

The Fathers of Jesus

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Make your way to your seats and go ahead and flip with me to Matthew 1. Matthew 1, I'm going to begin reading verse 18 and then we can dive in together.

Matthew 1, verse 18. Now, the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they had come 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.

Verse 21, she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

[1 : 27] All this took place to fulfill what the Lord has 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. He took his wife, but knew her not, until she had given birth to a son, and he called his name Jesus.

This is the word of God. Christmas is without a doubt the biggest holiday in our culture for non-Christians and Christians alike. Well, besides Easter for Christians, correct?

It is a season that begins earlier and earlier each year. For some people. And builds up to Christmas Day. You know, it is a season in which everyone wishes one another well and hopes that Christmases are merry.

We're just suddenly so joyful with everybody. It's a season in which happiness seems contagious, and peace is extended to all. You know, it's a season in which we gather with family and work hard to bury the hatchet, or at least sweep it under the rug for a few days.

[2 : 44] And it's a season that's almost magical. I remember as a kid, the lights and the trees and the wreaths and the gifts kind of drew me into this magical place each year.

And I was just captured by it, by the anticipation and the gifts and the mystery of how those gifts got there. It's a season of joy. But, you know, sadly, Christmas is a season and a day in which we're rarely satisfied.

I mean, it's fun, but it's rarely, if we're honest, all it's cracked up to be.

Maybe this is because we've lost the true meaning of Christmas. Maybe there's a war on Christmas. I think it's more likely that our hearts are so fragile and so easily distracted from true joy because of the stuff of Christmas.

Blaise Pascal said hundreds of years ago, All men seek happiness. This is without exception.

Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end.

[3 : 55] This is the motive. Seeking happiness is the motive of every action of every man. He's saying our hearts are wired for happiness. And far too often, we're distracted by the stuff of Christmas and can't find the real joy.

So this morning, I just want to pause the celebration. Now, I am not a killjoy at all. In a moment, I do want to return us to cookie eating, gift giving, and carol singing and all those things.

But I want to pause the celebration for just a moment and try to prepare our hearts for Christmas. In a word, where we're going is the only completely solid joy of Christmas and always is Jesus.

The only completely solid. Solid. That means not... That means dependable. Completely dependable joy of Christmas and always is Jesus Christ.

Point one, Jesus is truly God. Point one, Jesus is truly God. If you remember two weeks ago, we walked through that genealogy in verse 1 to 17. And this morning, we're going to study verse 18 to 25 to the end of the chapter.

[5 : 10] And these verses tell the story of Christmas in a way that's a little bit different. There's no mention of Elizabeth. No mention of John the Baptist. No mention of at least the multitude of angels in the heavens.

There's mention of an angel. There's no word about the shepherds and very little about Mary. No song of Mary. These verses present Christmas through Joseph's eyes.

And they present it that way because they have something to say about who Jesus really is.

Now, we saw very quickly Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit. I mean, Matthew takes great care, takes great pains, if you will, to tell us Joseph is not the father.

Now, all the drama of these verses focus on how Mary gets pregnant, what Joseph is then to do about it.

[6 : 08] Now, we know, if you've read your Bible, there's miraculous births throughout it, right, with Sarah and so many others. But this birth is most miraculous of all.

Look at verse 18. It says, this child was from the Holy Spirit. Again, we see that down in verse 20.

Joseph's son of David, do not fear, for that which is conceived of her is from the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is formed by the Spirit. Jesus is made in the womb before Mary becomes Joseph's wife.

He was betrothed to her. And that's a little bit different than engagement in our world. He was betrothed, and it was a contractual thing. It was a prenuptial agreement, if you will, between them two that they would indeed get married.

But it was before they got married. And look at verse 18. Matthew tells us, before they came together, she was found to be with child. Down in verse 25. He took her to be his wife, but he knew her not.

[7 : 15] Matthew wants us to see that something extraordinary is happening here. In fact, verse 18 tells us even more. Look at verse 18. He says, now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way.

Literally, the way that should be translated is the beginning of Jesus Christ took place in this way.

It's the same word for Genesis. Now, if we step back for a moment, what Matthew's trying to say is that God the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit lived together in unity, joy, and peace for all time.

But at the right time, God the Son came to us in Jesus. Now, that's incredible. That's what he's trying to say. The beginning of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ began. God the Son never began, which is so hard to put our minds around. But the story of Christmas is a story of how the Son of God came and became man.

It's a story of how the Son of God came and became Jesus Christ, the Messiah. That's all that means. The Savior of the world. Now, we would fully expect when God comes to town, extraordinary things are happening.

[8 : 29] And that's what Matthew's trying to say. Something extraordinary is happening here. The Apostle John tells us that the Word, Jesus Christ, Son of God, became flesh.

