

God With Us

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[0:00] Well, this past week I went to North Andros for a couple of days. Notice I went to the north.! I did not go to the south. Long story, long story.

But I went to North Andros for a couple of days just to pray and to really seek the Lord and to plan for this coming year. And went with such an awareness of my need for God's help.

But while there, I had the opportunity to talk with the gentleman who oversees the property where I stayed. And in talking with him, I began to engage him about his spiritual life.

And he began to talk about interesting things. He actually said, he said, if someone needs to remind me about God, I don't deserve to live one more day on this earth.

And he talked and talked. But as he talked, I got no assurance that he knew Jesus Christ as Lord and personal Savior.

[1:08] And so I decided I would ask him a very critical question to see if he believed the Bible to be God's word. And I asked him, I said, do you believe what the Bible says that Jesus was born of a virgin?

And he hesitated. And then he said, no, I don't believe that. And to be absolutely sure that I understood what he was saying and he understood what I was asking, I asked him if he was saying that Jesus was born from an earthly father, just as we are, and every other human being.

And he said, yes. But the Bible in Luke chapter 2 describes the birth of Jesus as good news. The Bible describes Jesus as born a Savior.

But if my friend in North Andros is correct, if Jesus was born into this world like the rest of us, and he has an earthly father like the rest of us, that would be no good news.

There would be no good news because Jesus would be like the rest of us. And Jesus himself would need to have a Savior to rescue him and to redeem him and to reconcile him to God.

[2:45] And so this issue about the birth of Jesus becomes very critical. And it is not so much the crucifixion when we think about it because if Jesus is not who the scriptures say that he is in his birth, his death really doesn't matter.

He just died. His life is just a tragedy and he died a very tragic death. And so the virgin birth of Jesus then becomes very, very critical in terms of the death of Jesus making a difference.

And really, this is what the gospel writers are showing us. This is what the gospel writers are setting out to do. They're trying to show us that there's a unique person who was born and there was a unique person who died.

And in order for him to do what the scripture says that he did in his death, then he needs to be who the scriptures say that he is in his birth.

Now, I wonder what about you this morning? I wonder where you stand on this question about Jesus and really what the scriptures say about his birth.

[4:10] Do you believe that Jesus was born of a virgin? And when I say that, I don't mean so much you accept it.

But do you have deep conviction in your soul that Jesus was indeed born of a virgin? And I pray that you do.

And if you do, I pray that God's word this morning will further strengthen your belief. But if you're here this morning and you are not sure about that or you outrightly reject that, I pray the Lord will use the preaching of his word to open your eyes and to bring you to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Lord, please, if you've not yet done so, would you turn in your Bibles to the Gospel of Matthew. And this morning our attention will be directed to verses 18 and 25 of Matthew chapter 1.

Matthew chapter 1, verses 18 through 25. I'm reading from the English Standard Version. If you have another translation, yours will read slightly differently.

[5:25] Matthew chapter 1, beginning in verse 18. Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way.

When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, 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. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us. When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.

[6:53] He took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son, and he called his name Jesus. Let's pray together.

Well, thank you this morning for your word. We thank you for the Holy Spirit who alone leads and guides into truth.

I pray this morning that all over this room, those who by your grace and mercy have come to believe the truth of these words would be strengthened in their belief.

And, oh Lord, we pray that those who doubt these words, those who outrightly reject these words, would be recipients of your amazing grace, that you would open their eyes and you would grant them sight and you would grant them faith to believe the truth of the gospel.

Lord, I recognize my insufficiency to handle your word, and especially in this moment, to handle this great truth, this foundational truth about the person and the work of Jesus Christ.

[8:24] So would you help me, enable me, guard my speech, and would you give me the unction that comes from your spirit to proclaim with clarity and with conviction the truth of your word.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. As we consider this account of the birth of Jesus Christ, here's what I am trusting the Lord to help us all to see.

Here's what I am trusting the Lord to help us all to see. Through the birth of Christ, God came to sinners so that sinners can come to God.

or to put it another way, the birth of Christ brought God to us to bring us to God. That's what I hope that we will see from this text and from this sermon this morning.

To help you follow along, I have organized my thoughts around two points, two very simple points, and the first one is this. Christ brought God to sinners.

[9:44] Christ brought God to sinners. Now to see how Jesus did this, we need to have a broad understanding of the Bible as a whole.

Not in a whole lot of detail, but just a broad understanding of the sweep of Scripture or the storyline of the Bible. And we can really divide Scripture into four parts.

We can divide the dealings of God recorded in Scripture in four parts, and they are number one, creation. that God created this world, and He created man, and He established him as the Lord over all of His creation.

