

“That we might receive adoption as sons”

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 December 2024

Preacher: Ife Ojetayo

[0:00] F*** out, people of God, on this fifth day of Christmas, the first Sunday after the commemoration of the birth of our Lord. Our epistle and gospel lessons set forth to us how we are beneficiaries of our Lord's birth.

For unto us a child is born. Unto us a son is given.

While our present reality and eternal future are connected to His coming to dwell among us. Do you know that? Your own personal reality, present reality and your eternal future are intimately connected to this event in history.

And our readings today invite us to a spiritual apprehension, to a spiritual understanding of this divine truth. So we look at the historical narrative in Matthew's gospel.

The event of God's redemptive work. And then we look in Paul's epistle to the Galatians. Which shows us how this event applies to those who belong to Jesus by faith.

[1:15] St. Matthew's account of the nativity is from Joseph's point of view. That which God has preordained is now coming to pass.

The long-awaited son of righteousness will dawn on a people who dwell in darkness. But for Joseph, this event, this great good news that is about to happen, that is happening in fact, For Joseph, it oddly felt like a happy event.

Just put yourself for a moment in his position. He is bethrowed to a woman. In the practice of HNAE's, bethrowal is an official legal commitment to marriage.

To break it, in our day, you can just break an engagement, if you're engaged with somebody. But in Joseph's and Mary's time, to be bethrowed, it's legally binding. You'll have to undertake a divorce to break that bethrowal.

So this is, in fact, already a legal commitment to Mary and Joseph. They're committed to one another. And what happens in the time of bethrowal and wedding is that Joseph is meant to go back to his father's house And build a home that he and his future, his wife really, she's already his wife legally, His wife we're going to live in.

[2:37] They're not yet living together. The wedding hasn't happened yet. So this is where Joseph is in. He's anticipating this happy moment in his own life. He's taking a wife.

He's building, as is the custom, a home. That he and his wife will make their home after their wedding ceremony. And as he's working on this building, you can imagine, as he's preparing for the wedding, you can imagine that he's hopeful.

He's hopeful for the life and the family he will build with Mary. Then he gets the devastating news. That his wife-to-be is pregnant. But the wedding hasn't taken place yet. The marriage hasn't been consummated yet.

So you can imagine what that news will bring to Joseph. And here is God's great good news happening. But in fact, it has turned Joseph's life upside down.

[3:51] And contrary to some, like a recent pastor from the synagogue of Satan, I will call it, who recently denied the virgin birth. This is what he said. He said, Mary was absolutely, positively not a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus.

He continues. That whole concept of virginity is culturally defined anyway. But, he says, and hear him now as he says it.

But we know, we know, we in the modern world know, biologically, of course, that it is an impossibility in the 21st century for a virgin to give birth.

Apparently, they didn't know that back then, that a virgin couldn't give birth. It took modern science in the 21st century for humanity to understand how babies are made. But, such people deny the virgin birth.

And to deny the virgin birth is to deny Jesus as Savior and Lord. The two are intimately connected. [5:04] And to deny the virgin birth is to deny Jesus as Savior and Lord, and thereby to deny your very salvation from sin and death through faith in him. But, while many, many people from the synagogue of Satan go about denying Jesus, while masquerading as a Christian church, we need to look to and trust what the Holy Scripture says concerning the fulfillment of God's promise to us in the birth of Jesus Christ.

So, I invite you to look closer to Matthew's Gospel here this morning. By the way, it's on page 959 of your pew Bible, so I invite you to open along.

I think that's where it is, starting in verse 18. Now, in Matthew's day, even in Matthew's day, before penicillin and all the modern luxuries that we enjoy in our advanced, you know, age, even in Matthew's day, no one was in doubt as to how babies came about, including Joseph himself. He knows full well. And this is why the news that is betrothed, is pregnant, was disorienting and threatens to destroy his life and his future.

So, St. Matthew tells us that Joseph, upon hearing this news, being a just man, although he had been shamed, but being a just man, thinking that Mary had been unfaithful, he sought not to shame her and sought to divorce her quietly.

[6:49] That's what St. Matthew tells us in his Gospel account. But what Joseph doesn't know is that God is at work. And God means that Joseph will be one of the instruments to accomplish his purposes.

Joseph doesn't know that yet. So it is through, throughout redemptive history, that's how it often takes place. When the Lord God calls a man, to use Bonhoeffer's word, when the Lord God calls a man, he bids him come and die.

And here is Joseph being called as an instrument of God. And God is calling him to himself. And it is a call to come and die. It's a death to his plans and his expectations.

A death to live in for himself. A death, an invitation to come and die, so that he may live unto God. So it was with Joseph. An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream.

And in one fell swoop, all his carefully laid plans and expectations for how his life should go, was upended. He's now part of a story that is bigger than he could ever write for himself.

[7:58] A glorious story of everlasting significance that will ruin his life in all the glorious ways imaginable. The angel appeared to him, 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.

