail in obedience as we will, as Joseph will have done at times, we can take hope. hope. We can take hope in this one who was miraculously given birth to by the Virgin Mary. The one who is God with us. The one who lived a perfect life of obedience.

[26:13] The one who was fully obedient to his father even by going to death. even death on a cross. And we can and we must praise God that this is so.

That we can stand in Christ's obedience for us. That we can know God with us in suffering.

Being obedient to God will suffer. Jesus says, take up your cross and follow me. But know we're following one who is God with us, who's been through suffering.

God with us come to save us from our sin so that in him God the father can see his, Jesus' perfect life of obedience in us.

and so there in that final verse, in verse 25, as Mary gave birth to a son and Joseph, in obedience to God, gave him the name Jesus, surely with Joseph understanding from the angel who Jesus was, he will have rejoiced Christ, in this saviour born to him.

[27:46] We follow him, the one who is our God, the servant king. king. He calls us now to follow him.

Let's pray that he would help us to do so. Father God, we need