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Matthew 1:18-25

Fellow Sinners, God is With Us!

Intro

The other day, Ashley and I were talking about the different Christmas traditions our families had when we were growing up. We recounted some of the same things we did and the same foods we ate every year; I thought about how much I loved going to my Granny's house, year after year, and being with family; I thought of how much I miss that now. And yet, these same things that *fill me such joy* at thinking of them years later, were also *so familiar and common-place* at the time that I often *took them for granted* and failed to realize just how special they were.

We might be in danger of doing the very same thing with Bible passages that we are “overly-familiar” with - passages like Matt. 1:18-25. We grow accustomed to hearing the same Christmas songs and bible verses year after year that we might begin to grow *numb* to the incredible glory that is revealed to us in the awe-striking passage. We can become so familiar with what it says that *we forget its true meaning and value*. And yet, *there is a reason that Christians often return to these same passages and truths, year after year, at the time of Christmas!* The truths we see here are *beautiful and breath-taking*.

The wonderful news of Christmas is this: *God Himself has stepped down into sinful, fallen, broken Creation and humanity, even becoming a man, just like us, in order to **draw near, save us from our sins, and bring us close, so that we can be with Him forever!*** The wonderful news of this passage, the wonderful news of Christmas, the wonderful news of the *gospel Jesus Christ*, is that **God is with us!** *There is joy to the world because the Lord has come!*

So let us fight against the temptation to “tune out” what this passage says, simply because it is familiar and we think we already know what it has to say. Let us have a fresh encounter with the glory of God revealed in this passage and be awed by it!

The first truth we see is that...

I. Jesus Christ Was Miraculously Born of a Virgin, in Fulfillment of the Scriptures

As we saw last week, the book of Matthew opens by showing, through the use of the genealogy, how Jesus Christ is fulfilling God's promises to send a King, a messianic *Savior*, for

His people. And now, the narrative of Jesus's life begins by telling us of his birth, of how God's savior comes into the world. But the passage here is brief, and doesn't actually spend time *on the birth account itself*. And unlike the account given in Luke, where the focus is more on Mary's perspective, here we're given the perspective of Jesus's adoptive human father, Joseph. The story begins with this young, unmarried, engaged couple. Mary and Joseph were "betrothed;" this means they were engaged to be married, but is also meant much more than that. Betrothal was seen as a legally binding status, unlike our modern period of engagement; to break off a betrothal was seen as divorce, and required a certificate of divorce; and yet, they were not yet married, were not living together, and were still required to live in purity before the marriage. We live in a day and age where the idea of sexual purity is *mocked* rather than honored; but this was not the case for first century Jews. And we are told here that Joseph and Mary were indeed living in such purity, before the Lord and each other.

So imagine Joseph's shock, then, when Mary, his betrothed, with whom he has never been intimate, suddenly becomes pregnant! Since every pregnancy up until that point, and every pregnancy since then, has always begun in the same way, it was logical and natural for Joseph to assume that Mary *had been unfaithful*; since he knew that he had not been intimate with her, he immediately assumed that she had been unfaithful and had an affair with another man. After all, in every other circumstance in human history, *that would have been the case!* And this was a *very big deal*; this would have been considered *adultery*, a sin calling for stoning under the Old Testament Law of Moses; and even though this practice was not normally allowed in such cases under Roman rule, this still would have brought great social shame and consequences upon Mary.

And so Joseph intends to act in a righteous and honorable way: first, being a righteous man, he is going to divorce her, showing that he has indeed been faithful and that he had not been impure; but secondly, he also acted *compassionately*; he did not want to shame Mary publicly, so he was going to "*divorce her quietly*" (v.19). But then, *God intervenes and stops him*; Joseph is visited by an angel, a messenger of the Lord, in a dream. The angel says, in 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.**" We are overly familiar with this passage and this teaching, but the Angel was giving Joseph incredible, mind-blowing news: *Mary, his beloved betrothed, had not been impure and unfaithful; she was pregnant and still a virgin; the baby she*

carried was not conceived by natural means, but by the miraculous work of God the Holy Spirit! And verse 23 makes clear that this is a **miraculous sign** to signal the birth of the messianic savior, **in fulfillment of God's prophecies in the Old Testament.**

