

Sermon for December 18, 2016 – Advent 4

Matthew 1:18-25

**Theme: Who will this child be? The angel tells us:**

- 1) *He is Jesus, the LORD's Savior*
- 2) *He is Immanuel, God with us.*

*<sup>18</sup>This is how the birth of Jesus Christ took place. His mother, Mary, was pledged in marriage to Joseph. Before they came together, she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup>Joseph, her husband, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her. So he decided to divorce her privately. <sup>20</sup>But as he was considering these things, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup>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." <sup>22</sup>All this happened to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: <sup>23</sup>"Look, the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son. And they will name him Immanuel," which means, "God with us." <sup>24</sup>When Joseph woke up from his sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him. He took Mary home as his wife, <sup>25</sup>but he was not intimate with her until she gave birth to her firstborn son. And he named him Jesus.*

Have you ever received a gift that you didn't know what to do with because you didn't know what it was? My kids sort of received a gift like that from my brother last year. When they opened it up, it just looked like a model robot. But, after finding out more about the gift, they realized that it was much more than a mere model: it could dance, follow them around, play music – all sorts of stuff. That information made them enjoy the gift a lot more.

Did you know that God's great gift of Jesus is one that many people don't know what to do with? What makes his birth so special that we continue to celebrate it thousands of years after it occurred? What meaning and relevance could it possibly have for us today?

Let us listen to an angel explain the answer to these questions, under the theme: **Who will this child be? The angel tells us:** 1) *He is Jesus, the LORD's Savior.* 2) *He is Immanuel, God with us.*

Part 1: He is Jesus, the LORD's Savior

Our text begins: *<sup>18</sup>This is how the birth of Jesus Christ took place. His mother, Mary, was pledged in marriage to Joseph.*

Please understand their situation correctly: Mary and Joseph were not merely engaged. According to the custom of their culture, their pledge made them legally married in the eyes of the state. To put it in modern terms, it's as if Mary and Joseph signed and legally submitted their marriage license months before having the actual ceremony. However, because they both highly honored

the estate of marriage, they agreed not to come together as husband and wife until after their planned, wedding feast. But. . .

*Before they came together, she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.*

We don't know whether Mary told Joseph about her pregnancy or he found out on his own, but I am convinced that (after he found out) Mary did her best to explain to Joseph about the angel's visit, that she still was a virgin and that the baby inside of her was from the Holy Spirit. But Joseph still saw the sad fact: Mary was pregnant and the baby was not his child."

<sup>19</sup>*Joseph, her husband, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her. So he decided to divorce her privately.*

I certainly feel for Joseph. I can imagine him thinking: "Mary is a God-fearing woman. She isn't one to lie to me. Her relative, Elizabeth, is strangely pregnant in her old age. Could Mary be telling the truth? And if she is, what does this mean for me? But then again, how can I know for certain? Whose child is she carrying?"

Mary seemed to have committed adultery, which was punishable by death. But Joseph loved Mary dearly. He didn't want her to suffer public disgrace. Maybe he even wanted to believe what she said, but couldn't. That's probably why he decided that it would be best if he used some lame excuse other than adultery to get a divorce. No one would think anything about it and Mary would be safe.

<sup>20</sup>*But as he was considering these things, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup>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."*

God gave Joseph the reassurance and direction he needed by sending an angel. Notice that the angel calls Joseph a "son of David," reminding him of the prophecy that the Messiah would come from the house and line of David, to which both he and Mary belonged.

Then the angel reassured him that what his wife told him about the baby was true: Mary had not cheated on him. She was still a virgin. The baby inside her was conceived from the Holy Spirit - brought about by the will of God. The LORD chose Mary to be the mother of the promised Savior and wanted Joseph to be her husband - protecting and providing for both mother and child.

And, acting as the baby's earthly father, Joseph was to name him Jesus - the Greek version of the Hebrew name Joshua, which literally means, "The LORD's Savior." Yes, Jesus' name would perfectly describe who he is and what he came to do.

