

Matthew 1:18-25 AM

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[0 : 00] Blessed Lord, who has caused all holy scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of your holy word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

You may be seated. So this is the second week of a sermon series on the Incarnation, and we're quite simply trying to say that the Christmas story brings us to the heart of what is so unique about Christianity.

God became fully human while remaining fully God. Now, when you compare this claim to many other faiths and religions, you may see that God in other faiths and religions interacts with humans in a lot of ways.

He might even appear to humans, and he might even come to dwell with humans in temples, but God never actually becomes a human in any other faith or religion.

And when we claim that God became fully human while remaining fully God, we're saying that no aspect of his humanity was compromised and no aspect of his divinity was diminished.

[1 : 25] We're claiming that simultaneously he upholds the universe by the power of his word, and he depends on Mary and Joseph for food and warmth and protection. This is what the Christians call the Incarnation.

God becoming human, God in the flesh. It's at the heart of our faith. And the question that we're asking in these kind of six or seven weeks of Advent and Christmas is, what does this mean for us? Now, last week, Chris really helpfully brought us into Philippians chapter 2, Paul's perspective. And according to Paul, the Incarnation means God is humble. Think about that.

He is humble in the way he relates to us. His majestic humility means though he was in the form of God, he does not take it as less than himself to take on the form of a human, and he empties himself even into the form of a slave, dying a death on the cross in order to take away everything that keeps us from coming to him.

And so Paul encouraged us. He said, have this mind among yourselves which is in Christ Jesus. Have this mind which is among Christ Jesus as you begin Advent. The Incarnation means God is humble toward you.

[2 : 36] In the next two weeks, we're going to be looking at Matthew chapter 1 and Luke chapter 1. So we're going to be kind of diving into the middle of the story. And what we discover here is that the Incarnation means that God is here, and God keeps his promises.

Verse 22 in Matthew chapter 1. This is on page 807 in case you need to turn back to it. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

You see, it's easy for some of us to become convinced that God, maybe he created the world and like a great watchmaker, he set it working and then he just lets it tick away without his involvement. It's easy to become convinced by experience that maybe God is absent or indifferent or silent. Maybe he's a great promise maker, but not a great promise keeper. Or for some of us, he cares about the whole world.

We can affirm that in general. But if we ask ourselves, does he really care about me? We have a lot of question marks. Matthew and Luke show us that the Incarnation means God does care.

[3 : 43] He comes to be with his people and he comes to keep his promises to them and he comes to save them so that they will be with him forever. Now, normally we're used to telling the story through Mary's perspective.

That's next week. That's Luke. I think David's going to be getting at that one, which is going to be great. But this week, as we look at Matthew, we see it through Joseph's perspective. Susie and I

recently started watching season three of BBC's Race Across the World. Has anybody seen that before? You guys got to watch this. This is good stuff. Season three is five teams of people seek to race across Canada from Vancouver to Newfoundland without smartphones, internet access, or credit cards, and they're given a limited amount of money. Anyways, the point is, the race starts in the middle of Stanley Park right in our own backyard. And one of the stunning things to watch is that one of the five teams, it took them a whole day to find their way out of Stanley Park.

It was incredible. They had never been there before. It was unknown and unexpected territory, and so you just see them bouncing around and they can't figure out where to go.

[4 : 55] And it was beautiful cinematography in a sense because it kept taking you into the middle of the forest as they're trying to figure out where they're going. And then it would pan up to these aerial views so that you would see the park situated amongst all this water and all these mountains, and you would see that just the city is just a few steps away.

And so it gave you this sense that the team that was in the middle of Stanley Park, their experience was very real, but it was very limited. They needed a bigger perspective in order to understand where they are and what they are experiencing.

And that's one of the beauties of Matthew chapter 1, is that we get Joseph's perspective on the ground, let's say, in the middle of Stanley Park, and then it's as if God lifts the lid and gives us an aerial view of what he's doing and gives his perspective on the situation.

Both true, but both overlapping. So the two points are the pregnancy from Joseph's perspective and the child from God's perspective. Starting in verse 18, we get Joseph's perspective on Mary's pregnancy.

Now the birth of Jesus 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.

[6 : 11] And her husband Joseph, being a just man and willing to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. Now pay attention to this really quickly.

