



## Immanuel – God With Us

*Series: Matthew: The King and His Kingdom*

Matthew 1:18-25

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**Introduction** Last week as we began this study of the Gospel of Matthew, you remember that we saw that as Matthew constructed his genealogy, one of the chief things that he meant for his readers to have a handle on was Christ's place as the Son of David, as the rightful King over the nation of Israel. But not only is he concerned to paint the portrait of Jesus as the true Messiah but also as Immanuel – God incarnate with His people. Having established Jesus' royal lineage through Christ, now we see in this record of Joseph and the angel, a record of the divine origin of Christ.

**1) Setting the Scene (v. 18-19)** As Matthew begins to unfold for us the circumstances surrounding the conception and birth of Jesus Christ, we get an insight into the marriage customs of the Jews as well as the character of Joseph. To understand what is going on here, we need to understand the nature of Jewish betrothal. Often it is compared with engagement, but betrothal was something far more serious and weighty. Marriages were arranged for individuals by parents, and contracts were negotiated and were publically acknowledged by the families. The grooms family would pay a dowry price to the bride's family and from that point on, they were considered to be betrothed to one another, though for a period of about a year, the woman in the relationship would live with her family under her father's care until the marriage was consummated. During the waiting period, they were referred to as husband and wife. The reason for the waiting period was to demonstrate the faithfulness of the pledge of purity given concerning the bride, to demonstrate that she was pure and was faithful to the marriage arrangement. At the end of the waiting period, the husband would then go to the house of the bride's parents and in a grand processional march lead his bride back to his home. That was the expectation that Joseph had for he and Mary, so you can imagine the shock and the sorrow that came with the discovery that Mary was pregnant.

In fact the phrase “found to be” is a Hebrew idiom or expression that is used to communicate shock. Joseph is shocked and hurt that the woman that he is to marry has, from his perspective, been unfaithful. She had sinned against God and against him. We don’t know the details of how Joseph finds out. We can only imagine that it was Mary who told him and that she told him that she was pregnant with the Son of God. And though Matthew is quick to remind us that she is pregnant with a child from the Holy Spirit, Joseph, as of yet does not know this for certain. Can you imagine being Joseph here? How would any of us respond to that? Don’t think about this knowing the end of the story as we look at the beginning. Maybe he thinks that she is crazy. Maybe he thinks that she is caught red-handed and so she is spinning a tale. I don’t know. But his response to this devastating news gives us some great insight into the character of the man whom God chose to be the earthly father of Jesus.

Matthew tells us that Joseph that he is a just man, a righteous man. In other words, Joseph is a man of faith. He is a man who is concerned for God’s law and for the righteousness that it demands. But we see that, not only is Joseph a righteous man, his righteousness is not some sort of cold and impersonal righteousness, but instead it is righteousness that is mixed with mercy. Though his heart is broken, Joseph does not desire to be harsh and ruthless – and there is a kind of cold righteousness that is like that – but he desires to be gracious and kind. Joseph loves Mary. Though the law would have allowed him to pursue the death penalty for her – **(Deuteronomy 22:23–24, ESV)** – not only does he not pursue the death penalty, but Joseph’s heart is not even to publically shame her by exposing her as an adulteress. Mercifully, this man who had been shamed by Mary’s apparent infidelity, was satisfied to divorce her quietly without any display of anger, resentment and bitterness. He loves Mary and he does not desire her destruction, but neither can he overlook the commands of God’s law. He is a righteous man. He will not participate in what appears to him to be sin, but he is also a gracious man and he determines not to shame Mary publically.

What a great lesson for us is found here. How often we are quick to declare that we are standing up for righteousness’ sake when we are offended, demanding judgment, demanding every last ounce of retribution. We don’t see that in Joseph. Though it seems that he has been sinned against, though it seems that Mary has broken her vows, though it seems that he has been greatly sinned against, the heart of Joseph is mercy – not that he overlooks the apparent offense – that is not it, that is not real righteousness. What we see from the perspective of Joseph, who is under the impression that Mary has sinned against him is not unlike the commands of Romans 12:19-21: **(Romans 12:19–21, ESV)** So Joseph is

content to put Mary away quietly, to break his fellowship with her and to end the marriage contract. Joseph must have been thinking that perhaps his mercy will bring her to repentance. At any rate, Joseph is satisfied to entrust Mary's judgment, the avenging of this apparent sin, to God. And that is how it would have ended had it not been for an

**2) Angelic Intervention (v. 20-21)** As Joseph was considering, working through and thinking about these things, the angel of the Lord appears to Joseph, bringing with him a distinct and clear message. Calling him the "son of David," we are reminded again that Joseph must be the stepfather to Jesus so that He will have a legitimate claim to the throne of Israel, so that He can be the final Son of David. The angel appears to him in a dream and the message that he brings is distinct and decisive for Joseph.

