

Christmas Really Is A Big Deal Matthew 1:21-23

This morning I want to invite you to look at the gospel account of Matthew, chapter 1, vs. 21-23. Let's read it together.

“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:

“‘the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel’” – which means ‘God with us.’”

We begin in verse 21 with the big proclamation about the child.

I. THE BIG PROCLAMATION ABOUT THE CHILD – v. 21

I am grateful for the Gospels. They call our attention back in time to events around the life of Jesus. They are filled with highs and lows: His birth and death; His miracles and betrayal; His resurrection and rejection. Reviewing the narrative of Jesus' history from the gospels is an important exercise for us to be reminded of the impact His life has had on us. It also reminds us to look back and consider the highs and lows of our past year putting into perspective God's eternal plan in all of them.

This past year has been no exception. It's been filled with highs and lows. The unexpected partings of loved ones left us wondering about the plans and timing of an omniscient and omnipotent God who could have changed the course of some events but only in His wisdom did He move forward with those difficult plans. Even we at times question His wisdom, but, we must remain confident that He knows the plans He has for us.

But we have also welcomed other news that is to us good news, if you will, of great joy. If you aren't

aware, several weeks ago there was a festive spirit in the home of one of our church families. Luke and Sarah found out that they will be welcoming a new member into their family in 2018. Gathered around family and friends they had a *reveal party*. That's all the rave these days for those who choose to know the gender of their child before he or she arrives on the scene and then share the news with others in some creative way.

So it was on a Saturday several weeks ago that a party was planned with a big decorated box and at a designated time was opened to reveal they will be having a little girl. Joey was perhaps more excited about the balloons than he was about the baby.

In our passage we are taking a glimpse back at the birth narrative surrounding Joseph. He is engaged to Mary. She is pregnant but not by him, which leaves him pondering how he can resolve this very precarious situation. Not wanting to publically shame her any more than she must have already felt he considered his options. One night while wrestling with his thoughts an angel visits him and explains briefly what was going on reassuring him and revealing to him that this was God's plan.

From our text we read that God gave a reveal party to Joseph.

A. A Revealing Party – v. 21a

The difference between the reveal party for Luke and Sarah and the one for Joseph is that he was all alone. There was an entirely different spirit or mood then. He wasn't in a festive mood. He had some serious misgivings. It was a huge dilemma. I'm sure it was painful to consider what was happening and what he thought he needed to do. He was all alone and one has to wonder what emotional support he had during this difficult time.

No wonder God sent His special emissary to have a private reveal party. Joseph needed to be told what

was happening and why. “She, Mary, will give birth to a son.” No balloons, no party poppers, no desserts, just a message from an angel in a dream.

In the previous verse he is told how it happened. It didn’t happen in some moment of heated passion that led to a wrong decision on Mary’s part. In Luke 1 we read that she had found favor with God. The root of the word favor is grace. Mary had received grace from God to be the birth mother of the Savior. God had done it.

And neither did it happen where she was molested in some dark ally.

The angel explained to Joseph that what had happened to her was a miraculous act of the Holy Spirit of God who brought about this conception.

We aren’t told if Joseph connected the prophetic dots so that he immediately remembered the Old Testament prophecy about the virgin who would give birth to the Messiah. Matthew adds that connection for us in the next verses and we’ll get to that in a moment. For now Joseph needed a personal and private reveal party.

The angel revealed the gender.

Next we see a revealing person.

B. A Revealing Person – v. 21b

Everyone has a name some are common. Some are, well, unique.

Actor Nicolas Cage named his son Kal-El after Superman.

Actor Jason Lee named his son Pilot Inspektor.

Actor Sylvester Stalone named his son Sage Moonblood.

Singer Bono named his daughter Memphis Eve.

Actor Forest Whittaker (if that doesn’t say enough already) named his son Ocean because, as he explained, wants his son to be expansive.

Then there are names like Blue Angel, Audio Science, Moon Unit, Moxie Crimefighter, and Tu Morrow, none of which I’m not making up.

Actress Gwyneth Paltrow named her daughter Apple explaining that it “sounded so sweet and conjured up such a lovely picture for me – apples are so sweet and they’re wholesome and it’s biblical – and it just sounded so lovely and clean.”

The angel told Joseph what to name this boy. “and you are to give Him the name Jesus.”

Jesus was not a random name but a name full of meaning. The name Jesus was not uncommon in those days. Other Jewish boys were given that name, not because it was hoped they would be the Savior for that’s what the name means. Names then had meaning and significance. That others before this child was born had that name did not in any way diminish the importance of this child being given that name.

It is equivalent to the Hebrew name Joshua both of which mean Savior.

Joshua was given that name by Moses as he was to physically lead the nation of Israel into the Promised Land.

This Jesus was to have that name as He would lead people spiritually into the Promised Land of heaven through salvation.

