

Matthew 1 - God is with us!

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[0 : 00] We're going to start a series in Matthew's Gospel, and this will take us through till Christmas and beyond. It'll take us quite a while.

But it's important, because we're in a new venue for us, and we have our old community that came with us from Estill School. We have a new community, people who've come to us and are starting to come to us from the locality.

And we are a Christian church. Our sign outside tells you that our main purpose to be here is to share the love of Christ.

And so we want you to know Jesus, and we want you to experience what it is to follow the way of Jesus. Because there's an old word that is used that has rather gone out of fashion, but it's really important.

And that is the word disciple. Every follower of Jesus is a disciple. And the word disciple simply means learner. We're all learners. We're all learning what it is to follow after Jesus.

[1 : 04] Jesus is still alive. He's with us. God with us. He is with us through his spirit. And he left us his word and his example to follow.

And it is possible for us and indeed desirable and crucial for us that we should follow the way of Jesus. And that means that we hear him.

We listen to him. We follow his example. So we become like him. And then we do what he does. And you're going to hear that kind of mantra almost repeated again and again throughout this series.

So we're starting at the beginning in Matthew chapter 1. And I'm going to read a few verses. Josh will skip on a couple of slides. Today's title is God is with us.

And the key verse is there. You can see on the screen. The virgin shall be with child and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us.

[2 : 03] And I'll come back to that statement in just a moment. So just keep that in mind. Matthew chapter 1 begins with lots of names. It's called the genealogy. I'll refer to the genealogy again.

But just reading the first verse. This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Now those two people are really important if you understand Jewish history.

David is the archetypal king. He was not the first king. He was the second king of Israel. But under David, the nation of Israel prospered and became the superpower of the then world.

So David is the ideal king. But David stands in the messianic line. So he is the king through whom the Christ, the saviour of the world, will come.

And therefore, the Jews still today, when they long for the restoration of Israel as the chief powerhouse in the world, look forward to a Messiah who will reign as king in Jerusalem.

[3 : 08] So that's the idea there. David is crucially important. But Abraham is equally important because he is the father of the covenant. And that word covenant means agreement.

And it tells us that God makes agreements with sinful human beings and offers them the opportunity to come back into relationship with him as they seek to live their lives according to his word.

So Abraham is important too.

And then we pick up the reading at verse 17. You can see how Matthew orders and structures things. Thus, there were 14 generations in all from Abraham to David, 14 from David to the exile to Babylon, and 14 from the exile to the Messiah.

Now, that's well structured, and it's deliberately structured, and lots of names are missing from the genealogy. It is structured in such a way as to pick out the key people.

[4 : 32] And it's done so very neatly. And the reason for this is that unlike today, where you have a Bible, hopefully in your lap, or you have one on your phone or wherever, but where we all have individual Bibles, of course, we wouldn't need to memorize stuff.

We do need to memorize stuff if you don't have a Bible. And in Matthew's time, when Matthew was writing, largely to Jewish Christians, Hebrews, he knew that they relied heavily on memory, and he wanted them to remember these names because these names were important.

So that's why it's structured as it is. Verse 18. This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about. His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.

Because Joseph, her husband, was faithful to the law and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet.

[5 : 56] The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us. When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him, and took Mary home as his wife.

And he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son, and he gave him the name Jesus. And it feels like Christmas all of a sudden, doesn't it?

Except it's not Christmas, and that's the point. Matthew didn't write this with Christmas in mind. Christmas, from Matthew's point of view, was a modern invention or extension of Christian tradition.

It didn't exist at his time. But the idea of Advent, of course, was crucially important. The coming of Christ into the world is good news, because it tells us that salvation is possible, and a return to God is possible through faith in Jesus.

Indeed, through Jesus, God is with us. Just take that on board. God is with us. Next slide, please, Josh. God is with us, and God is here to be worshipped by us.