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. Joseph is assured by God that Mary's pregnancy is a divine miracle, that the child in the womb is the promised Messiah, who has come to save his people from their sins.

Joseph is referred to as son of David. Joseph is a descendant of King David. Undoubtedly, he knows that himself, that he is from the lineage of David. But that is not a particularly distinguishing factor in Joseph's life, that he is a son of David.

It's not a distinction factor, because there were probably, in Joseph's time, thousands, if not tens of thousands, of descendants, who can trace their lineage to David.

So he's not one out of two, or sometimes he's probably one out of tens of thousands. And nothing in his life will tell you that he's from a royal line.

[9:23] He lives in Galilee, in Nazareth, a backwater village. He was a peasant, and no name, nobody. But God has picked him out to be an instrument to accomplish this purpose.

He is from a particular line, a descendant of King David, but the line itself is a failed line at this point in Joseph's history.

David's line, at this point in Israel's history, is a failed lineage. Yet, though there is nothing particularly unique or special, God chose this man, this just man, we're talking, who is looking forward to the promises of God.

And he's told, he's told to name this child, who is betrothed, is about to give birth to, he's told to name this child Jesus, which again means Yahweh saves.

Now, even the name itself is a common name in Joseph's day, which indicates, in fact, the fact that the name is common indicates the people's longing, in expectations for the Messiah.

[10:42] And up to that time, the name Jesus, the most famous bearer of that name, was Joshua. It is the same meaning, said in a different way. Joshua, you remember, if you remember your Bible, is Moses' successor, who led Israel into the promised land and defeated all the enemies.

The same, it's the same name, Jesus Jehoshua, which means Yahweh, saves, Yahweh delivers. So this Jesus, this greater Jehoshua, is come, and he will save his people from a much greater enemy, which is sin and death.

Well, the angel shows up to Joseph, and tells Joseph, Joseph, in this great work of redemption, you are now a big player in God's action, in redemptive history.

And he quotes to Joseph, the prophet Isaiah, Isaiah chapter 7, verse 14, which we read in our first lesson this morning. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel.

This promise, which was first made more than 750 years ago, before Joseph's time, was made to a king, another of Joseph's ancestors, a particular king, King Ahaz of Judah.

[12:01] Ahaz was one of those wicked kings who did evil in the sight of the Lord. Now, in Ahaz this time, two rival kings, the kings of Israel and Syria, kings of Israel and Syria, sorry, wanted to strong-arm him into joining the alliance against the powerful Assyrian nation.

But he was an astute political player and he knew that he couldn't align with these two powers because even with them, they couldn't stand up to the strength of the Assyrian nation.

But God sent to Ahaz, the king, a prophet, the prophet Isaiah. And God told, through the prophet Isaiah, God told the king, Ahaz, to be encouraged, to not fear.

God encouraged him not to trust in horses and chariots, but to trust in Yahweh, the Lord who saves. But unfortunately, Ahaz did not trust in God's promise. Instead, he submitted Judah under the rule of Assyria. He took their gods as Judah's gods to worship.

[13:09] He erected altars to Assyrian idols in Jerusalem and throughout Judah. And he took his son, Ezekiah, a just king, most of his reign to rid Israel, or at least Judah at that point, of all these false altars.

But here is God in Isaiah 7 telling this king to not be afraid, but to trust in the Lord. But for Ahaz, his fear of Assyria was much bigger than his trust in God.

And he led his nation into idolatry. The idolatry that led ultimately to the nation being under God's judgment and being driven to exile. But God told Ahaz, you don't want to believe in the promises of God.

Well, here's a sign for you. God promised that a virgin will give birth to a son and you will call his name Emmanuel. The Hebrew word for virgin there in Isaiah 7 can also refer to a young maiden in the immediate context of the prophecy.

Isaiah is referring to a younger married woman when he says a virgin will give birth. Presumably a virgin, this young woman unmarried, will be because she's unmarried.

[14:26] But we're not told who this woman is. But she's known to Ahaz apparently in the prophecy. And she's meant to be a sign to him that before this child that is born to this maiden is able to eat solid food and able to know the difference between good and evil, the Lord himself will remove the threat of Israel and Syria, the two rival nations.

And so the call is for Ahaz to trust in the Lord. Don't place your hope in pagan kings and pagan gods. Trust in the Lord who promises and keeps his word. And in case you're wondering, what Isaiah prophesied to Ahaz did happen as God promised it would.

Assyria crushed Syria and Israel. I know it's confusing. Assyria and Syria. Yes. But Assyria, the greater nation, crushed Syria and Israel, the ten northern kingdoms.

And they were destroyed. As God said, it would happen. But Ahaz, instead of trusting the Lord, had placed its trust in Assyrian might.

He had refused to place his trust in Yahweh and soon Judah itself will fall to a foreign palace. This is the context of the prophecy that Matthew now quotes in Matthew chapter 1 verse 23.

[15:54] In Isaiah, we see God's word of promise come to pass as he said it would. In Matthew's day, Israel is in an even greater need for God to come and save his people.