The second part is the fall. There's a creation, there's the fall. Through the rebellion of Adam and Eve, they rebelled against God, and mankind fell into sin and was separated from God.

And the third part is redemption. Redemption started with that first proclamation that came out of the mouth of God when He said, I will put enmity between the seed of the woman, the seed of the serpent, and her seed will crush His head, and He will bruise its heel.

[11:17] And so redemption began in that moment, and then redemption continued. So we're thinking, if you want to think in terms of particular Scriptures, that's somewhere in Genesis chapter 3 where the fall took place and where God said these words.

And then we can think of redemption as everything else from that particular point through to the climax of the death and burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

All that God did in between there, the giving of the law, sending of the prophets, all of that can be in this one category called redemption.

And then the fourth and final part is new creation. And this is that period from the resurrection of Jesus Christ up until His return when He will return and usher in a new heaven and a new earth in which there dwells righteousness.

Now there's some overlapping in between there, but broadly that's what you're talking about. You're talking about creation, fall, redemption, and new creation.

[12:26] That is what Scripture is revealing to us. That's what this Bible is all about. That is what we go to look, to see when we go into it.

So here we come this morning to the very first book in the New Testament, the Gospel of Matthew. And Matthew begins with a very interesting statement in verse 1.

It says, The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. That's quite an interesting statement. And it's interesting on its face because what we see is that it is saying that Jesus had two fathers.

Notice what it says. The son of David, the son of Abraham. But we know that Jesus could not have had two biological fathers, and that becomes very clear, especially what the writer, Matthew, is trying to communicate to us because he goes on and he lists the other sons or some of the other sons of both David and Abraham.

So we know that Matthew is referring to Jesus not as the biological son of David and Abraham, but as the covenantal son of David and Abraham.

[13:50] In God's redemption plan that unfolded after the fall, God made a covenant with both Abraham and with David. David. And God said to each of them that he was going to give them a particular son, a special son.

He said to Abraham, through your son, I will bless all the nations of the earth. And later on, the apostle Paul and Jesus himself say that when those words were uttered to Abraham, it was the preaching of the gospel, that the gospel was preached to Abraham, that his seed, through his seed, the whole world would be blessed.

And then the Lord promised David a similar promise. He said to him, I'm going to give you a son who's going to build a house for my name. And I will establish his throne and his kingdom will last forever.

That has to be a special son who's able to fulfill those predictions. And the New Testament writers, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, tell us that Jesus is the promised son of David and the promised son of Abraham.

Jesus is that promised son. And so the whole point that Matthew is seeking to make in verses 1 through 17 of chapter 1 is he wants his readers to see Jesus is this promised covenantal son of both Abraham and of David.

[15:30] And then starting in verse 18, Matthew goes on to give us the circumstances of Christ's birth. In verses 18 through 21, he gives the details of Christ's birth. And then in verse 22, he says, all of this happened to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

And the prophet he's referring to here is the prophet Isaiah. And the prophet Isaiah had made this prophecy some 700 years before Jesus was actually born.

Now I want you to follow with me closely to see what Matthew is doing. Matthew wrote his gospel 20 to 30 years after the death of Jesus.

Matthew's not writing, this is not unfolding as Matthew's writing. Matthew's writing in retrospect 20 to 30 years after Jesus had ascended into heaven.

And he is making a case for who Jesus is. He is making a case that he is God incarnate, that he is the second person of the Godhead who came down to earth from heaven.

[16:40] And he's saying that the incarnate son of God is indeed the son of Abraham. It is indeed the son of David. He is the promised Messiah.

And he now wants to help us to see why this is the case and how he is unique based on his birth. So here's what Matthew does.

Starting in verse 18, we see Mary discovers that she is pregnant. Well, not discovers she is pregnant, but Joseph discovers she is pregnant. Or she tells Joseph that she is pregnant.

And no doubt, Mary would have explained it to Joseph to say, hey Joseph, this is what happened. The Holy Spirit came to me and told me this would happen. And indeed, it did happen and so I'm pregnant.

But in verse 19, we see that Joseph clearly did not believe Mary's story. He thought that Mary had been unfaithful to him and he decided that he was going to divorce her quietly.

[17:43] And the reason he had to divorce her is that in Jewish culture, though they were not married, marriage took place in two stages. There was the betrothal stage. There was a year to two years.

It was a real commitment and a pledge to be married. And then the marriage would take place after that. But if you broke off the betrothal, there had to be some kind of a formal divorce because it was a formal commitment to be married.

And during that betrothal period, sexual relations were prohibited. And so Joseph, Scripture says, he was a righteous man. And as a righteous man, he dealt with Mary in an appropriate manner.