[7 : 06] I want us to think about that word God. That's why it's in capitals, you see, and a slightly different colour font if you've got really good eyesight. God, the maker of heaven and earth, the supreme being in the universe, the one in whom we live, exist, and have our being, is with us.

That's amazing. And that is a revelation to the soul that we all ought to be extremely happy about. But it's a bit like Christmas, isn't it? We hear those words, and they become so familiar to us that the impact of that doesn't kind of hit.

But if we said, oh, Queen Elizabeth is coming to be with us tomorrow, most of us, maybe not all of us, because some people are not royalists, I understand, but most of us, and certainly I would be, I'd be absolutely delighted.

And I'd have the Whitby Gazette on the phone and the National Press, and I'd say, look, Queen Elizabeth is coming to Westcliffe Church on Skinner Street tomorrow to be with us.

And it would be, it would be really exciting. And there'd be crowds outside waiting to see the royal party arrive. Who knows she might come, I don't know, well, she'll come to our barbecue, I don't know.

[8 : 22] But, but imagine, imagine the privilege. And yet somebody much greater than Queen Elizabeth, and indeed Queen Elizabeth would agree, because she believes in him too, much, somebody much greater is with us, and that is the God of the universe.

That is why we worship. And that really ought to thrill our hearts. And in some senses, it becomes a test of where we are in our faith.

If that's something that can idly pass us by in a similar way that any other news item idly passes us by, there's probably something quite wrong with our spiritual lives.

The point of our lives each day is to walk in communion with God. To live within the reality of the presence of God.

I seek every day to wake up and say, good morning, Heavenly Father. Simple words. But to connect with God at my waking.

[9 : 26] And then the last thing I seek to do at night is to say, good night, Heavenly Father. Now, you might think that sounds awfully familiar. But that's relationship.

Relationship with God is meant to be familiar. God is there. God is to be known. God is the ultimate arbiter of my life. In Him, I live and move and have my being.

It's because of Him I am alive. And at His bidding, I will die. And if I really, really believe that, I need to connect with Him every day. Because God is with us.

What a joy. And when God is with us, it creates worship. And it's interesting that on Wednesday, I was reading in Matthew 2. And I picked up on this word worship as I read.

And there were different people who worshipped God. There was the wise men. Remember them? They came along to worship the baby Jesus. They understood the significance of this event.

[10 : 26] That the promised one had come into the world. And they bowed down to worship Him, didn't they? And they gave Him gold and frankincense and myrrh. But there was another person who said he wanted to worship Jesus.

And that was Herod the king. But his idea was quite different. He wasn't there to give gold, frankincense and myrrh. He was bringing a sharp sword to kill Jesus and any other child under two years of age.

Any other boy child. He had murder in his heart. And yet he said, I also will come and worship Him. And that's the thing about worship, you see.

Turning up and singing songs is not worship. Worship, making the right noise about, oh yes I want to worship God, is not in itself worship. Worship must be an outflow of the heart.

A response to God that says, because you are with me, I want to be with you. That's worship. So that's the first thing we discover.

[11 : 27] God is with us. And you know of course I've already indicated that there is this genealogy. And I want you to notice something about this genealogy which for me is really significant.

I've already mentioned the men who are important. So Abraham, David, there are others that are mentioned that we remember like Jehoshaphat and Asa. Great kings of Israel who have experienced great victories for the nation against the foreign enemies.

But then there's a wonderful part here that you need to kind of see its significance. Five women are mentioned. Now again if I mentioned that on the news program somewhere, somebody would, what's the significance of that?

Five women, well we live in an age when women and men are treated equally and respected for what they contribute to society. And we understand their historical significance and value and so on.

But it was very different in Jesus' day. Women were not usually mentioned in genealogies. Because women were not regarded as very important. They were bearers of children.

[12 : 33] And Jewish rabbis used to pray, God I thank you that you did not make me a Gentile or a woman. So that tells you their significance in the scheme of things.