From the very beginning of the Bible, God uses *miraculous births* to bring about His promises and deliverance for His people. In Gen. 3:15, right after the very first sin, we see the very first hint of the good news of salvation: GOD promises that an “**offspring,**” a child, shall be born that will crush Satan's head, signifying deliverance for humanity from the curse of sin. Then, God promised to make Abraham into a great nation, to begin through him the special people of God; yet Abraham was *childless* in his old age, and his wife Sarah was not only past the age of childbirth but had always been *barren*; and then, God miraculously gave Sarah a child, even in barrenness in old age! And this pattern is repeated, where miraculously gives a child to a barren, faithful woman: to Isaac and Rebekah, then to Hannah, the mother of Samuel. And these children signify grace, blessing, and promised deliverance for God's people. Then, in Isaiah 7, which is quoted here, we see this same pattern picked up, *but greatly escalated*: a child will be born not too a barren woman, *but to a virgin!* Isaiah makes clear, just a couple of chapters later in Isaiah 9:1-7 (which we looked at together a couple of weeks ago), that this promised child *would be the promised Messiah, the promised Davidic King and Savior of GOD's people; and he would be Mighty God Himself!* And so we see these promises fulfilled here in the birth of Christ: *the promised savior enters into the world through the most miraculous birth imaginable - He is born to a virgin!*

As I've said, this truth is probably *over familiar* to many of us; we might assume this to be true, but we might not give it much thought, or see it as very important. Yet it is helpful for us all to remember that *the Bible asserts this as a historical fact* that actually happened; as *the fulfillment of God's Word*; and as *theologically true and significant*. Many people in the world today scoff at the idea of the virgin birth and dismiss it as impossible nonsense. Of course it seems impossible to us - *that's why it is a miracle! It is the very act of God!* **But that's just the point: we can't save ourselves; we need a miracle!** If there was something *natural* that could happen for us to deal with our sin, then Christ wouldn't have had to come. The whole point is that we *need a miracle to be saved from our sins!* It takes a divine intervention! And that is *exactly* what we see here! THE miraculous arrival of the promised one who would, *just as miraculously*, save us from our sins! After all, if we can't believe in the miracle of the **Virgin**

Birth, then how could we believe in the **resurrection from the dead**? Both depend upon the **Word and Work of God**; therefore, both truths are infinitely trustworthy; we can bet our lives on them.

Therefore, the truth of the **Virgin Birth** is important for us to know about and believe in *because it is a necessary part of the gospel, the good news of how we are saved in Christ*. Why would it be necessary that the savior be *born of a virgin*? Because it is necessary that the savior, Jesus Christ, be both **fully God and fully man**, which is exactly what the **Virgin Birth** secures and reveals.

II. Jesus Christ Was Born to be Fully God and Fully Man

The virgin birth reveals that Jesus is born **of a woman - Mary, being a truly human baby, truly born and legally part of the line of David**; yet it also reveals that Jesus *does not have a human Father, but is conceived by the Holy Spirit of God in a miraculous way*. Jesus is both **truly God and truly human**.

This is made explicit by the name of the child in verse 23; the prophet Isaiah says *“they shall call his name Immanuel.”* And Matthew quickly translates this name for us, so we don’t miss the significance: the name means *“God with Us.”* This child that is born in such a miraculous way *is God Himself*. The birth of Jesus literally means **God is with us** because *Jesus, the baby born, is Himself God!* In the birth of Christ, God Himself is born among us, as a real, flesh-and-blood human man! God the Creator took on flesh!

This is the incredible, awe-striking, wondrous mystery of the **Incarnation**. The word **incarnation** simply means that *Jesus Christ is the eternal God the Son who took on flesh, becoming a real human being, a man, who lived in this world, just like us*. He was even *born as a baby, just like we are!* It means that Jesus Christ is **fully God and fully man**.

Jesus is really “human” in every way. He was truly born as a helpless, vulnerable baby. He was dependent on his parents for survival; he had needs that needed to be met by others, *just like we do*. He knew limitations and weakness, pain and suffering, joy, sadness, and fear, *just like we do*. He became **truly human in every way - except that he was without sin**. Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life - and yet, it was still a **very real, very human life!**

And at the same time, Jesus is **really, truly God!** He is the eternal, pre-existent Son of God, equal with the Father. Very God of very God! Jesus Christ, the God-Man, is **Two-in-One**: one person, Jesus Christ, the eternal Son, who has **two natures: a human nature, and the**

divine nature. He is not some hybrid, being a “mix” of the two; Jesus is not half-God half man. Nor does he only *pretend to be a human*. No, Jesus, in a very real yet mysterious way, is **fully God and fully man** at the exact same time!