That it was given to other Jewish boys didn’t mean that the hopes of salvation were in some way pinned to that child being the promised Messiah. They were given that name as a way of looking forward to the salvation the true Messiah would bring. It was a name of hope

But here is this one whose name was to be Jesus who would be the hope of people who believed on Him. It is a precious name. It is a sweet name.

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,

There’s just something about that name.

Master, Savior, Jesus,

Like the fragrance after the rain.

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,

Let all heaven and earth proclaim,
King's and kingdoms will all pass away,
But there's something about that name.

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There is a name I love to hear,
I love to sing its worth;
It sounds like music in my ear,
The sweetest name on earth.
O how I love Jesus.

Jesus is the sweetest name I know,
And He's just the same as His lovely name,
And that's the reason why I love Him so;
O Jesus is the sweetest name I know.

Precious Name, oh, how sweet!
Hope of earth and joy of Heav'n;
Precious Name, oh, how sweet!
Hope of earth and joy of Heav'n.

The angel revealed the name of Jesus to Joseph, a name that reveals something about His identity and purpose.

C. A Revealing Purpose – v. 21c

“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.”

Just as His name implies He will save us from our sin.

Greek scholar A. T. Robertson writes “Jesus will save us away from and out of our sins. They (sins) will be cast into oblivion and He will cover them up out of sight.”

This Jesus, born 2,000 years ago would save us from sin's penalty, save us from sin's power, and save us from sin's presence. It implies deliverance, safety, preservation, and healing. He came to save us from the spiritual mess we are in from sin.

The angel told Joseph why this child would be born. His purpose seen in the name given to Him was to save us from sin.

Sin means to miss the mark and refers to a failure to keep the law. The Bible is clear that we have all sinned or missed the mark. The mark we have missed is God's standard of perfection. None of us is even close and Jesus came to save us. By accepting Him as Savior He clothes us with His righteousness. As God looks at us He sees the perfect nature of His Son in us. There is salvation in His name because of who He is and what He has done in dying on the cross for us.

If I were to write you a check for a million dollars and you went to the bank to cash that check you would probably be laughed out of the bank because you would find that the check is worthless. I don't have that kind of money. As far as the bank is concerned my name is no good. But if Bill Gates or President Trump were to give you a check for one million dollars, you would find that the check is worth what it says because their names are good for it. It's all in the name.

The name of Jesus is able to save because His name is good for it. There is saving value in His name and in no other name.

During His ministry Jesus stated His purpose that He came to seek and save the lost. (Mark 10:45)

It was a big proclamation about the child as it revealed who He was and why He was coming to be born.

It was also the best prophecy about the child.

II. THE BEST PROPHECY ABOUT THE CHILD – vs. 22-23

Matthew helps to substantiate the message of the angel through an Old Testament prophecy, a message that will put Joseph's mind at ease. He

first of all talks about the prophecy being fulfilled.

A. The Prophecy Is Fulfilled – v. 22

A lot of people do their shopping online with Amazon. If you need it they probably have it, and if you need it fast they work to get it there on time. I learned this week that Amazon has what they call the Fulfillment Center. There are 80 Fulfillment Centers worldwide to guarantee you get your package on time and just in time to be under your tree for Christmas.

Now they may claim to be on time, but like any other business they have a loophole because quite honestly no company can guarantee 100% satisfaction 100% of the time in delivery. When I place an order they always send an email confirmation with an expected delivery date. With that confirmation they give a tracking number so you can follow the progress of your package's delivery. For those of you familiar with their shipping you have noticed at the top of the page a note informing you about possible delays. For example, this past fall when hurricanes hit the east coast a note said they were closely tracking the weather conditions and deliveries may be delayed. So while they make every effort to fulfill your order, they can't guarantee it 100% of the time. Other factor outside their control can mess up the timetable.

Matthew writes that what took place was to fulfill what the Lord said through the prophet. This is the first of 47 Old Testament prophecies quoted by Matthew. Because his audience was primarily Jews it was important to make the reference to the Old Testament to substantiate that what was written in the Old Testament was being fulfilled or completed in the New Testament. He is lending credibility to the divine origin and accuracy of Scripture. If the Old Testament said it, it would come true. Matthew is saying that what the angel proclaimed to Joseph, this Jesus was the fulfillment of what was

written by the Old Testament prophet, something that was written 700 years earlier.

Matthew says that all this took place as promised in the Old Testament. What was fulfilled was foretold.

B. The Prophecy Is Foretold – v. 23

Matthew quotes from Isaiah 7:14. In the context of the prophecy two kings had formed an alliance to fight against King Ahaz of Judah. To bolster the king's faith so he wouldn't be afraid, Ahaz was told to ask for a sign of God's deliverance. The attack wasn't going to happen. God was telling Ahaz that Israel wouldn't exist in the future. 65 years later Assyria would destroy Israel and take them away as captives while Judah would remain. God wanted Ahaz to have faith through a sign that would be given to him, but the king refused to accept a sign. His refusal was a rejection of God. God said nevertheless a sign would be given to confirm the message: "the virgin will be with child and you will call His name Immanuel, which means 'God with us.'"

