

He is Jesus; He is Immanuel

Matthew 1:18-23

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Many of us have fond memories of experiencing Christmas as children. However, as we grow older at least some of “the magic” of the season might fade and give way to family or money pressures and the busyness of life. One article I came across opened with the following words:

Christmas time is here again. Each year the season feels brand new. Welcoming it in with open arms, we try to recapture the magic we felt as a child in our now adult lives. Christmas cookies with hot cocoa. Warm sweaters and wool scarves. Memories of the cherished times we spent with family...

I came across another Website that said the following:

*This blog is dedicated to everyone who still gets excited, and is inspired by the wonderful magic of the Christmas season. For the children, it's an exciting time, and for the grown-ups, **we become children again**. I hope that as you read these pages, you'll feel the spirit of the Holiday Season stirring inside of you, warming your heart with fond memories, and nice cozy feelings. I invite you to make A-Magical-Christmas.com a place to get together during the Christmas season, to connect with like minded folks who love Christmas, and who feel inspired and transformed by its magic.*

Now you need to know – and I mentioned this last week - that I am all for fond Christmas memories with family and Christmas cookies and hot chocolate. Between you and me I don't even mind nice cozy feelings. However, that being said, as the pastor of this local church, I see it as both my duty and my privilege to remind you that our main goal as Christians at Christmas time should not be primarily to reclaim “the Christmas magic” we knew as kids. Our main focus ought not be to somehow recapture a child-hood Christmas feeling for ourselves or for our families – as wonderful as those feelings might be. Our main goal and focus should be to celebrate and rejoice in the Gospel; and in particular to celebrate and rejoice in the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

You see, Christmas is the annual Festival of the Incarnation. It is the day in the year that Christians have set-aside for hundreds of years to celebrate God coming to earth, taking upon himself human flesh so that He might one day, thirty-three years later, as the perfect God-man, become our Savior by dying on the Cross. For us, that's what Christmas-time is all about!

So “yes”, enjoy the cookies and the hot cocoa! And may you create many warm family memories this Christmas season! But as you do, may I urge you? - don't lose sight of the fact that Christmas finds its ultimate purpose in God's people making much of the One we read about in our passage today. Well, with that said, let's turn our attention to this evening's text – which I trust will help us to do just that.

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ [1] took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed [2] to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. 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. 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel"

May God bless this meditation of the events surrounding the birth of our Lord.

In the passage Matthew who is the tax collector turned apostle, tells us the amazing story of how Jesus, of how our Savior, came into the world. In verse 18 we read that Mary had been betrothed to Joseph. What that means is that Mary and Joseph were legally married, yet the wedding had not yet taken place and Mary had not yet moved in with her husband Joseph. This was the custom in those days.

It would kind of be like in our culture if upon engagement, the marriage paperwork was filed and became effective "immediately." In the Jewish culture of that day, the betrothal period was a 12 month long season that would have established the fidelity of both the bride and groom to be. If both partners had been faithful to one another then the couple would have a formal wedding and the husband would take his wife home with him.

For Mary and Joseph, it was during this time that the unthinkable happens – so we read in verse 18: "before they came together [so still during the betrothal period] she was found to be with child." Needless to say, for both Mary and Joseph, this was quite the development. From Mary's perspective she has done nothing wrong – and from Joseph's perspective how could she not have done something very wrong? How could she not have been unfaithful to him? The evidence of her guilt obviously appeared pretty conclusive. So how does Joseph respond?

Well in verse 19 we learn that Joseph was a very devout and godly Jewish man. Most likely he didn't feel that he could finalize his marriage to Mary because to do so would be to admit his own guilt in the situation; it would be to admit that he had fathered a child outside of God's boundaries-outside of wedlock. There were probably other reasons he didn't want to finalize the marriage as well. I mean just think about it. From Joseph's perspective, his future bride had betrayed him and *not only that* she was lying about it *and not only that* she was unrepentant, and *not only that* she concocts this story that the baby in her womb was conceived of the Holy Spirit. You have got to feel bad for both Mary and Joseph. What a tough, tough situation this must have been for them both!

So Joseph didn't want to finalize his marriage, but still the passage also says, he was "unwilling to put her [Mary] to shame"...which meant that he was committed to showing young Mary compassion and mercy. He didn't want to make a big deal out of this publically. He didn't want to see her prosecuted in ways that the law allowed. He just wanted to separate himself from Mary quietly and discreetly.

