

Wreath Making Talk

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[0 : 00] Good news. We all love a bit of good news, don't we? There hasn't been a lot of it around over the last 20 months, what with the global pandemic, Afghanistan, climate change concerns, economic problems, the list goes on.

Well, tonight we want to share with you some very good news indeed. In fact, it's the best news ever. At that very first Christmas, 2,000 years ago, in a small backwater of the Roman world, a baby was born. A baby who was to change history.

We're going to spend a few minutes thinking about that first Christmas. We're dipping into a historical document of what happened. Before we do, you might like to know who wrote it.

It's Matthew, one of Jesus's 12 close followers. It's an eyewitness account of the events of Jesus's life written down just a few years after his death.

Well, we're going to read now, and it's from Matthew, chapter 1, starting at verse 18. It's under the little heading, Joseph accepts Jesus as his son. So Matthew 1, verses 18 to 23.

[1 : 27] 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.

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.

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. All this took place to fulfil 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. Picture the scene.

[2 : 39] Joseph is engaged to be married. He then finds out that his fiancée is pregnant, and he's not the father. Just as he's considering what to do, an amazing event happens.

An angel appears to him in a dream. Now Joseph was not simple. He knew about the birds and the bees. But the angel tells him that the baby is from God, the Holy Spirit, and is therefore not another man's child.

Now look down with me at verse 22. It's Matthew's comment on the conception.

All this took place to fulfil 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.

Now I know the writing is small, but can you see the footnote at the very bottom of the page? It tells us that this quote is from a Jewish prophet, Isaiah, who wrote of his birth 800 years before it happened.

[3 : 53] This baby and his unique conception was foretold, so that those there at the time, and those like us who get to read about it later, can be sure that God has planned this event.

The baby was God with us. This is a momentous thing. You see, the reason we can know God is because he chose to come into the world himself, in the person of Jesus, and he arrived as a baby that very first Christmas.

Now you can't know a baby before they're born. Sure, you know they're there, but you can only really get to know them when they arrive, in person.

We have three grown-up sons. I didn't know what they'd be like before they arrived. Would they be blonde or dark-haired, tall like my husband, or vertically challenged like me?

But once they were born, I could start to get to know them. In a similar way, we can't really know what God is like until he steps down into history at a particular time and place.

[5 : 09] Jesus was here in person to reveal God's character to us. So that's the first momentous thing I want us to see tonight, that Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us.

The second momentous thing is that this baby will save his people from their sins. Look down with me again at verse 21.

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.

Now the name Jesus is the Greek form of the Jewish name Joshua. It means God saves. This baby will be called God saves, and he has a job to do to save his people from their sins.

Let me explain. Sin is not a word we use in everyday speech. It's a technical term. It means anything we say, think or do which shows we value something or someone more than the God who made us.

[6 : 24] We all show sin in different ways, putting other things first in our lives. running my life my way. If someone asked you tonight, what would you most like for Christmas, what would it be?

Your family to be happy? Good health for yourself or your parents? That place at uni for your child? More recognition and satisfaction at work?

Or at home? All good things. But all things that we can be tempted to put before God. That's sin. Now sin separates us from God.

As we've already seen, God loves us so much, he came to earth in the person of Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us. Jesus came to take our sin for us, so that we wouldn't have to spend eternity without him and the good things he gives us.

It's Jesus' death on the cross that enables us to have a personal relationship with him. Now human nature hasn't changed in the last 2,000 years.

[7 : 39] The people back then had a problem that needed fixing, whether they knew it or not, whether they accepted it or not, and we're exactly the same. They needed then and we need now to be saved from the consequences of our sin.

As things stand because of sin, because we put other things before our relationship with God, we face eternal separation from him and all his good gifts.

Let me explain. God is good, holy, and just. my sin separates me from him. But the great good news is that Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, is able to take this sin from my shoulders.

He can take the load on himself because he is God. He can pay the punishment my sins deserve. It's a swap. He can pay with his death so I don't have to pay with my own.

and I can have a relationship with God. Jesus grew up to be executed on a Roman cross 33 years later outside Jerusalem.

[8 : 57] We have Jewish and Roman evidence for this. It's the event we still celebrate at Easter. Jesus has come to save people.

Let's conclude the account by looking at what Joseph does with this new information. follow along with me as I read the last three sentences in Matthew 1 and it's at the bottom of the page.

It's verse 24 and 25. 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. What does Joseph do with this new information?

He obeys. He believes God and takes Mary as his wife. He calls the baby Jesus just as he was told. Will you be like Joseph this Christmas?

[10 : 03] Christmas? Will you consider what really happened that first Christmas day as you wrap presents, cook, host or travel to relatives or friends?

Christmas. This account in Matthew tells us two main things. First, that God sent Jesus his son as a baby that first Christmas 2,000 years ago.

Emmanuel, God with us. And second, that this baby Jesus would save his people from their sin. Will you look at these spiritual claims?

That first Christmas was a momentous moment in history. The angel testified to it. Joseph listened and obeyed. What will you do with this information?

It might turn out to be a life-changing experience. It was for me. I was a young adult in 1987 working in the city when I was first told this momentous news.

[11 : 06] I heard a Bible talk about the God who made me and I finally realised the huge significance of that historical event, the real meaning of Christmas. I discovered for myself that it was possible to know God because he had come to live with his people 2,000 years ago.

I could know what he was like through the pages of this historical document. I knew I needed a saviour but until that moment I hadn't known where to look for him.

Emmanuel God with us. Jesus was that saviour. Deciding to believe the evidence was the best decision of my life so I do commend to you to have a read of this short eyewitness account of Jesus' life or come to Grace Church Dulwich for one of our Christmas carol services or ask questions of the friend who brought you along tonight.

So do investigate whether this Jesus is God himself come to live with his people Emmanuel God with us the saviour who would die for anyone who trusts in him.

As I close we hope you have a wonderful time this Christmas. Enjoy friends, family, the finer things of life. More than that we hope you take time out to consider the real meaning of Christmas this great good news, Emmanuel, God with us, Jesus, God save.