It seems that Joseph learned of Mary's pregnancy before the angel announced it to him. So think about this. His head is spinning.

His world has been turned upside down. Something he never expected coming. And he's wondering, what do I do next? How do I deal with the disappointment? How do I shield Mary from the shame?

And you see that Joseph settles on what he thinks is the best course of action. The best course of action, from God's perspective, if he's seeking to honor God, is to divorce. Divorce is justifiable. It's a righteous thing to do in this situation. But from a human perspective, he should do it quietly, so as to honor Mary and not shame her in any way. And then the angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in the middle of his spinning thoughts to announce that God's ways are not his ways.

[7 : 16] Verse 20. 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.

So right away, at the beginning of the gospel, at the beginning of the New Testament, at the beginning of this new work that God is doing in the world, we are reminded that God's ways are not our ways.

We can think of what we expect to be the most just and righteous thing to do in a given situation, and what would be most honorable and least shameful to do in a given situation, and it may be that God just wants to do something different.

His ways often confound us, and the ways in which he does things often surprise us. The prophet Isaiah knew this well. Well, chapter 55, he speaks on behalf of God and says, For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, declares the Lord.

As the heavens are higher than the earth, so higher are my ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. So the angel of the Lord announces to Joseph something that no mind, human mind, could have thought up, that God is doing a new thing.

[8 : 36] He's bringing a new beginning into the history of his world through a new virgin birth. It's something totally unexpected and totally unknown to Joseph. He's never seen this before.

What in the world is he supposed to do with this? So the question that's presented to Joseph here is, Is he prepared to trust what God is speaking to him and what God has for him? Is he prepared to

trust that God is actually at work in the most unlikely of ways and in the messiest of situations? Joseph is at a crossroads. And it's not uncommon for us to find ourselves at crossroads like Joseph. Like, I'm sure some people have probably experienced, Well, I didn't expect this pregnancy.

Maybe not in this way. Or, I didn't know marriage was going to be this hard and take this twist and turns. I didn't anticipate my family would have to deal with this or that the diagnosis would be terminal.

I thought I'd be somewhere else at this age in my life. Or maybe I didn't want my pastor to retire or leave. See, many of us are going to find ourselves at a crossroads at some point, facing unknown and unpredictable future.

[9 : 50] And the question that's going to be presented to us is, Are we ready to trust that God is speaking to us in that place? That God is at work doing something new in that place?

And it can be a work that is deeply personal. Like, God speaks directly to Joseph. But it can be a work that, in its deep personality, can have wide communal effects. What God is doing as he speaks to Joseph and Joseph obeys to him is something that is actually for his whole people and for all the world.

And it's so fascinating here. Did you notice how trust looks for Joseph? It's just simple faithfulness and obedience to the word that was spoken to him.

It's not that fancy. Look at verse 24. When Joseph woke from sleep, when he had his dreams, vision, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. It's just stated matter of fact.

He took his wife, and he knew her not until she had given birth to a son, and he called his name Jesus. In other words, marry her and name him.

[11 : 00] In this instance, be a husband and be a father. It's as if the angel of the Lord is just saying to him, Be normal while I do the abnormal. It's as if Joseph, in response, just says, I'm just trusting, Lord, what you've spoken to me, even though I don't understand the fullness of what you're doing here.

And part of the beauty of the way in which Matthew tells Joseph's story here is notice how the first half of the chapter is actually this massive genealogy. It would have been great to have Clara read the genealogy.

But it's just 17 verses of going from this person was the father of this person, was the father of this person, was the father of this person, from Abraham to David to the exile, all the way to Jesus the Messiah.

And the point is, is that although this is a surprise to Joseph in his life, he never saw this coming. And although God is asking him to trust him and to walk forward in courage and obedience, and he doesn't know what that's going to mean for him, this is something that God has been preparing for for many generations.

It is new to Joseph, but it is not new to God. It seems like plan B to Joseph, but it is plan A for God. It is surprising to Joseph, but it is not a surprise to God.

[12 : 20] God knows what he is doing. He is not anxious about the situation. He has been preparing for this for hundreds of years. And so from Joseph's perspective, it's quite an astonishing thing.

He just steps out in simple trust to the word of God that has been spoken to him. And through that simple act of trust, unbeknownst to him, he becomes part of God's great plan through all the ages to bring Christ to the world.