The angel gives to Joseph very clear insight into the nature and the person of this child that is growing in Mary's womb. This child is conceived of the Holy Spirit. He is the Son of God and you will be his father. This is not like the foolish and fanciful and sordid and foul stories of the pagans in which the gods come down to earth and lie with women. Here is the truth, elegant and graceful and simple. The Holy Spirit, by His divine creative power causes Mary to be with Child. That is what the angel is saying here. Do not miss the significance of two things here. First, the angel commands Joseph to name the child. To name this Child meant that Joseph was taking Him as his son, adopting him into his family adopting him into the line of David. That is significant. But as well we need to see that the name that Joseph is command to give to this Son is significant as well.

**A common name with uncommon significance:** The name itself, Jesus, as we have said before is not an uncommon name. It is "Yeshua" in Hebrew, Joshua in Greek. It means "Yahweh saves" or "Yahweh is salvation." It was a common name. But the reasoning behind the name is what gives it uncommon significance. The angel tells Joseph to name the Child Jesus, not because it is a family name, but because **he will save his people from their sins**. What we see from the very beginning in this announcement of the angel is that the birth of Christ and the cross are inseparable.

**He will save His people from their sins** – He, Jesus, will save his people from their sins. The angel's declaration here is emphatic and particular. The angel means for Joseph and for us to

know that Jesus and no one else saves, not temporally and not eternally. It is Christ alone. This declaration is meant to cut loose every idolatrous hope and reliance that we have in our lives. Jesus alone is to be our hope. Jesus alone is to have our trust. Jesus alone is to be our greatest desire because Jesus alone saves. **(Acts 4:12, ESV)** The angel is announcing the exclusive nature of Christ. All of our salvation resides in one person.

**He will save His people from their sins** -- We are to see that the salvation that comes through Christ is a definite and completely accomplished work of Jesus Christ for all the redeemed of every age. Jesus did not come and die upon the cross to potentially secure salvation for some who may or may not hopefully at one point in the future be saved. It is not that Jesus made men savable or potentially delivered His people. It is not that Jesus desperately wants to save people, nor that he longs to save people, nor that he has done all that he can do to save people and now it is up to them. No, no, a thousand times no! That is not what the angel said. The angel said, He will save His people from their sins and in time He did. On the cross, as He suffered, the just for the unjust, Jesus saved His people. He cried out “It is finished” as He saved His people. Christ did not give his life a ransom for people in general. He actually saved his people from their sins. His death was effective. His sacrifice was effectual; it saved His people. This is a definite atonement, a particular redemption. Jesus died to save His people, those elect of God, chosen before the foundation of the world. He saved those whom the Father has given to the Son. It is why Jesus would pray in John 17 before going to the cross saying **(John 17:1–2, ESV)** Those whom Christ purposed to save, He saved. All whom the Father has given to the Son will come to Him and of those, Jesus will lose none. **(John 6:37–39, ESV)** No, by the testimony of the angel we are to understand that this is a salvation that he has fully accomplished and which he has accomplished specifically for His people. And last we need to see that this is a salvation that is full and complete. The angel said:

**He will save His people from their sins** –What does it mean – “from their sins”? Jesus will rescue us from our sins – from the penalty and from the power of our sin. He saves us from the penalty of our sins, from the eternal punishment of hell, from divine wrath that our sins deserve. But even more He has saved us from the power and dominion of sin in our daily lives, conforming us more and more every day into His image. There are so many who have a deficient view of salvation, a deficient view of the work of Christ to save us. To hold to a Jesus that saves from the penalty of sin but not the power of sin, a Jesus who delivers you from God’s wrath but leaves you hopelessly entangled in sin and mastered by it is to

severely misunderstand and devalue the power of Christ's blood and His work of salvation at best, or at worst, not to know the true Christ of the Scriptures at all.