The sign was not a young woman as some translate the word. She was a virgin who had never been intimate with a man. If the sign was a young woman implying that she was married, where is the miracle in that, that happens 1000's a time each day all over the world. The promised Messiah had to be born of a virgin in order to save. He had to be both God and man. He could not be from the seed of a man because then the sin nature would have been passed on to him and he would be a sinner like everyone else. In Genesis 3:15 we are given the promise from God that the Redeemer would come from the seed of a woman. The essence of the gospel hinges on the virgin birth.

In the 4th century a Bible teacher by the name of Arius denied the virgin birth teaching that Jesus was not deity just an ordinary man. Nicholas, Bishop of Myra, rose to refute this heresy at a meeting in

Nicaea in AD 325. From that important meeting came what is known as the Nicæan Creed that adamantly insisted on the virgin birth.

Unless Jesus is born of a virgin He cannot be God with us. And if He is not God with us, He cannot save us. And if He cannot save us, then He is just like us. Only Jesus as both God and man could die and atone for sin. But if He is just another man, He couldn't even save Himself, let alone anyone else.

He is Immanuel – God with us. Immanuel isn't a title or even a name. It is a characterization of Jesus. He is the one who became flesh and dwelt among, the one who has made God known to us.

J. Vernon McGee has written “He was never called Immanuel. But you cannot call Him Jesus unless He is Immanuel, God with us. He must be Immanuel to be the Savior of the world. That is how important the virgin birth is.”

The virgin birth is essential to the gospel narrative. He is not God if He had a human father, the Bible is false, we have no Savior, and we are still lost in sin. But Scripture is clear that “in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God...and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” (John 1:1, 14)

Matthew Henry writes that God is with us to save us from sin so that we in turn might be with God. Here is the wonderful promise proclaimed by the prophet fulfilled in the person of Jesus.

But the fact is God has always been with us. This wonderful promise is throughout Scripture. Hebrews 13:5 “I will never leave you or forsake you.”

Matthew 28:20 “I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Isaiah 41:10 “Fear not for I am with you.”

Psalm 23:4 “I will fear no evil, for You are with me.”

When we trust Christ as Savior, God is with us through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Looking back over this past year maybe you have questioned that promise. Unforeseen, even unwelcome circumstances can cause us to wonder if that promise is true. We can feel alone and discouraged wondering if God's silence is His absence. It had been 400 years since God last spoke to His people. In that time they had been through a lot as a nation. I'm sure there were many who remained skeptical about God's presence.

Whatever this past year held for you, rest assured in this promise that God is with you. It is recorded for us in prophecy. It is a promise of God's presence with us all the time. It was fulfilled in the person of Jesus born 2,000 years ago that He might be God with you.

J.B. Phillips wrote a fanciful story about two angels, a senior angel and a junior angel who was being shown the wonders of the universe. They passed by whirling galaxies and blazing suns but paused to observe a small galaxy of 500 billion stars. Listen into a portion of the conversation.

“As the two of them drew near to the star which we call our sun and to its circling planets, the senior angel pointed to a small and rather insignificant sphere turning very slowly on its axis. It looked as dull as a dirty tennis-ball to the little angel, whose mind was filled with the size and glory of what he had seen.

‘I want you to watch that one particularly,’ said the senior angel, pointing with his finger.

‘Well, it looks very small and rather dirty to me,’ said the little angel. ‘What's special about that one?’

‘Do you mean that our great and glorious Prince...went down in Person to this fifth-rate little ball? Why should He do a thing like that?’...

The little angel’s face wrinkled in disgust. ‘Do you mean to tell me,’ he said, ‘that He stooped so low as to become one of those creeping, crawling creatures of that floating ball?’

‘I do, and I don’t think He would like you to call them ‘creeping, crawling creatures’ in that tone of voice. For, strange as it may seem to us, He loves them. He went down to visit them to lift them up to become like Him.’

The little angel looked blank. Such a thought was almost beyond his comprehension.”

Philip Yancey writes “It is almost beyond my comprehension too, and yet I accept that this notion is the key to understanding Christmas and is, in fact, the touchstone of my faith.”

If we accept as truth the account of Jesus’ birth, that God is truly come to be with us, to save us, let that fact erase our fear and give us hope and peace not just for the future, but for today, for each day through the salvation we find in Him. And so we gladly lift our hearts in praise to sing:

Joy to the world! the Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King.
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And heav’n and nature sing,
And heav’n and nature sing,
And heav’n and heav’n and nature sing.

Let the proclamation about the child and the prophecy about the child be the promise you cling to in the year ahead. His coming was revealed as a way to affirm the promise and reassure our hearts that God is with us.

John 14:1-3

Christmas really is a big deal.