And yet here in the genealogy there are a mention of five women and they're really significant. He could have mentioned Sarah but he didn't. Sarah was really important. He could have mentioned her but he didn't.

The first woman he mentions is Tamar. And Tamar was the daughter-in-law of one of the founders of the tribes of Israel, Judah.

Now she's mentioned in Genesis 38 because she tricked her father-in-law into having, listen, sorry if this is kind of sensitive at whatever time it is in the morning.

She tricked her father-in-law into having sex with her so that she could produce a child. That's what she did. She dressed up as a prostitute, convinced him she was a prostitute.

[13 : 34] He slept with her. And then when it was found out that she was pregnant because she was by now a widow, they said, Judah, the man said, bring her out, we'll stone her to death. She'd been immoral.

But she very wisely took something of Judah's and said, oh by the way, I'm pregnant to the man who gave me these. You can imagine how Judah's heart stopped all of a sudden.

Wow, these are mine. And of course he had to acknowledge that she was more righteous than him. Now it sounds very seedy, doesn't it?

And there's all kinds of complications as to why that happened. But she had a right to have a child to keep her first husband's name going. And he did not honor that with his sons.

It was a leveraged sister. She's the first woman mentioned. The next one is Rahab. Now Rahab is also a prostitute.

[14 : 33] And she's in Jericho. And she helps the spies escape. The next one that is mentioned is Ruth. And she's a foreigner. She's a Moabitess. She comes back to Israel.

She has no natural right to belong to the people of Israel. But she's received into the community. And she becomes the grandmother of David. Who is the royal line to Jesus.

The next woman mentioned is not mentioned by name. She's called the wife of Uriah. And she was an adulteress. Bathsheba.

The famed incident when David took her as his own and committed adultery. She had a child and they were punished and the child died. And then the last one mentioned is Mary.

Who was thought to be pregnant outside of marriage. And who bore the stigma of that all her adult life. Is this not Mary's son they said in Nazareth.

[15 : 34] They would normally say Joseph's. But they didn't believe that. And isn't it amazing that all of the women mentioned are all women who had shadows of sin hanging over them.

Whose reputations were damaged. And yet our God who is with us. In his amazing grace. Choses to identify with those that the world despises.

Why? Because when God is with us. He is with us in Jesus. Who came to save his people from their sins. And it's almost as if God says. I want to show you how scandalous all this is.

I'm going to put into my son's line. All of the people he could have missed out. I want to put into that line. All of those people who have a bad reputation. I'll identify with them.

And this is good news you see. Because what I want to say to you is. It doesn't matter about your reputation. It doesn't matter how bad you've been. Where you've been.

[16 : 40] How awful your life may be. And the catalogue of your life might be full of scandalous sin. God is still ready to receive you by his grace.

Amazing grace. Amazing grace is available to you. Regardless of how bad your record has been. Or how bad your heart is.

We can begin again with Jesus. God is with us. Okay next slide please Josh. So if God is with us in what sense?

Well, first of all, God is with us in Jesus. Again, this was quite amazing, quite significant. He understood exactly what he was saying.

He was saying that the almighty, omniscient, that means all-knowing, all-powerful God who fills heaven and earth, designed a human body in which he could dwell with humanity.

[17 : 43] And that is astonishing. Now, don't ask me to explain that, but it is called incarnation. That is to say, God became flesh in the person of Jesus.

That Jesus was not an ordinary man, nor he was a man. At the same time he was a man, he was also God in human flesh. And again, that is to be noted.

The disciples knew exactly what they were saying. And they knew that when they looked at Jesus, it wasn't just enough to say, he's a great teacher.

It wasn't just enough to say, he's a great moral example. They bowed down and worshipped him because he was God. And Jesus accepted worship from them because he knew he was God.

When Thomas, that doubting disciple, put his fingers into his hand and touched his side, he bowed down and said, my Lord and my God. And Jesus didn't say, get up, that's terrible blasphemy.