This can be hard to wrap our heads around, but let us at least try and *wrap our hearts around this*, so that it truly moves us to adore and worship Him! This means that God, who created all things, the very **“Word of the Father”** became a *human being*; the very *light of God* stepped down into darkness; the very author of life itself *stepped down into life - to step into your life, and my life*. God the Son was born *as a real, human baby*. It was not a “silent night;” Jesus was a baby, and babies scream when they are born. Jesus had to be nursed, swaddled, and cared for by his mom, Mary! *And at the very same moment, the baby she gave birth to was the very God that knit Mary together in her own mother’s womb! As she held Jesus in her arms for the first time, He was upholding her very life as the God who made her! As the baby Jesus was dependent upon Mary and Joseph for life and survival, being needy and helpless, he was, at the very same time, the very God of life that they were dependent upon for their very life and breath, at every second!*

This is amazing and wondrous! This is the beautiful mystery of the Incarnation! This means that God Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, assumed **our humanity**. He stepped down *into our lives; even our broken lives in this broken, fallen world, full of sin and suffering*. Jesus is **Immanuel - God with us!** Jesus took on flesh *to be with us; to be with you!* Jesus lived as a **real human man**; he truly experienced suffering and pain; he truly experienced loss and sorrow; he knew what it meant to be needy and dependent! That means He *perfectly empathizes* with your own suffering, your own struggles, your very neediness. *God is with you as you walk through this life!*

And the most amazing part is: **Jesus did so perfectly!** As he lived the human life, faced with temptation and trial on every side, **he never sinned! He lived it out perfectly! And he did so in our place! For you and for me! So that where we have failed, he has succeeded, and he attributes it to our account!** Why? **Because he became a man in order to save us.**

He came to save us from our sins...

III. Jesus Christ was Born in order to Save Us from our Sins

The **goal of the incarnation - the purpose of Christ’s birth** - was always *the Cross* - we can’t rightly understand *Christmas* without looking to Easter. In verse 21, the angel very clearly

tells us **why Jesus Christ is born**: “*for he will save his people from their sins.*” After all, as the angel implies, *this is exactly what the name Jesus means.* “Jesus” is the Greek form of the name “Joshua,” or “Yeshua,” which means, “**God saves,**” or “**God is salvation.**” So the heart of this passage proclaims clearly to us the **good news, the gospel, that Jesus Christ came to save us from our sins!**

The **virgin birth** was essential for the **incarnation**, God becoming Man in Christ. And the **incarnation** is essential for our **salvation**. We needed God himself to save us; we can’t save ourselves, and no other human being could save us. We saw last week that the promised savior from God had to be a *human being from the line of David, for he would be the promised, eternal Davidic king.* But we don’t just need another sinful man to save us; we need *God Himself to save us.* We need the sinless **God-Man, Jesus Christ**, to live a *perfect human life in our place*; and ultimately, to *go to the cross and die in the place of our sins.* *This is why Jesus Christ came; this is why he was born: **to be our savior! To save us from our sins!***

Each and every one of us is a sinner. Each and every one of us has failed before the Lord, before each other, and before our own eyes. Each one of us has sinned both *intentionally* and even *unintentionally*. We all know we have actively done what is wrong, that we have actively disobeyed God. And yet even when we *try* we still fail. *We are sinners, and we cannot stand before the Holy, Righteous God! There is nothing we can do to deal with our sin! We cannot live a perfect life! We cannot save ourselves!*

And yet: *we don’t have to! There is hope, even for sinners like you and me! **God Himself stepped down to live a perfect life in our place; to die a sinner’s death in our place; and to be raised by the power of God to eternal life and peace in our place!*** THIS is what Jesus Christ came to do! This is what he has done! He has accomplished salvation - forgiveness from sins, righteousness, and eternal life with God - for sinners!