Now, that's a mind bender that we could spend all afternoon talking about. I mean, what he's saying is Jesus did not transform into a human.

So we're not talking about metamorphosis. We're not talking about an egg that turns into a caterpillar, that turns into a cocoon, that turns into a butterfly or something like that. We're not talking about a change in state of the Son of God.

Nor are we talking about that Jesus joined with man to form something new, like a third thing. You know, like if we mix a couple colors together, like red and blue, we might get purple.

Or if we throw together flour and butter and eggs, we make a pound cake. But that's not what we're talking about here. Jesus didn't change who he was, but he began to be what he was not.

[9 : 33] There's one quote which may or may not be clarifying. He said, the Son of God became in time what he eternally was not. He did not cease to be what he eternally was, but he began to be what he was not.

Now, that's why Matthew's sending so much time about this. Jesus, the Son of God, became man. He's not one part God and one part man kind of stuck together or something like that.

This is where all of the preacher's illustrations fall short. Jesus is not an egg, you know, with like an internal yoke that is his divinity or something like that, and a fragile shell that is his humanity or something like that.

He's not an atom, you know, which I don't know much about science, so I won't go into that. But he's not a Twinkie either, where I guess the warm, wonderful part in the inside is his divinity, and the outside is his humanity.

That's not it. Jesus, who is truly God, became truly man. Again, the idea is it's completely mind-boggling and indeed a complete mystery.

[10:48] I mean, I think the first thing we should do when we talk about the incarnation is pause and worship. I love the way Martin Luther says it in a hymn that he wrote, Praise the Lord.

But it's precisely here. And what Matthew's trying to say is precisely here that Christianity stands out from every other religion.

Numerous people have claimed to have gone to heaven and seen Jesus in a near-death experience. I mean, I'm sure you've heard about the bestseller, Heaven is for Real, which talks about a three-year-old who has an encounter with Jesus and the angels after an emergency appendectomy.

I think if that were my son, I'd say, buddy, that's the drugs talking. But there's books all about this. Another author tells a story about a 45-year-old teacher who dies and goes to heaven and sees the king.

The problem is it's Elvis who she sees in heaven. There's actually a whole book called Elvis in the Afterlife. If you want to read about other people who saw the king when they went in that near-death experience.

[12:14] And other religions talk about people who have gone to heaven. The Muslim prophet Muhammad claims to have been taken up to heaven. Even some people in the Bible talk about going to heaven.

And Isaiah, Ezekiel, John, and Paul, though he sort of denies it as well. But only Jesus claims to have come from heaven. This is where Christianity is completely unique.

Buddhism traces its roots to a teacher, Buddha, who learns much about purity and teaches on those things. But he never claims to be God, never claims to have gone to heaven. Mormonism finds its roots in conversations between Joseph Smith and some angel, Moroni.

But there's no claims of going to heaven or being from heaven. Same thing with the last great prophet Muhammad. He was just that, a prophet. While he claimed to have gone to heaven, he never claimed to have been from there or to have been God.

But not Jesus Christ. He said it again and again. John 6, he says, I have come from heaven, not to do my will, but the will of him who sent me.

[13:20] He says it again and again through his teaching. Before Abraham was, I am. He says it through his miracles. He says it by proclaiming the forgiveness of sins, that which only God can do.

And announcing that he's the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through him. And so the story of Jesus announcing that he's truly God announces the emptiness of every other religion and announces the great news, the good news, of great joy that God has come. That's why Jesus is a solid joy in a world of flimsy ones. Point two, Jesus came to be with us and to never leave.

Jesus came to be with us and to never leave. You know, that Jesus was, when he was born of Mary, that quite obviously means he was a human.

Right? He had ten toes and ten fingers. Belly button. However, Matthew explains all that took place by calling him Emmanuel.

[14:36] Or at least the angel. That's what the angel tells to Joseph. Look down at verse 22. It says, All this took place and all that conception by the Holy Spirit 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, in parentheses, God is with us.

Now, there's a lot going on in this little part of Matthew's gospel. But that little word, fulfill, that runs throughout Matthew's gospel reminds us that Jesus is the answer to prophecies and promises.

One of these is Isaiah 7, 14. That's what Matthew references. And that was a promise that Jesus would come and we would know who he is because he's born of a virgin.

These words were originally written to King Ahaz of Judah in the 8th century. And Ahaz was facing all sorts of threats around him from surrounding nation.

[15 : 42] And he concludes in that moment, much like we conclude at times, that he couldn't trust the Lord. Because the threats were too great and that his only hope was Assyria.

But Isaiah came to him with this prophecy. He says, you'll have a son and be born of a virgin. And that'll be your sign that you can trust the Lord. And so Ahaz had a son named Maharshalah Hashbaz.