[18 : 47] He said, well, I don't know what he said. He said, well, it's great because you've seen. But blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

He accepted his worship and he honoured those who would worship like Thomas, bowing before Jesus, saying he is Lord and he is God.

He is God with us. But as I say there, he is also the man, Christ Jesus. And that's significant and important, too, because you know that the one you worship identifies with you.

He knows who you are. He knows what you're like. He knows what you're capable of. He knows what this world is like. And he knows how difficult it is to live in it. He knows what it is to suffer.

He knows what it is to grieve. He knows what it is to die. So you can never turn around to him and say, you don't know what it's like, Jesus, living in this world.

[19 : 44] Yes, he does. So much more than we do. He sees beyond the human causation to the demonic and devilish causes that make this world such a hell at times to live in.

You see, there are so many great things about this world and so much that is wonderful about human nature. I was talking to somebody about this on Friday evening. So many things. And, you know, what's your view of human nature?

My view of human nature is negative. They thought, wow, that's really bad. It's not really bad. It's really redemptive. It's understanding that although we're capable of great good, we are also equally capable of great evil.

We can be magnificently kind to refugees. I mean, humanity in general. And yet blow them up at airports and kill them willfully. That's what we're capable of doing.

We can, like I do, take our dogs out for a walk, pat them on the head, tell them how wonderful they are, make them great companions. Or we can say it's illegal to have a dog. And any dog in this country must be put down.

[20 : 53] Because that's what will happen in some countries. We are capable of great good and capable of great evil. And because Jesus knows that, he came as human flesh and identified with humans and lived the life that humans lived, except he never sinned.

So that he could die in our place and rightfully pay for that sin. For since by man came death, says the scripture, sin by man also comes resurrection to eternal life.

Jesus is a man in order that we as humans might be redeemed. And thirdly, he's a man called Jesus. You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

Now, if you were going to bring a Messiah into the world, you might pick a really good name. I don't know what a really good name would be. God picked Joshua. That's what it really was. In Hebrew, Jesus is just the anglicized form.

There were loads of Joshuas around, lords. Joshua means God is my salvation. Lots of Jewish fathers called their children Joshua because they wanted the Israelite nation to be delivered from enemies.

[22 : 05] And Joshua was a great military hero, so why not? It's like in America, lots of people called their children Lee or Jackson or Grant because they were great civil war leaders.

But Jesus, Joshua, means savior. And so God called his son, Jesus, to tell us that his main purpose in life was to save you.

Now, don't miss that. There are lots of people who love to listen about, talk about Jesus. Oh, the wisest man that ever lived. I don't argue. The best man that ever lived.

A great, wonderful moral example. I won't argue. But that is not the purpose of his coming. The purpose of his coming is to save us. People might be fascinated by his words and say, well, I'll follow his words.

You're welcome. Fascinated by his words. Follow his words. And all of that. And they might say, yeah, let's, we need to listen to the words of Jesus. If we all followed the words of Jesus, the world would be a better place.

[23 : 08] Yes, it would. But it wouldn't save you. Just to follow his words. Just to read his words. Just to treat him as if he's a philosopher. That won't save you. Likewise, people say, we need to follow his example.

Like we follow the example of the Buddha. Or we follow the example of other great sages or great wise men. Yes, it's great to follow his example. But that won't save you. What will save you is faith in him as your sacrifice.

Your atoning sacrifice. Saying that when he died on the cross, he died for you. He died to cleanse you from your sin so that you could have fellowship with God.

And unless you get that right, everything else, though it will be of value, will not save you. All of the gospels that contain the teaching of Jesus end with the cross and the resurrection.

Because if it had stopped before the cross and the resurrection, there would still be no hope for the world. It is in the cross of Christ that we are reconciled to God.

[24 : 12] Thank you, Josh. Next slide. So Jesus is so important to the whole of history. And I love this quote from Napoleon Bonaparte, no less, the great military general back in the 19th, 18th and 19th century.

