

God Speaks to Us

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Date: 12 April 2026

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[0 : 00] It's lovely to be with you and I hold you in my prayers as you go forward in whatever purposes God has for you and for the church.

What a joy to be here this morning in Orpington when I left my home there. It was raining and I came into the sunshine. So the sun shines clearly on the righteous in Hearn Hill and the unrighteous.

You take your pick actually. We're starting a new series here this morning. Having just had Easter, we're going to have a bit of Christmas this morning as we start a new series in Matthew's Gospel. And this is the first sermon about Matthew's Gospel in Matthew chapter 1. Matthew chapter 1 from verse 18.

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.

[1 : 19] Because Joseph, her husband, was a righteous man and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he 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 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.

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.

[2 : 37] But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son and he gave him the name Jesus.

I want to begin with a bit of a personal testimony. Growing up, my father was in the Royal Marines. We moved around the country, actually, from base to base where he did his service. But he seemed to spend more time drinking in the officer's mess than he did with his family. And when he was with his family, he was aggressive and violent. We moved, I was born in Portsmouth.

We moved to Poole, to Chatham. We spent some years in Brixton. Not that they have a Marine base there, but because he was serving in Germany and then during the Aden crisis in Aden.

[3 : 51] And then down to Exmouth as well. By the time he left the Royal Marines, I was a teenager.

And my parents divorced acrimoniously. From the day he walked out of our house at the time, I never saw him again.

He just left. Do you know, growing up all those years, until my teenage years, I had never been inside a church.

I didn't know the name of Jesus. But a friend from school, he was also called Martin, actually. A friend from school had the courage to invite me along to a church. It was St. James' Parish Church in Poole in Dorset.

[5 : 02] My first time ever in a church. And I remember it. Though it was a few years ago now.

I remember it as if it were yesterday. For the first time in my life, I heard about a Father God who loved me, unlike my Father.

Who gave himself for me in Jesus Christ, his Son. And according to the guy that was speaking at the front, a Father who would never leave me or let me down.

God did something remarkable in my life. God did something like that. I opened my life. I opened my heart to him and he came in.

Abba, Father, let me be yours and yours alone. A reading this morning tells the story of another father.

[6 : 31] Actually, if you like, a stepfather in Joseph. Matthew's Gospel especially begins with a focus on him.

And of course, Jesus' family tree going back all the way to Abraham. Luke's Gospel focuses more on the story of Mary.

But Matthew's Gospel, especially for Jewish readers, wants to focus on Joseph, the man in the story. And particularly also focuses on the fact that this story is fulfilling the prophecy and promises of God's word through the years in the Old Testament.

And I just want to share with you three things that I think stand out for us in this story of Joseph. On this day when we've had this gorgeous dedication, let's learn from the Holy Family how we are to live.

[7 : 58] And the first thing is this. Be open to the Holy Spirit. Have you got that? Be open to the Holy Spirit.

You know, all seems to be happy until Joseph learns that his fiancée is pregnant and that he knew he had nothing to do with it.

We're told that he's a righteous man. Righteous but obviously compassionate as well. He decides to divorce Mary, to break off the engagement quietly, instead of making a fuss about it, so that she wouldn't be condemned in the eyes of the community and perhaps even stoned.

And then in a dream, in a dream, an angel tells him that this baby that Mary is bearing is of a virgin birth, that a son will be born to them whose name is to be Jesus because he will be, by the Holy Spirit, the Saviour of the world.

And Joseph, as a result of this dream, listens to God. He changes his mind.

[9 : 44] And he takes Mary as his wife and the Saviour of the world in Jesus is born. I wonder how good you are at listening.

You know, it's said that God gave us two ears but only one mouth that we might do twice as much listening as we do speaking.

My wife Margaret said to me, well, why don't you remember it then? But not just listening to other people's voices or even just listening to our own voice.

How good we are at that, listening to our own opinion. But what about our listening to God? Our listening to the Holy Spirit as he speaks to us as individuals and as a church.

And I think this is especially, I didn't know about the preaching with a view next Sunday until this morning, but this is especially important for us as a church that we might develop our listening, our listening to God.

[11 : 14] I'm certain, and I know in my own experience that God speaks to us still in supernatural ways as he did with Joseph through a dream and an angel speaking to him.

He speaks also by his Holy Spirit. He speaks also through a word of prophecy given to us individually or as a community of God's people.

He speaks also through that still, small voice, that word from our consciences. Perhaps he speaks to you and me too through a wise Christian friend.

And primarily, of course, he speaks to us through his word, the Bible. He speaks through what he once spoke, his revealed word.

But that we might be open to the voice of God as Joseph was. That we might be open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

[12 : 40] Perhaps to change our minds as Joseph did. But to hear him speaking, not to be, you know, not to be so full of our own noise that we fail to listen to the voice of God.

In our everyday lives, as parents, as people, as children of our Heavenly Father.

Let's tune in to the voice of the Lord. that we might be more open, just as Joseph was, to the voice of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Yes, church? Do you believe that? Hi? Hi? Are you there? Let's believe that God speaks today.