And yet, this doesn’t just automatically apply to every single sinner out there. We must *respond in faith.*

IV. Like Joseph, We Must Respond to this Good News with Obedient Faith, Even When it is Costly.

As we heard read earlier, in **John 3:16**, God does indeed “love the whole world,” which is why he sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross and save sinners; but what does the rest of John 3:16 say? “*That whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*” And

so we see here: Jesus came to save, specifically, **“his people.”** It is precisely **those who “call his name Immanuel”** that are saved from their sins! This salvation is applied to **everyone who believes that Jesus Christ really is “God with us!” That he really did come in fulfillment of the scriptures; that He really is perfectly God and perfectly man; and that He really did live, die, and rise again to save all who repent and believe in Him!**

And such genuine faith is evidence by *repentant hearts and faithful obedience in our lives, just like what we see here in the example of Joseph.* We began looking at his life, and the story of Christ’s birth from his perspective, earlier. And it’s worth mentioning again *just how much emphasis Matthew is placing on Joseph in this passage.* And I think the point Matthew wants us to see, at least in part, is that *the way Joseph responds to the Word of the Lord here is an example for us to follow.* So let’s take another look back at the life of Joseph for a second.

As we’ve already seen, Joseph initially assumed, very reasonably, that Mary had been unfaithful, and intended to quietly divorce her. But then, God revealed to Him, through a dream, that Mary *had not* been unfaithful, but that she carried the *promised savior from GOD*, and that this was the *miraculous work of the Holy Spirit of God!* And so, Joseph had a choice to make. If he truly believes that this is true - if he *truly believes and trusts in the Word of God revealed to Him*, believing that Mary’s son truly is the promised one of God - *then of course he can no longer put Mary away!* In fact, it would be *outright disobedience* for him to do so, since the angel explicitly tells him, **“do not fear to take Mary as your wife.”**

But there would be good reason for Joseph fearing to do so. In the eyes of everyone around them, for Joseph to still marry Mary would be to admit *guilty* to being physically intimate with her before marriage. In our promiscuous day and age, that might not seem like a big deal, *but this was a very serious allegation for a first century Jew.* For a man who loved GOD and wanted to be righteous in his ways, *it would be a great burden* to be unjustly considered by all of their friends, family, neighbors, and religious leaders to have *sinned and to continue to lie about it.* We know that Mary and Joseph were not lying; we know they were faithful to the Lord in these things. And yet, even though Joseph believed that this child was from the Lord, not adultery, he would have known that *pretty much no one else they knew would have believed their story!* If Mary and Joseph insisted that they were pure and waited till marriage, everyone else would have likely responded in mockery, saying, “Yeah, sure, how else do you explain Mary

being pregnant?” This came with a great social cost. There would have been many *earthly reasons* for Joseph to put her away quietly and wash his hands of it.

And yet, we see here that **Joseph believed the Lord! He had faith in the Word of God and the good news of the promised child, Jesus Christ.** And how do we know that Joseph believed? **Because he obeyed.** Even though it would have been very costly, **Joseph responded in faith by obeying the Lord.** IN verses 24-25, after he receives this dream from God, he awoke and **“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.”** Joseph believed; he responded in *faith*, trusting in the good news of the Lord! And his faith was *genuine*, being evidence by *costly obedience*. THIS is the example held out for each of us. We, too, are called to believe in this good news: that **God came down and became a man, being born in the person of Jesus Christ; and He came to save God’s people; to save anyone who trusts and believes in Him!** Such believe is costly; such believe demands faithfulness and obedience in our lives; indeed, believing in Christ changes our lives completely! And yet, *it is belief that He saves us from our sins!* There is no greater news or hope out there! It is a message **worth believing, a message worth changing our lives for, even though it is costly!**

And so, the question before each of us today is: **Do you believe that Jesus truly is the GOD-Man, who has come to save us from our sins? Do you truly believe that your only hope is Him, and that his perfect life, death, and resurrection are sufficient to take away your sins? Are you resting in Jesus alone as your savior?**

If so, *rejoice!* **Believe that just as he was born of the virgin Mary, so you have now been born again to new life in Him; just as he lived and died in your place, so you are forgiven of your sins and declared righteous, even now! Believe that just as he was raised and ascended into heaven, so you will be raised to eternal life with God, because GOD is with you, even now, in the midst of whatever is going on in your life!**

And if you’re not a believer this morning, then these glorious promises can be true for you as well! Simply believe in the *good news* of the very first Christmas story: ***believe that a savior has been born, even for you! That God himself has stepped down to live, die, and be raised in your place, to save you from your sins, if you will turn away from sin and trust in Him alone!*** If you have any questions about this, or about being baptised or joining the church, I

would love to speak further with you; you can find me after the service or you can even come now during the last song. Let us pray.