So the sum of what the angels said to Joseph in a dream is this: Do not shrink back from taking Mary as your wife. Do not shrink back from your calling from God to care for this woman and for the Child who is in her womb. Do not shrink back from this calling, though it is difficult and costly. Oh beloved, make no mistake, this calling upon Joseph *is* difficult and costly, faithful discipleship always is. I fear sometimes that we romanticize the difficult nature of Joseph's obedience to God. This was no fairytale romance that we are reading. This is a picture of the nature of true discipleship and true discipleship requires costly obedience. This child, whom Joseph was being commanded to take as his own, would one day say of the nature of true discipleship: **(Matthew 16:24–26, ESV)** This was not the life that Joseph had planned, but it was the life for which he had been created and he was obedient to the calling to it. As Matthew records for us: **(Matthew 1:24–25, ESV)** Here we see in Joseph the very heart of discipleship displayed – obedience. Obedience is the evidence of true faith. It is faith visible, faith acting, and faith manifest. It is the test of reality among those who claim to be the Lord's people. Last, Matthew would not have us miss the

**3) Prophetic Significance (v. 22-23)** Quoting from the prophet Isaiah, Matthew writes: ***“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).”*** **(Matthew 1:22–23, ESV)**

In what will become a common occurrence before the end of our study of this gospel, Matthew draws a line connecting OT prophecy to personal fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ. Quoting from the prophet Isaiah, Matthew means to show us that Jesus Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of the Immanuel prophecy made in Isaiah 7. Let me show you what he is doing here.

Matthew is referring to a prophecy that Isaiah made to the king of Judah named Ahaz. Ahaz was a wicked king. Last week I told you that Ahaz worshipped the pagan gods of Assyria, practiced human sacrifice, killed one of his own sons, stripped the gold and silver from the temple, and defiled the Lord's altar. In Isaiah 7, King Ahaz and he nation of Judah are in a

tough spot. Israel and Aram, now modern day Syria, joined forces to attack Judah and to divide it and place on the throne a puppet king called “the son of Tabeel.” Never one to trust in the Lord, Ahaz instead decided to make a treaty with the king of Assyria and throw all of his hope for deliverance on this earthly king.

Graciously God commanded Isaiah to take his son Shear-jashub (“A remnant shall return”) and meet Ahaz as the king was inspecting the city’s water system. Ahaz’s heart had been wavering, and the hearts of his people had been shaking for fear but Isaiah came with a message of assurance: **(Isaiah 7:4, ESV)** The Lord was promising that their plot would not stand; saying that, within sixty-five years, the hostile northern kingdom of Israel would be broken and would cease to be a people. All Ahaz had to do was to trust in God to deliver him and the nation. Again this was all of God’s grace. He did not deserve this intervention by God. The Lord invited this wicked and weak king to repentance and to trust in God and in His promises saying in **(Isaiah 7:9, ESV)** Further displaying His grace we read in Isaiah 7: **“Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.” (Isaiah 7:11–12, ESV)**

God offers to do a sign for Ahaz to show his faithfulness and his power. He could have asked for anything. If he had been a man of faith, he would have asked a sign of God, he would have broken His alliance with the worldly King of Assyria and he would have called the nation to repentance and trust in to God, to prayer and praise; but the king continued in his unbelief putting on a pious front and refusing God’s offer.

So, instead of speaking only to the king, Isaiah addressed the whole “house of David” and gave the prophecy concerning “Immanuel.” **(Isaiah 7:13–17, ESV)**

God gives to Ahaz and to Judah the promise of the Immanuel, a child that would be the sign that God was with them. **Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.** The Hebrew word that Isaiah used for the virgin is 'almâ; and this particular word is the word someone would use to describe a young virgin who was about to become married. A woman who was then a virgin would get married, conceive, and bear a son whose name would be “Immanuel.” This son would be a reminder that God was with His people and would care for them and deliver Judah from Israel and Aram. As we read on into the next chapter of Isaiah, we find that the prophet did indeed take a woman - a prophetess – to be his wife. She was Isaiah’s second wife, his first wife having died after Shear-jashub was born; and this wife bore him a son who was given the name Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz - a name which means, "Quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil". He was a sign given to Ahaz to

show that these threatening enemies would indeed forsake their lands in a very short amount of time. In fact, as the Lord says, they would forsake their lands before the child was old enough to know the difference between right and wrong. Orthodox Jewish boys become “sons of the Law” at the age of twelve. This special son was a reminder that Syria and Ephraim would be out of the picture within the next twelve years. Isaiah delivered this prophecy in 734 B.C. In 732 B.C., Assyria defeated Syria; and in 722 B.C., Assyria invaded the Northern Kingdom. The prophecy of the Immanuel was fulfilled in the time of Isaiah in that way – fulfilled, little f.