Which that one is, as far as I know, is still available if you want to claim an Old Testament name for your next child. And so you can go do this. I won't read it again.

But that son, when that son was old enough. It's our understanding that the threats to Ahaz had ceased. And so this son came in the 8th century.

And the threats ceased to Ahaz. But if we read Isaiah in more detail, the promise of a son continues to build steam.

[16 : 44] So yes, Ahaz had this son. But the way Isaiah prophesied throughout his book that there was going to be a greater son.

And obviously we know this passage from, to us a child is born. To us a son is given. That was just chapters later, but another prophecy of Isaiah. And it continues that this son will be wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace.

So it's well understood that during those days there was an anticipation that there would be a greater son who would be God. And the sign that this greater son has come and has arrived is that he would be born of a virgin.

And so what Matthew is saying is that this greater son is Jesus Christ. He shall be called Emmanuel, which means God with us.

The idea is that Jesus Christ comes. He's God with us to bring true sympathy and help. Jesus became truly man. He took up a human body and stooped low to enter this world.

[17 : 56] Have you ever drank orange juice right after brushing your teeth? Yeah, it's nasty, right? It's a shock to the system. I think in so many ways when Jesus Christ became man, it was a shock to his system for 33 years.

He became like us in every respect, yet without sin. He breathed in the God-ignoring air that we breathe in day after day, a universe and a humanity in rebellion against God.

And he came, not just so that he might feel our pain, but so that he might offer real help and sympathy. Hebrews 4 says it like this, For we do not have a high priest who's unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we might receive mercy and find help in our time of need. What's that mean? You know, that he was tempted in every respect as we are.

Now, that quite obviously doesn't mean that he dealt with all the exact same things we dealt with. But it does mean that he was thoroughly immersed in this world and the frailty of human flesh, that he faced temptation in total and never sinned.

[19 : 28] Now, as a quick aside, there is no indication in this text or anywhere else in the New Testament that Mary was sinless and given birth to Jesus Christ, as the Catholic Church supposes.

But he was conceived of the Holy Spirit so that he would be fully God and walk out this life without sin's guilt.

So Jesus comes to bring true sympathy and help. Yet Jesus does not bring the help we often think we need. Often the help we think we need is empathy.

What we think we need more than anything else is empathy. We think we want others to listen. We want them to hear our hurts and feel our pain.

We want them to enter in to how we feel. We don't want them to ask any questions. We don't want them to challenge us. We don't want to hear from God's word.

[20 : 37] Often we just want someone to enter in. You know, we see this all over our culture. You know, the worst sin in our culture is to disagree with what someone thinks or feels or does.

And the highest virtue in our culture is to agree with whatever someone thinks or feels or does. I love the way this works. I mean, even now, I feel like if I go to the doctor, I'm asked after the doctor, how do you feel about that visit?

You know, honestly, I don't care how I feel about the doctor. I just want to know that he's attacking the problems. And he knows, not me, what those are.

The idea is that empathy is a counterfeit. What we need is compassion. What we need is someone, not merely to feel what we feel, but to help us.

Jesus is not merely God with us. That's what I'm trying to say. The good news is not merely God with us, as if all we needed was for God to become like us and to feel what we feel.

[21 : 41] If all we had of Bethlehem, Christmas would not be good news. It would be sentimentality. It would be hand-patting and well-wishing and wishful thinking.

Christmas is good news, not mainly because of Bethlehem, but because Bethlehem begins the steps toward Calvary. I love the way Sinclair Ferguson says it here. He says, God with us has come to be God for us by dying for us on the cross.

And he comes to be God for us on the cross so that he could be God with us for the rest of our lives and into eternity so that we would know his love for us.

That's the idea. That's what's going on in this passage. God with us is coming to be God for us. And he's coming to be God for us so that he can remain God with us for the entirety of our lives.

Our hope is not in a God who became like us merely, but became like us so that he might stand before the throne of God and receive the judgment we deserve so that he might be God for us forever.

[23 : 00] I love the way Stuart Townend puts it in his hymn. King of heaven, now the friends of sinners, humble servant in the Father's hands, filled with power and the Holy Spirit, filled with mercy for the broken man.

This is how he became like us. Yes, he walked my road and felt my pain, joys and sorrows that I know so well.

Yet his righteous steps give me hope again. I will follow my Emmanuel. But see where it goes in the next verse. Through the kisses of a friend's betrayal, he was lifted on a cruel cross.

He was punished for a world's transgressions. He was suffering to save the lost. He fights for breath. He fights for me. Loosing sinners from the claims of hell.

And with a shout, our souls are free. Death defeated by Emmanuel. That's the good news that Bethlehem promises.

[24 : 04] Because that's the good news of the gospel. Wonderfully, Matthew's gospel. So it begins, you know, it began with that genealogy with a bunch of names we don't really know. And then it begins with this promise that he's going to be Emmanuel.