And so he knew it was not his child. He knew absolutely there was no possibility that this could be his child. And he clearly didn't believe her explanation, so he was going to put her away.

What a decent man who would do that, not seeking to shame her, but convince it's not his child.

He's going to put her away. Part of his righteousness is seen in the fact that we're told that he continued to ponder these things.

[19:00] Even though he had made his mind up, he had resolved that he was going to do this. We read in verse 20 that, but as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord came to him and told him, hey, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife.

What is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And we read in verse 21 that the angel tells him that Mary's going to have a son and he, Joseph, is to name this child Jesus because he's going to save his people from their sins.

And then Matthew explains all this. He says in verse 21, all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the mouth of the prophet that a virgin was going to conceive and be our son and they were going to call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us.

Now that's quite interesting what Matthew records. And a natural question arises, who are those who will call his name Emmanuel?

Emmanuel. Joseph was told by the angel you are to call him Jesus, but here we see that Matthew is saying, quoting from Isaiah, they will call his name Emmanuel.

[20:27] And so the question is, who are those who will call this child born of the Virgin Mary Emmanuel? I want to try to answer that this morning.

the miracle and the meaning of the virgin birth are communicated in this precious name, Emmanuel. We sing about it often, but I don't think we have the import of how precious this name is.

God is with us. It plainly means God is with us. It means that through the virgin birth, God came to us by the power of the Holy Spirit in the person of his only Son.

It means that holy God in love became a perfect man to bear our blame. It means that the redemption that had been promised for thousands of years was now being fulfilled and God and sinner could now be reconciled, that God had now come.

God had drawn near to sinners. And what we see is we see the move of divine grace. We see how divine grace works.

[21:51] We see how divine grace works in redemption. It comes from God, not from us. we didn't go to God, God came to us.

God made the move to us. And what we see happening in this act is the same thing we see in Genesis. When Adam and Eve sinned, what did they do? They ran and they hid from God.

And the next thing we hear is we hear God calling and saying, Adam, where are you? Adam, what have you done? It wasn't Adam running to God and saying, God, we're so sorry, we disobeyed, we sinned against you.

God was the one who broke the silence and who called them. And what we see in the coming of the Son of God, God in the flesh, we see God taking that move, we see God coming to sinners.

And He came to us in the person of His Son and we are able to say, Emmanuel, God is with us. but I come back to the question, who are they that call Him Emmanuel?

[23:03] And here I'm not talking about those who verbally utter that word, those who can say that word, but instead I'm talking about those who from heartfelt conviction and heartfelt confession can say Emmanuel when they consider the Lord Jesus Christ.

they can consider and think that in His coming that God indeed came to us, that God indeed drew near to sinners and they're able to say Emmanuel because they understand that act of redemption. They understand that this one born of Mary was God's Son. God is so who are they?

Who are they who are able to with conviction say Emmanuel? This is who they are. They are those whose eyes God has opened, whose eyes God has enabled to see the grace and the mercy that is displayed in the birth and the person of Jesus Christ that God came to sinners and is with sinners who believe.

Those are the ones who can say Emmanuel as they think of the Christmas story, as they think of God coming down in human flesh. They are the ones who can convictingly say in their hearts Emmanuel because God has indeed opened their eyes to see it.

[24:45] Otherwise, they won't believe it. Otherwise, they would never see it. Otherwise, it would just be a story. It would just be a word. But they will not be able to call him Emmanuel away from God opening their eyes.

And see, this is why we can all we can really do is we can share the details of the virgin birth as Matthew has done. That's all we can do.

We cannot convince people to believe that. Because what is necessary to believe that is the same thing that happened to Joseph. Joseph would never have believed if there was not divine intervention and his eyes were opened when that angel came to him and said, listen, Joseph, what Mary is saying is true.

she indeed has been conceived by the Holy Spirit. And he was able to then take her unashamed as his wife.

And being so committed to that process, even though it was his right to engage in sexual relations once they married, he took her as his wife. But Scripture says he never knew her sexually until after Jesus was born.

[26:10] The same is true for us this morning. Those of us who this morning believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that he was born of the Virgin Mary, and we can say Emmanuel, we can say God with us, we do so because of the mercy and the grace of God who opened our eyes, who enabled us just like Joseph to believe what otherwise we would never believe.

And so when my friend in North Androa said to me he didn't believe this, I wasn't startled by it. I wasn't troubled by it. I was burdened. I was crying out to the Lord, oh Lord, would you open his eyes because it is only meant he opens our eyes to see that we're able to see.