And let's be ready to be open to him more as his Holy Spirit speaks in our hearts and minds, just as he did for Joseph.

[14 : 00] Open to the Holy Spirit's voice. Open, secondly, open to the name of Jesus.

The angel tells him in his dream, give him the name Jesus, meaning Saviour, because he will save his people from their sins.

And then fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah chapter 7, verse 14, they will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us.

In Jesus, in Jesus, God is not distant or remote. He enters our confusion, our humanity, our vulnerability, He understands our ordinary lives.

He comes to save us, not in a political rescue, but in an eternal salvation through the forgiveness of sins.

[15 : 22] And he comes to be with us in our struggles and in our pain, in our temptations, and in our vulnerability as human beings.

The miracle of Christmas is not just that a child is born. It's that God steps into human life through his incarnation as the word is made flesh for us.

He is Emmanuel, God with us still. But it began with Joseph and Mary saying yes to the will of God. a personal illustration. Treat me gently as I give in.

Over the last year and a half, my darling wife, Margaret, has been suffering with chronic anxiety.

[16 : 37] It seems to have come from nowhere. There's been certainly an element of spiritual darkness and warfare about it.

and it's been an awful trial. Some of you will understand.

Some of you won't. It's been so hard to bear. But we're so grateful to the work of the mental health services of the NHS, for the love and support of family and Christian friends.

And just in these last two weeks, we've seen a real turning point as light seems to have been breaking in through the darkness and through the anxiety.

And I can tell you I can tell you that that sense of Emmanuel, God with us, in the darkness and in the light, has been the greatest healing point for her of all.

[18 : 06] I don't know what life's been like for you in this last year. I hope for many of us there's been joy and health and blessing.

And God, Emmanuel, is with you in that too. But we're vulnerable creatures, aren't we? We're fragile human beings.

And I want to encourage you to be open to the name and the authority of Jesus in your life.

He's not only the saviour of the world, you know. He's your saviour. He's not only Emmanuel, God, with us.

He's with you. Like Joseph and Mary, that we might be open to the name of Jesus and of Emmanuel in our lives that we might speak his name.

[19 : 19] Speak his name, Jesus, over your hearts and lives. Speak it over your home. Speak it over your family for there is power in the name of Jesus.

Jesus. I went, we were busy yesterday and I went to a guy who runs a takeaway Ghanaian sort of caravan near where we live.

It's great. They had curried goats. Oh, that's fantastic and jollof rice. It was just lovely. And he said to me, the Ghanaian guy, Michael, he said to me, I'm pastor because he knew I was a minister.

He said, pastor, I watched the film The Passion of Christ just this last week and it's amazing. Jesus died for us.

I so often find that you can have that kind of conversation with Ghanaian and Nigerian people much more than you can have it with boring white English people.

[20 : 33] Why is that? And I said, speak the name of Jesus to Michael, this guy. Speak the name of Jesus over your restaurant, over your business.

Speak the name of Jesus over your family. God, for there's power in the name of Jesus. I've seen it, I've seen it in reality as my wife has come through that awful, begun to come through that awful time of anxiety.

Open to the Holy Spirit, to listening to his voice. opening, open to the authority of the name of Jesus, that he might be Emmanuel for you and me.

And open, thirdly, finally, open to the need for trusting him more. more. I've often, I've often thought that Joseph is not given the credit he deserves, but then, I'm a man.

So often, the limelight is on Mary, you know, apart from Jesus himself, the limelight is given to Mary, and you can understand why.

[22 : 06] But Joseph is also a model for us of a man who is faithful to what he hears God saying.

He trusts, even when he doesn't fully understand what's going on. He obeys what he hears God saying to him, even when it almost goes against the grain and what he had intended to do. His obedience doesn't get the limelight, but it changes history. And for us today, like Joseph, faith is sometimes not having all the answers.

Faith is sometimes trusting, even through the doubts and questions that we have. But trusting God anyway.

You know, you cannot trust God too much. church. So I have a real sense of my spirit that God is calling some of us here today to trust him more.

[23 : 39] It's true for all of us. Whatever situation we're in, however long we've been Christians or not. But for some of us, it's particularly true at particular times, isn't it, that we need to trust him.

Trust him with your family. Trust him with your plans. Trust him with your finances. Trust him with your work.

Trust him with your life. Trust him in your home. Trust him in your heart, because he's always, he's always trustworthy.

As that guy said back then when I first became a Christian, he'll never let you down and he'll never let you go.

Like Joseph, trust him even when you find it difficult to understand. So be open to the Holy Spirit.

[24 : 57] Let's learn to listen more in our lives and in our church to the voice of God speaking to us.

and be open to the name of Jesus speaking his authority over our lives and be open to the need for trust for he is your heavenly father who will never let you go.

Abba father. Father, thank you. Thank you for your word and thank you that you speak to us today through your Holy Spirit as well.

help us to be open Lord as individuals and as a community of your people.

Help us to be open to the Holy Spirit speaking to us and through us. Help us to be open to the authority of the name of Jesus in and over our lives.

[26 : 28] help us just to trust you more. Amen.