If you fast forward to the very end, it ends with the same promise. After Jesus does all that he did with his life, death, and resurrection, and right before he's ascended to the Father, he says, Behold, again, just like he says in this passage, Behold, I'll be with you always to the end of the earth.

That's why he said it's better that I go and depart and be with the Father. Because through the Holy Spirit, I'll be with you always.

He's telling his disciples, I'm about to send you out in my name. And you're going to suffer. But you're not going to suffer alone. Same word he says to us.

The solid joy of Christmas is not merely God with us. The fact that he's come to be completely for us forever.

[25 : 14] Point three, Jesus gives salvation. Jesus gives salvation. You know, one of the main purposes of these verses and seeing Christmas through Joseph's eyes is to establish Jesus as the true son of David.

So if you remember, we talked about that two weeks ago. We talked about the genealogy proving that Joseph was the son of David. And therefore, Jesus can be the son of David.

But we know from this passage, Jesus was not the natural son of Joseph. Right? That's obvious. They've made that very clear. But he was born of the Spirit and of Mary.

But through Joseph's godly response, and that's what he's trying to answer for us, Jesus was adopted and became the son of David.

But the angel comes to Joseph to say that this son of David would be like no other. Look in verse 21. The angel says, she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

[26 : 22] But verse 24, when Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. He took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son, and he called his name

Jesus.

Now, Jesus, this is another name for the son of God in this passage, and his name just simply means the Lord is salvation or the Lord saves. That's what Jesus, Jesus means.

It means Jesus gives salvation. And the reason this is surprising to Joseph, because there were lots of expectations about what the true son of God or true son of David would come to do.

Would he come to take up a sword? Would he come to smite the Philippines? Last night with my family, we were reading about David taking out Goliath. Would he come to rescue in that way?

Would he come to bring peace to the city, to the city of David, to Jerusalem forever?

And that's not what he came to do, is what the angel says. He came to save. And not merely to save.

[27 : 28] He came to save by giving his life as a ransom. J.C. Ryle says it very well when he says, The rulers of this world have often called themselves great, conqueror, bold, magnificent, and the like.

We know rulers that do that to this day. But the Son of God was content to call himself Savior.

That's what the Son of God was thoroughly content to call himself Savior, because he will save his people from their sins.

It puts Christmas in its proper light. Christmas is about pointing forward to salvation. Doug Wilson says, In one sense, of course, Jesus is the reason for the season.

Let's settle that, you know. But in another sense, sin is the reason for the season. You know, the Christmas story doesn't begin in a stable in Bedlam.

The Christmas story began in eternity past in the heart of God the Father when he determined to give all that he has, his own son, to rescue his people from their greatest needs, sin and death.

[28 : 40] That's what the Christmas story is pointing forward. That's why the Christmas story is good news. Jesus came to bring salvation. D.A. Carson said, and I did bring a bunch of my friends today, but this is terrific.

If God had perceived our greatest need was economic, he would have sent an economist. If he had perceived our greatest need was entertainment, he would have sent a comedian or an artist. If God had perceived that our greatest need was political stability, which we need, he would have sent us a politician.

If he had perceived that our greatest need was health, he would have sent us a doctor. But he perceived that our greatest need involved our sin, our alienation from him, our profound rebellion, our death, and he sent us a savior.

That's the good news of the gospel. You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save, not might save, not make salvation possible. He will save his people from their sins.

What a name. What a name. Joseph? Call him Jesus.

[29 : 53] Reminds me of O4000 tongue. Jesus, the name that charms our fears, that bids our sorrows cease. Tis music in the sinner's ears, tis life and help and peace.

He breaks the power of canceled sins. He sets the prisoner free. I can't remember the next line. I can remember that. Ah, whatever.

What? His blood can make the fallas clean. His blood availed. For me. That's the good news of the gospel. God is all about joy. God is all about joy. Christmas is all about joy because God sent a son to rescue us from the certain damnation we deserve.

If you're not a Christian, I offer you the gospel of Jesus Christ. I stand on the authority of God's word. And say today is the day of salvation. If you'll but come to him. If you'll come, if you'll but admit, or if you'll but admit that sin is indeed the reason for this season for you.

And you need a savior. If you believe that God raised him from the dead and place your faith in him, the Bible says you'll be saved once and for all.

[31 : 14] Christmas is about salvation. Christmas is the end of pride. It's meant to be.

The incarnation says you couldn't do it. You were sunk. Now, you may not feel sunk anymore.

You may feel like you got a good head on your shoulders. But that's not what the incarnation says. It says you were sunk and you still are.

And you're no better off than anybody else. I love Tim Keller says Christmas is the end of thinking you're better than someone else. Because Christmas is telling you you could never get to heaven on your own.