I know many, he says, and I tell you that Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between him and every other person in the world, there is no possible term of comparison. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne and I founded empires.

But on what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force? Jesus Christ founded his empire upon love. And at this hour, millions of people would die for him.

And that, I think, sums up wonderfully the significance of Jesus in the world. He is our saviour, our redeemer, the one who buys us back to God.

He is God with us. And that is wonderful. I don't know whose phone is going on. I don't think it's mine, is it? No? Okay. So, next slide, here's Josh.

[25 : 21] God is with us. Second point. It looks like it repeats itself, but you'll see its difference. God is with us.

Now, next slide. What does that mean? Matthew 11 says, this was a complaint made of Jesus. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, look at him, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

I think that's a wonderful verse. You see, Jesus had a reputation at the time he was with us. But his reputation wasn't universally acclaimed.

It wasn't that lots of people went around and said, oh, he's a great man. And that's uncontrovertibly so. What some people said, especially the religious ones, the really good ones, they said, nah, nah, he's a fraud.

He's a fraud because I saw him in a pub with a drunken. He's a fraud because I saw him touching a letter. He's a fraud because I saw him talking with and spending time with prostitutes.

[26 : 30] And so they wrote him off on the basis of those whom he associated with. Now, religious people are very good at that. We're very good at thinking that if we want to kind of maintain our purity, we have to separate ourselves from all the waifs and strays of society who are regarded as down and outs and, you know, bad reputation and a bad record and all of that.

And I'm really, really glad to say, and I'm here to say to you today, that I'm happy to be your friend. And that friendship is not conditional upon the kind of life you live.

It is conditional upon the love of Jesus. It is not for me to write anybody off. It is not for me to judge who would be worthy of God's attention and God's favour.

It is God Lord who decides that. God is with us. God is with the prostitute. With the drug addict. With the sinner. With those who've got a bad record and a bad heart.

And he loves to be with those. And he loves to turn their lives around and redeem them and change them from the inside out. That's what God does really well. And we can't do that.

[27 : 49] I can't do that. Social services can't do that. Not lastingly. Not meaningfully. Not from the inside out. Though they do great works. That requires a miracle of grace.

And God alone can do it. And the history of the Christian church is full of examples of peoples whose lives were changed around by the Lord Jesus Christ.

He loved to be a friend of tax collectors and sinners. And do you know what that means? That means he's your friend too. Unless you're too good for him. Yeah? Yeah?

There are some people who think they're too good for him. I don't need Jesus. I'm a nice person. Well, good luck with that. The problem is it's not you who decides what a nice person is.

It's God. I don't need Jesus. I haven't done much wrong. Again, good luck with that. It is God who will decide whether you've done enough wrong or enough right to get you into heaven.

[28 : 55] God decides that. But I'm worried about that, you see. Because the Bible's definition of sin is, sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God.

Let me kind of unpack that in modern language. What that means is, sin is not just the bad things you do. It's the good things you should have done that you didn't do. It is the person you passed who was begging on the street and you didn't reach out to heaven.

It is that person you intended to go and do good for, but you didn't have the time. It is the bad thing you say or the bad thing you think that nobody else saw but God saw and God was.

Jesus is your friend if you will be his friend. He came as a friend of sinners to save us from our sins.

Next slide, Josh, please. And so what does this mean? It means that it is possible to have God with us and to live a God with us life in something that Matthew calls the kingdom of heaven.

[30 : 07] Now don't think that's the place you go to when you die. Don't think that. The kingdom of heaven is not the place you go to when you die. The kingdom of heaven is the rule of God over your life while you're here.

Because we live in two worlds as Christians. We occupy the kingdoms of this earth and we live under the rule of God in the kingdom of heaven. Remember when you pray, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

God's kingdom comes every time you do God's will on earth. God's kingdom comes every time somebody trusts in Jesus and enters into the kingdom of God.

We are born again into the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven. Simultaneous terms. Different gospel writers use different things. Matthew uses heaven because he was writing to Jews and they had a bit of a thing about using the name God.