Now, there are certainly many different kinds of "saviors" on this earth. Firefighters, paramedics, doctors, and charitable people (just to name a few) all save people in one way or another. What would make Jesus different from all these kind of saviors? The angel tells us: "*he will save his people from their sins.*"

And what is sin? It's both the desire and act of breaking God's holy Law. Sin infects us so thoroughly that it corrupts our nature. Because of sin we love evil, and not what is good. This is plainly evident every time we turn on the TV and see so called "entertainment," which glorifies sex, violence, greed and pride. But we don't even need to turn on the TV to know this. All we need to do is look into our hearts and take note of our thoughts, which often put "self" first and think poorly of others. Our own hearts testify of our rebellious sin, as we covet the things that don't belong to us and blame God for all that is wrong in the world. Sin separates us from God. Because of sin we deserve God's eternal punishment in hell.

But God the Father didn't want us lost to the depths of hell. This is why he promised to send a Savior from sin: someone who would both perfectly keep God's Holy Law in our place and suffer the punishment we deserve. By doing these two things, our Savior would satisfy God's justice and win our salvation.

However, no mere man could ever accomplish these things. This is why our Savior had to be both true God and man in one person: so that he could be under the law and die, and apply his perfect life, innocent death and glorious resurrection to all. This is why Jesus had to be born of a virgin birth. The Lord's Savior couldn't just be a mere man. He needed to be God with us!

## Part 2: He is Immanuel, God with us.

The angel continued: <sup>22</sup>*All this happened to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: <sup>23</sup>"Look, the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son. And they will name him Immanuel," which means, "God with us."*

Wonder above all wonders – just think about what the name Immanuel means! The Creator united himself with his creation in a way that seems unimaginable. Our God left his glorious, heavenly home to take on human flesh and blood in the womb of a virgin. He became one with his rebellious creation in order to save them.

Immanuel – God with us. What a wonderful name! God became like you and me. He was tempted in every way as we are, with one very important exception: he remained sinless. He suffered pain, sorrow and death, just like we do, in order that we might become like him: sinless, holy and loved by God. Because He rose from the dead, we too will rise from the dead. Because he ascended into heaven, we too will ascend into heaven. Because he has eternal life, we too will have eternal life. The LORD will accomplish this for everyone who holds on to him in repentance and faith.

And our God wasn't just with humanity when Jesus was born and walked this earth. He is with us now, as he promised, *"surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*<sup>ii</sup> God is with us in worship, as we gather around his Gospel. He is with us when we partake of the Lord's Supper, receiving the very body and blood he used on the cross to forgive our sins. Jesus promises to make his dwelling in every believer's heart – guiding and directing us through life as we meditate on His Word.

How can our hearts not jump for joy? What a wonderful revelation the angel gave Joseph: God was fulfilling his promise. Who would Mary's child be? He would be mankind's Savior from sin. He would be God with us.

And what was Joseph's response to this wonderful news? <sup>24</sup>*When Joseph woke up from his sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him. He took Mary home as his wife, <sup>25</sup>but he was not intimate with her until she gave birth to her firstborn son. And he named him Jesus.*

God gave Joseph the responsibility of being a husband to Mary and a father to her son. Joseph believed the Lord's message and performed his duty with great zeal. Because he obeyed, Jesus would be born into a family, and would not be considered a child of sin. Joseph also refrained from having any intimate union with his wife until after God's Son was born – thereby making sure that the virgin birth would remain unquestioned. At the baby's birth Joseph gave him the name Jesus and made sure to take care of both his wife and her child as best he could.

Now, what is our response to the angel's news? In one week we will be celebrating Christmas. God has graciously revealed to us who Jesus is and why his birth is important: He is our promised Savior from sin. He is God with us. Like Joseph, we too have been awakened to this knowledge. Are we now going to just sit here and go back to sleep, or are we, like Joseph, going to act out of faith? The message is certainly compelling us to act! Let us prepare for Christmas by encouraging one another to come and meditate on the blessed news of Jesus' birth. Invite your family and friends who aren't here today to come, see and experience Immanuel – God with us – this Christmas. Explain to them why you celebrate his birth. Tell them what meaning God's gift of the Savior has for their life. Then we will all be ready to receive God's Son with joy this Christmas, understanding how Jesus' birth is one of the greatest demonstrations of God's love for all mankind. Amen

---

<sup>i</sup> Matthew 28:20 NIV84