And Matthew says now to Joseph, rather, the angel Gabriel says to Joseph, this Messiah that you've been longing for to save you has come. In this case, the early fulfillment of Isaiah was merely a foreshadowing of the greater work of deliverance that God is bringing about through the birth of Jesus Christ.

The virgin is with child, God told Joseph. And now it's not just a young woman. The language that Matthew uses in his gospel to denote virgin means a woman who has not known a man, meaning a virgin.

And the technical meaning of that word, by technical, I mean the way all of humanity have understood that to mean. And this is how God has come to dwell with man. Emmanuel has come through this miraculous miracle. Emmanuel has come. God has come to dwell with us. Yahweh himself, the Lord who gave the promise, he himself has come to save his people from their bondage.

[17:19] And St. Paul picks up the story of the incarnation of Jesus in his epistle in Galatians. Paul says, in the fullness of time, the God who arrives just when he means to have come.

In other words, he comes right on time and as he purposed. He's come to fulfill the promise made in the Garden of Eden regarding the seed of the woman who will crush the head of the serpent. He's come as the offspring of Abraham through whom the nations of the world will be blessed. He has come as the root of Jesse, the son of David.

We will establish an everlasting kingdom and restore a lineage direct of honor into honor. Paul tells us, when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons.

Jesus. This is the reality for us today as we gather here. This is the reality for us as we know and we rejoice in the fact that God has come to dwell with us.

[18:34] That through Jesus Christ, through Jesus, the natural son of God, you and I are now made sons of God by adoption. This is the good news.

God comes to you in his word. as he came to Aas, through the prophet Isaiah, as he came to Joseph in a dream. God comes to you and I through his word and he says to you, do not be afraid. Your God has come to save you. And as St. John writes in his gospel, to all who receive him, he has given power to be called the sons of God even to them that believe in his name.

This is the reality that is signified in the sacrament of baptism. That you are born into Christ and you have Christ as a brother by adoption and God as your father.

You've become sons. And that's a technical term that Paul uses when he says we are now sons of God by adoption. He means all of us, both male and female. We are sons of God.

[19:41] The reason why he uses the particular gender I do not mention to refer to all of us as sons is because in Paul's day only sons inherit.

So he's making a clear distinction. Those who have come to God through Jesus Christ are all sons, co-heirs, joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.

This is the foundation of our hope as a Christian that in and through Christ we have all been made sons of God and we've been given the spirit of God to guide us and to lead us.

So I want you to consider during this Christmas season that all the benefits that are Christ's that belong to Jesus because he is the son of God, he is the heir of all things, all of those benefits that accrue to Jesus are also yours by grace through adoption.

the son of God has made you to be sons of God with him. Consider this Christmas season that what is said of Jesus Christ can also be said of you.

[20:54] If you come by faith to Jesus, you are made a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. You've been given assurance that you are a citizen of a heavenly home. you know your future.

You are seated with him, the Bible tells us, in his heavenly throne. You reign with him. You are joint heirs through the spirit.

That's who you are. You have died with him and you've been raised with him into a new life. so that sin and death have no sway over you any longer.

Death, the existential dread of every man and woman. Death has been defeated by the death of Jesus Christ.

Death has been rendered powerless. Its sting has been taken away. The shadow which it casts has been driven away by the light that has come into the world and has come into your heart.

[22:02] You bear that light. Death has no sway over you. And I think if we just take time to reflect on this truth, this good news of who we are and to whom we belong to, if we take time to reflect on all our benefits in Christ, we will not be so prone to leave the savior of our souls for the empty trinkets that the world tries to offer us.

And we will not give in to fear, the fear of man and the fear of the world, knowing that we've been rescued from the destruction that awaits the world. So that's what I invite you to this morning. Reflect on who you are. You are sons by adoption. Do you have Christ? Do you have Christ? If not, behold the goodness of salvation that has come into the world in the person of Jesus Christ.

Fall on your knees before his glorious majesty. He came in a lowly form and he went further to the lowest of lows. He went to a sinful death on a cross so as to raise you up from your lowest depths. [23 : 36] No matter how low you think you are, no matter how undeserving of mercy you think you are, Jesus Christ has gone lower so that he may raise you up there is yet hope.

why give into fear and the lies that comes from the enemy? Why not stand firm in faith?

and as our Lord said in his word, we will have trials and tribulations in this world. The reality is that neither you nor I know what 2025 holds in terms of what it holds for us personally and for the world at large.

Remember, even amid the tribulations that may come your way, remember that you have Christ as your brother and God as your father and because you are sons, beloved, God has sent the spirit of his son into our hearts.

Amen. Amen. On the other end, main on the other end, we are with you and the other end, we are
with you and the other end, and the other end, and the other end, and the other end, and the other
end, and the other end, and the other end, and the other end, and the other end, and the other end,
and the other end, and the other end, and the other end, and the other end, and the other end, and
the other end, and the other end, and the other end, and the other end, and the other end, and the
other end, lip, and the other end, and the other end, and the other end,