So he used the word heaven instead. Luke uses God. You can enter the kingdom of God even now where you're sitting. You can put yourself under the rule of God and your life can belong to him even now.

[31 : 20] And when it does, you become part of a church. And the church is the outpost of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God cannot be seen on earth.

The people who belong to the kingdom of God ultimately are only really, ultimately known to God. Because you can have many people who pretend they belong. The church is the place of visible members of the kingdom of God.

And it's always mixed. There are always people who believe truly and those who do not believe truly. And it's always mixed. But the kingdom of heaven is never mixed. And when you enter the kingdom of God, you can have communion with God every day through faith.

Every day you can speak to God. You can pray to God. You can ask God to meet your needs. You can ask God to be with you as your companion. And every day wherever you go, the kingdom of God is present.

And Jesus is your teacher in the kingdom of God. You've got to learn from him. Read the gospels and read them a lot. And when you think you know them well, read them again.

[32 : 25] And never stop reading them. Because it is Jesus' way of teaching you how to live in the kingdom of God. When we get to Matthew 5 through 7, we will see in the sermon that Jesus says, You want to live for me in the kingdom of God?

Be humble. Be righteous. Be good. Be salt. Be light. He gives us instruction after instruction about what the kingdom of heaven is like.

All his parables about what the kingdom of heaven is like. So that you might know how to live in it. And then he tells us to go and preach the gospel of this kingdom into the whole world.

And to make disciples and baptize them. And if you've not been baptized, I welcome you. Josh is going to be baptized in a couple of weeks' time in the very cold sea. And if you would like to be baptized, in a very cold sea, I will gladly baptize you.

As long as you enter the kingdom of God. And have faith in Jesus. And this Jesus, our King, is with us to the end of the world.

[33 : 27] He's always here. And again, one of the things I like to say to people, just to kind of muddle their minds a little bit. But it's true. Jesus is here with me and is as real to me now as you are.

So you can either lock me up as mentally deranged. Or you can take me seriously and we'll talk about it. There is much more in this world than that which is visible to the naked eye.

And Jesus says, I'm never going to leave you or forsake you. Wherever you go, I am with you. Next slide, Josh. God is with us.

But I want to end by just asking you, what did Matthew mean by us? And more precisely, who did he mean? He didn't mean everyone.

Because God wasn't with Herod who killed those children and massacred them in Bethlehem. And God wasn't with the Pharisees and the scribes who rejected Jesus.

[34 : 41] And God wasn't with Judas who betrayed him. And God wasn't with the Pharisees and the scribes who said, away with him, crucify, crucify. By us he means all who become his disciples.

Who follow him and become fishers of men. All of those who have faith. That he is their sacrificial lamb. Sent to save them from their sins.

So I want to ask you to close today. Are you part of the us? There is no more important question for you to settle than that.

Are you among the us? When we say God is with us, can you say God is with me? God is in me. God is mine.

And I am his. And God is mine. And I am his. As I have faith in Jesus. Last slide, Josh. So we're going to learn through Matthew's Gospel.

[35 : 45] What it is to be with Jesus. What it is to follow Jesus. And what it is to do what Jesus did.

Come on the journey with us. Become part of the us. Have faith. In the sacrificial sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us pray.

Amen.!!! There are some of us here today who can say God is with me.

I'm going to invite you to pray after me. So that if you want to, God can be with you today.

In the person of Jesus. If you would like to repeat these words after me in your own heart, then please do so. Heavenly Father, I thank you that you sent Jesus into the world to be my Savior.

[37 : 08] I thank you that Jesus took the punishment I deserved and suffered the agony of the cross so that I would not be punished for eternity.

And I thank you that by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, as I come to believe in him now, I know I can have my sins forgiven and receive eternal life.

Thank you that I can belong to the kingdom of heaven. I come to you, Jesus, now to receive that forgiveness. Thank you, Lord.

Amen.