So he got ready to go through with the divorce and at right about that time, God intervened by sending an angel to speak to Joseph in a dream. And in the dream the angel of Lord, vs.20, speaks these words:

"Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. [21] She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

Skipping down to vs.24 we read that in response, Joseph did what he was told...It says *there*

"When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife..."

Now I just want to pause right here and draw attention to Joseph's godly character. We already observed him to be a man of mercy and now we observe him to be a man of obedience. Even though there were going to be major consequences for Joseph, he obeyed God.

Even though his reputation with family members and others in the community would be tarnished because he married someone of Mary's shameful reputation, he still obeyed God. This compassionate, obedient man overlooked the "hit" his reputation would take. He took Mary as his wife and adopted Jesus – someone who would be viewed by many as an illegitimately born child. Joseph adopted Jesus and took him in as his own son. And he did all this in obedience to God and for that he is to be commended and honored.

Note also two names given to our Lord in this passage. The angel tells Joseph that the babe in Mary's womb is to be named Jesus, vs.21, "For he will save His people from their sins." The name Jesus – as some of you know – is significant. Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name "Joshua"- which means "God saves." Matthew in verse 23 goes on to say that this Savior is coming in fulfillment of the prophetic word given through the Prophet Isaiah hundreds of years earlier, who declared: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name "Immanuel" (which means, God with us.)

Now that is a basic summary of the story of Jesus' birth as told by Matthew. The question is, what's the point of it all? What's Matthew's goal, his agenda in telling it to us? Well, its there in those names. Those names carry great meaning.

Matthew tells this story mainly because he wants to show that before Jesus was even born His identity was clear: He is "Jesus" vs.21. And he is "Immanuel" vs.23. Those names are of great importance in the text; they are divinely given. And those names are of great importance at Christmas.

In conclusion, I want to share some concluding pastoral remarks...that represent what you might call a slight modification of the remarks I read at the beginning of my message.

Christmas time is here again. Each year the season feels brand new. Welcoming it in with open arms, we enjoy it's many blessings – blessings that come to us because our God is good and gracious and kind. Christmas cookies with hot cocoa. Warm sweaters and wool scarves. Memories of the cherished times we've spent with family. For the children of this church, this is a joy-filled time, and for the grown-ups, it's a joy-filled time for us as well.

But the reason it is joy-filled is not primarily because of the gifts we will receive or the gifts we will give – the family we will be with or perhaps will not be with. Those blessings are reasons for heartfelt rejoicing and gratitude to God. But there is a far deeper, far more profound reason for us to rejoice that has everything to do with One whose name is both "Jesus" and "Immanuel"; who is both our Savior and our God who is with us.

So over the course of the next few days, we don't have to strive to somehow "re-capture the magic of the season" or maybe lamenting if it just seems as if, for whatever reason, the magic isn't there. Why? Well, because we have something far greater, far more wonderful to rejoice in! We rejoice in the name of Jesus. We rejoice in the name of Immanuel. This Christmas, let those names be in our hearts and in on our lips. If you are saved, you are saved in the name of Jesus. Remember:

*though your sins are like scarlet,
they have been made white as white as snow; -- by **Jesus***

This Christmas remember,

*as far as the east is from the west,
so far does **Jesus** remove our transgressions from us.*

And this Christmas, let us think about **Immanuel**, as God with us. _ Jesus said 'behold I am with you always, even until the end of the age.' Brothers and sisters when Jesus came into the world – he came to be with fallen humanity– he came to dwell among us (Jn.1). He so loved us he came to our broken world. During his life, he was despised and rejected by men (Is.53) and while hanging on the Cross, in love for us, He was forsaken by God Himself. Why? So that he might forever be with us.

Through every difficult valley, through every difficult time, His enduring promise to you and me is "I will never leave you or forsake you (Heb.13)." It is promised that nothing can ever ever separate us from his

love. The virgin conceived a son, and they called his name Immanuel. God has not forsaken us helpless sinners. He is with us. Jesus saves us. We will be with him forever!

So as your pastor, let me just encourage you as we conclude: don't forget these things. Don't forget them on Christmas Eve. Don't forget them on Christmas day. Let us make what takes place this Christmas time *a Festival of the Incarnation.*

Let us think about, speak of, and worship Jesus, our Savior come. Let us think about, speak of, and worship Immanuel; God with us.

Let's PRAY.