And those of us who see this morning, we owe it to amazing grace. We don't know what to our righteousness, we don't owe it to our smartness, we owe it to amazing grace that God has opened our eyes to see and believe what the world ridicules, what the world mocks, that God came down in human flesh, in the person of his son, and we can say God with us.

We can say Emmanuel. Emmanuel. So in the virgin birth, Christ brought God to sinners, Emmanuel.

But not only did Christ bring God to sinners through the virgin birth, this passage also teaches us that Christ brings sinners to God.

[27:53] when Christ was born, God in Christ drew near to sinners and was with us. But that was not enough.

If all Jesus did was he was born and he lived forever, all that would ever have done was just bring God to us, bring God near to us, but we would still be separated from God.

We would still need to be reconciled to God. Sinners need to be brought to God and reconciled to him. And that reconciliation is foreshadowed and proclaimed in the name that Joseph was told to give him, in the name Jesus.

And the explanation is given why this name was given to him. The Lord, through the lips of the angel, said, you are to name him Joseph, and here's why, for he will save his people from their sins.

The purpose of saving his people from their sins was the heart and the mission of Christ and it's the heart and the message of the gospels in the New Testament.

[29:08] And the message is clear. The message is clear. Christ saved his people from their sins and he did so by dying on a cruel Roman cross as their substitute.

He took the place of sinners. He bore their sins. He endured God's wrath for those sins. And he was able to save and reconcile them to God because of his substitutionary work on the cross.

God's And so in the virgin birth Christ brought God to sinners Emmanuel and through his substitutionary death Christ brings sinners to God Jesus.

And so on this Christmas morning this Lord's Day morning when I ask you are you able to with heartfelt conviction with absolute persuasion call this one born of Mary Emmanuel because you truly believe that he is God's son conceived of the Holy Spirit born of the Virgin Mary and who in his birth and in his person brought God near to sinners and if you are you should celebrate today if you are able to do that Christmas should take on its highest meaning for you today you have every right to enjoy this day as we not celebrate the Lord's birthday we're not celebrating the day on which Jesus was born no we're celebrating the fact that he was born the fact that he came into the world if you're able to say that with heartfelt conviction this morning if God by his spirit has opened your eyes to be able to believe that and you should be amazed by the grace of God and you should be affected as you celebrate today but if you are here and you're not able to call the one born of Mary Emmanuel because you don't truly believe as much as my heart rejoices that I by the grace of God am able to do that and others by the grace of God are able to do that my heart breaks for you my heart breaks for you and I encourage you to cry out to the Lord and ask him for mercy and ask him to open your eyes to see what others see to see what apostles like Matthew saw so much so they were willing to die for it to see what others over the ages have seen so that it transformed their lives and transformed the way that they have lived and has affected the decisions that they have made they weren't doing it because they believed in a hoax or some lie but they believed it because their eyes were open to the truth and it changed everything but again more than being able to believe and see him as

[32:41] Emmanuel because that's not enough we need to know him as the Lord Jesus we need to know him as the one who saves us from our sins by taking our place and being our substitute on the cross he died the death that you and I deserved to die he paid the price for our sins he had no sin and he paid the price for our sins our past sins and our present sins and our future sins and when he said it is finished it is indeed finished and we don't have to answer to God for a single sin when we put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ do we have to confess them yes we do we will not stand before the Lord on that day and have to answer for any sin because we put our trust in Christ and he bore those sins and he bore them fully and perfectly and

God will not require payment twice at the hands of Christ and then at our hands as well and through Jesus Christ this morning those of us who know him as Jesus as the one who has saved us from our sins we know peace with God and we know that there will be no condemnation to us not now nor in the future perhaps you hear as an unbeliever and you may be thinking that your sins are too many or your sins are too great your sins are too serious but I assure you they are not I think of those comforting words in the second verse of Fanny Cosby's hymn to God be the glory where she wrote a perfect redemption the purchase of blood to every believer the promise of

God and then she writes this the vilest offender who truly believes that very moment from Jesus a pardon receives not go and work and then do good works and then it'll be dealt with no that moment from Jesus a pardon receives and so friend I say to you this morning that the blood of Jesus Christ is more powerful and the grace of God is more amazing than any and all of our sins and so I urge you today this Lord's Day this Christmas Day to bring the burden of your sins to Christ to trust him and to ask God to open your eyes that you can see him as Emmanuel that you can see him that God drew near in the Lord Jesus Christ that God did not hold his anger against rebellious humanity forever he didn't do as some of us do when we wait for others to come to us who have wronged us no he came to us in the person of his son as

Emmanuel I urge you to come to him this morning if you don't know Jesus Christ and if you do Christmas will take on its truest and its highest meaning let's pray