Maybe there's something about Joseph's experience that resonates with you today. You're wondering how to respond to God in the concrete circumstances of your own life. Lord, how do I trust you in this?

How do I trust you in this? I'd like to read a few little parts of a prayer that I found helpful in recent years. It's from the first volume of Every Moment Holy, and I found it gives wonderful perspective. Joseph-like perspective in the presence of God. It goes like this. Our lives are so small, O Lord. Our vision so limited.

[13 : 34] Our courage so frail. Our hours so fleeting. Therefore, give us grace and guidance for the journey ahead. We are gathered here because, and I love this line, we are gathered here because we believe that we are called together into a work we cannot yet know the fullness of.

Isn't that Joseph? We are called together into a work that we cannot yet know the fullness of. And still, we trust the voice of the one who has called us. So we offer to you, O God, these things. Our dreams, our plans, our visions. Shape them as you will. So that's the first point. The perspective of feet on the ground in Stanley Park.

The pregnancy from Joseph's perspective. And now Matthew takes us up to the aerial view. The child from God's perspective.

Verse 20. 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.

[14:45] Think about this for a second. We, these are words that we just glide over. And theologians spend centuries thinking about them. We are told that this child is from the Holy Spirit.

The one who hovered over the world's foundation now authors the world's salvation. The one who was the builder in the first creation is now the architect of the new creation.

And the point that the angel of the Lord is making is that what is happening here is not from human initiative. It's from divine initiative and divine origin. In fact, here, God is acting alone in some way. So there are many things that God does through his people and his creation. We know this. So Martin Luther, 16th century reformer, he said that, you know, one of the ways in which the Lord answers our prayer, Lord, give us our daily bread, is he answers that prayer often through the farmer who works the ground, through the weather that brings the right mixture of sunlight and water, and through the baker who makes the bread.

So God's working in all these things, but he works through other people. But there are some things that God doesn't do with others. He does alone. And the point here is that Jesus is different from every other human being that has come before him, that has come after him, in that he has no earthly father that has initiated or participated in his coming into existence.

[16:12] And it points to the fact that he comes from a divine father who has sent him. But there's more to this little phrase from the Holy Spirit. It shows us not only the divine origin of Jesus, but it also shows us the human goal of the Spirit.

Hear me here. Notice how the first thing we read about the Holy Spirit in the New Testament is that his ministry is to bring Jesus Christ into human life. Mary physically, and then every Christian in the church spiritually.

And this is something that only the Holy Spirit can do. Only the Holy Spirit can bring Jesus into your life and make you ready to receive everything that he has for you.

There's one author, Dale Bruner, who put it like this. I love how he describes this. He says, He says, He says, He says, The Holy Spirit is there to bring Jesus into our lives.

This is why Jesus can say at the very end of the gospel, Behold, I am with you always to the very end of the age. Because he knows that he's going to send the Holy Spirit. And this is why the Apostle John can say in one of his letters, By this you will know the Spirit of God.

[17:40] Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. The Spirit is focused on bringing Jesus into our lives.

And the second thing that we learn about this child is not only that he's from the Holy Spirit, But that he is given two names. Emmanuel and Jesus. Verse 21.

For she will bear a son, and you will call his name Jesus. For he will save his people from their sins. We'll come back to that. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

But behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, Which means, Matthew tells us, God with us.

So one name is the fulfillment of a promise, Emmanuel, And the other name is the foundation of a promise, Jesus. One name tells us who he is, Emmanuel, And the other name tells us what he will do, Jesus.

[18:43] One name tells us about the person of the Redeemer, Emmanuel, And the other tells us about the work of his redemption. He will save. So Emmanuel, as we're told here, means God with us.

Jesus is God's way of being with us. He's the humanity of God. Not a vague spiritual force, but a human face and a human name That is God's face and God's name.

Everything God is, Mary's son also is. Light from light, true God from true God, Begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, This is the with us God.

And the second thing is his name is Jesus, Which means God saves. But it quickly answers the question, like, Saves whom and from what? And this is where the angel gets very precise and descriptive.

It's helpful for us. Verse 21. For he will save his people, That's who, From their sins, That's what. [19 : 52] So notice what we're seeing here. The angel comes and says, Look, Joseph, this new thing's happening. The Holy Spirit is bringing the Redeemer into your wife's life and into the world. The Redeemer is going to do this wonderful work of redemption.

