

Christmas I

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Date: 31 December 2023

Preacher: Fr. Wade Miller

[0 : 00] In our gospel text this morning from Matthew chapter 1, we heard how Mary was betrothed to Joseph.

Betrothal in the ancient world was not the same as being engaged in our modern context. Betrothal meant that Joseph and Mary had already sworn their exclusive allegiance to one another in the presence of witnesses.

They had bound themselves together by an oath, by a covenant, not just a mere contract. This was the first step in their marriage.

The next step would involve Mary leaving her home and moving in with Joseph, beginning their own family together. But when Joseph finds out that Mary is pregnant and that the child she carries is not his, he plans to quietly release Mary from her marriage obligation, so not to disgrace her.

In other words, Joseph was going to quietly divorce her. That's when the angel appears to him in a dream and tells him not to leave Mary, not to divorce Mary, because she has not stepped out on him.

[1 : 25] She has not committed adultery. She has within her womb a child, a child that was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

You see, Mary heard the word of God and suddenly she was pregnant with child. And the angel tells Joseph that this child will be called Jesus.

That Joseph is to name this baby Jesus. The name Jesus in the Hebrew means Yeshua or Joshua.

Yeshua means Yahweh is salvation. That is, the Lord is salvation. That's what the name means. But unlike the Joshua of the Old Testament who led the people into the promised land, Joseph learns that this Yeshua, this Joshua, this Jesus will be the one who saves people from their sins.

In other words, the one that Mary has within her womb is the God who has come into this world to save us from our sins and to lead us into everlasting life.

[2 : 41] This Jesus is the freedom. He is the life for all people as he's come to break the bondage of sin and destroy death. Jesus is our salvation and he is the promised land.

He is the destination. The second name that will be given to this newborn baby is Emmanuel, which means God with us.

This is significant because God will no longer be hidden or masked by images such as a cloud by day or fire by night. No, God has now come into this world taking upon himself our human flesh.

God has become one of us. And this name Emmanuel fulfills the words of the prophet Isaiah as we read in chapter 7, verse 14 of Isaiah.

Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel.

[3 : 57] You see, the prophet Isaiah is speaking these words during a time when Israel was falling. Israel was about to be taken captive and invaded by the Assyrians up north.

And later Judah would be overrun in the south by the Babylonians. This was a bleak, bleak time. But the hope and comfort is that the Lord was not going to abandon his people.

He was not leaving his people. Emmanuel, God with us, would come and be with his people. Joseph now hears that the promise, the long expected promise that God would come for his people has now come to its ultimate conclusion and fulfillment in the person of Jesus.

God has come in the conception and the eventual birth of Mary's son, Jesus. Because he is the one who came to seek and to save the lost.

He is God among us. The Lord and creator of all things has come for us lost and wayward sheep. Today is a very, very special day.

[5 : 22] Because Matthew and Isla have now received this God who has come in the flesh and the person of Jesus. The one who saves.

They received Emmanuel. The God who is among us. The God who is among them. They have been adopted and engrafted into Christ by grace.

To use the language of our collect, our prayer of the day. And this has happened as they have been baptized and now made children of the living God.

They have been brought into the family of God. They know Emmanuel. The God who has come for his people.

And no matter what life brings. They have a God who is near. A God who is present. A God who seeks them.

[6 : 22] A God who loves them. A God who is with them. Just as he is with all of us. Through the good times. And in the bad.

You see, we learn about Emmanuel. The God who is present. Not some distant deity. As a matter of fact, St. Matthew's gospel ends. With the following words of Jesus.

In Matthew chapter 28 verse 20. Where our Lord says. Lo, I am with you always. Emmanuel. I am with you always.

Even to the end of the age. Even after our Lord's birth. His death. His ascension. His resurrection and ascension.

Jesus is with us. And he comes to us. In the sacraments. He comes feeding us. Even in the joys of childbirth.

[7 : 21] Or in the devastation of death. Jesus is with us. Even in this wonderful celebration. Like we experienced today.

Or in the most severe hardships. Jesus is with you. Dear friends. Jesus is with you. Because as a baptized Christian.

You have been brought into his family. He has claimed you. He loves you. And he will never leave. Nor will he ever forsake you.

We have received God. And his name has been placed upon us. At our baptism. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. This is what we witnessed. This morning.

In the baptism of Isla and Matthew. Our God. Will never leave. He will never abandon us. Because Jesus came.

[8 : 23] For this very purpose. To seek. And to save. And he is the great Emmanuel. The God. Who is always.

Always with us. Amen. In the name of the Father. And of the Son. And of the Holy Ghost.
Amen. Amen. Amen.

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