And this work of redemption is going to be both communal, It's about his people, And it's going to be spiritual. It's about their sins. So notice how it's a communal work, His people.

I think this is something that we can just glide over quite easily, But Jesus isn't interested in just saving a bunch of individuals And letting them walk around doing their own thing as individual followers of Jesus.

Jesus is interested in saving people, individuals, into the church. He's interested in people walking together and gathering together And praying together and confessing together And serving together And saying, How great is our God together?

He's come to make and save a people. And then notice how it's also spiritual. He is concerned with this people's sins, With their sins first and foremost.

[21 : 02] Not necessarily with their enemies. Now this is one of the things that I think can help us, I mean can hurt us spiritually. Sometimes we can get so fixated on the sins of others, What they've done to us, That we fail to see our own sins, And what we've done.

Sometimes we can get so fixated on how unhealthy the world is, That we can forget to see how unhealthy we are. And I think that's why Jesus says in Matthew a few chapters later, Like, Why are you worried about the speck in your brother and sister's eye, When you have this massive plank and log in your own eye?

See, One of the first words in the New Testament about Jesus' salvation, Is that Jesus has not come just to save us from our enemies, Although that's a theme we'll see next week in Luke.

Jesus has come first and foremost to save us from ourselves. Jesus is God with us to save us from ourselves. And I think this is one of the hardest, Most liberating pills for our culture to swallow, For us to swallow.

You are not just the greatly sinned against, You are the great sinner. And you have a great savior. This is one of the reasons why Advent has traditionally been a season of repentance, With overtones of Lent.

[22 : 20] The angel says, You will be saved from your sins. And so the Christian church has often said, Well, What are those sins that we need saving from? And you'll notice, Actually, If you kind of flip just to the back page of your service order sheet, And page 12, Really quickly, You'll notice that, In Advent, For the next few Sundays, We're actually going to have, At the very end of our service, Instead of a postlude, This responsive Advent prose that we sing, Because it's bringing us into, Week in, Week out, This very reality of the Lord who comes to save us from our sins.

Look at verse 1. It says, Turn your fierce anger from us, O Lord, And remember not our sins forever. Then verse 2.

We have sinned and become like one who is unclean. We have all withered like a leaf, And our iniquities like the wind have swept us away. Verse 3, Halfway through, I myself am the Lord, And none but I can deliver, What my hand holds, None can snatch away.

Do you see what just happened here? The first two verses are taking us into the depths of our sin, And then behold, In verse 3, There's a Savior that says, I can save, And I will not let anybody snatch you away.

And then verse 4, Words of comfort. Comfort my people, Comfort them. My salvation shall not be delayed. I have swept away your offenses like a cloud.

[23 : 55] Fear not, For I will save you. I am the Lord your God, The Holy One of Israel, Your Redeemer. So let me summarize quickly for you.

When the Holy Spirit brings Jesus into the world, And when the Holy Spirit brings Jesus into our lives, We have a Redeemer. And He is our Redeemer.

And what He is concerned about, Is what most hurts and hinders us, From enjoying Him forever. He has not come just to make our lives more comfortable, And more exciting, And more peaceful, Or to make us just a little bit more likable.

He has come to wage war against everything in us, That keeps us from Him. To deliver us from our sins, To break the self-made chains that bind us, And to welcome us into the freedom of His tender mercy, And His tenacious love.

And there is nothing absent or indifferent or silent about this God. In the Incarnation, We discover the God who spoke the world into being, And who upholds it by the power of His word, And who spoke in many places, And in many ways by the prophets, Now speaks to us through a human being, And a human face, And a human voice, The Lord Jesus Christ.

[25 : 30] He is the fulfillment of all God's past promises, And the foundation of all our future hopes. And He cares not only about the world, But about you and me personally.

He speaks to us. He leaps right out of the heavens into our living room. And He wants the sales of our lives to be filled with His promises. So what we discover this Christmas, Is that we do not have an absent, indifferent, or silent God, But we have a God who comes all the way down in majestic humility, Announces His presence, Tells us who He is, Tells us what He is doing, And then says, Will you step forward and trust me, In this new work that I am doing in your lives?

My brothers and sisters, I speak these things to you, In the name of the Father, And of the Son, And of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.■