But, because Ahaz and the hardened nation of Judah would not believe the sign of the Immanuel, the promise that God was with them and would deliver them, Isaiah warned him that Assyria would become Judah’s enemy. Throughout chapter 8, Isaiah shows the rulers of Judah the mistake they were making by trusting Assyria instead of trusting the Lord. In other words, Ahaz’s unbelief would bring judgment upon the people of Judah. Because of his unbelief and the hardness of the majority of Israel, Judah would become a vassal state, slaves to Assyria. Despite the wickedness of Ahaz and the unbelief of the majority of the nation, though, God did not allow Assyria to completely destroy Judah. But God did promise a future deliverer, a future Immanuel, a future child of promise. The darkness that was imposed by sin would be lifted by the coming of the true Immanuel, the enemies of the believing remnant – those still faithful to God – would be defeated by the true Immanuel, the great fulfillment of the promise of God’s deliverance of His covenant people would be found in this special child of whom Isaiah wrote saying: **(Isaiah 9:6–7, ESV)**

This, Matthew says, is the ultimate fulfillment of the Immanuel promise. The *ultimate* fulfillment of this prophecy is in our Lord Jesus Christ, who is “God with us”. Do you see it? The child that God promised to Isaiah through his bride-to-be was a real child. But he was also a "sign" - a "type – both sons were and Isaiah understood that – **(Isaiah 8:18, ESV)**

So we see that Christ is the true fulfillment of the Immanuel prophecy, that one that is born of the virgin, not in type only but in truth. He is the child born – true humanity and the Son who is given – full deity. He is the one truly born of the virgin, born to deliver His people. He is the fulfillment of the Immanuel prophecy. In light of this truth we can ask and answer two very important questions.

## **Does the virgin conception of Christ really matter?**

It does matter. Despite the post modern and emergent garbage of men like Rob Bell and others of his ilk, the virgin conception and birth of Christ is not a “spring on the trampoline of the Christian faith that can be removed and people continue to keep jumping” – which is his cutesy way of describing the Christian faith. That this prophecy is fulfilled in Christ, that He is conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin and born of that same virgin is absolutely vital to the true Christian faith.

Why? First, the virgin birth is essential to establish the deity of Jesus Christ. If He was born of a human father and mother according to the way of man, then He is not God in human flesh. His existence would have begun at conception, and thus He could not have been the eternal God in human flesh.

Moreover, the virgin birth is essential to establish the sinless humanity of Jesus Christ. If He was born of natural parents, then He was born a sinner like all human beings since the fall, and He would have needed a Savior for Himself. If He had sin of His own, He could not have died as the substitute for others. To be born as a man who fully shared our humanity, Jesus had to have a human parent. By the glorious work of the Holy Spirit in the virgin birth, Jesus was born as fully human and yet sinless. Although Mary herself was a sinner, Jesus, in a miracle of proportions we cannot even fathom, was kept from her sin and born as fully human, yet without sin.

***“Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh...”***(1 Timothy 3:16a, ESV)

It matters to fulfill prophecy. Matthew describes Isaiah 7:14 as being ultimately and completely fulfilled, big F, when this woman, Mary, who had not known a man, bore a Son by the Holy Spirit, and this Son is none other than “God with us.” Our salvation demands that God transcendent become God with us.

**Why does our salvation demand “God-with-us”? Why does our salvation require God to act to take on human flesh?**

(1) **Salvation is from the Lord.** Scripture clearly affirms over and over, "salvation is from the Lord". We see repeated in the OT and NT that God is always the originator and the accomplisher of salvation. David, the sweet sing of Israel, wrote (**Psalm 62:5–7, ESV**) In the book of Revelation we see this scene: (**Revelation 7:9–10, ESV**)

In both Testaments, God is always seen as the initiator and bringer of salvation. God is the one who saves sinners because sinners cannot save themselves. We have no power and we have no hope of salvation apart from the work of God. If we were to be delivered, God must intervene. He must deliver us from death and into eternal life. In fact, our Savior's given name is a reminder of that truth every time that we say it with understanding. Jesus – Yahweh saves. God saves. Man does not save himself. He cannot save others. God saves.

(2) **Our salvation demands God with us because the measure of man's offence against God requires that some one of infinite worth and power satisfy God's penalty against man for his sin and rejection of God and of His glory.** The divine penalty against man for his sin required that someone of infinite capability satisfy God's wrath. Sin against an infinitely holy God demands an infinite sacrifice for that sin. Man could not provide that sacrifice, only God could and only in the person of His glorious and perfect Son, **"the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature..."**(**Hebrews 1:3, ESV**), the one in whom **"all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell"**(**Colossians 1:19–20, ESV**) A finite man cannot bear, cannot satisfy an infinite demand for justice: (**Hebrews 9:26, ESV**) The Incarnation makes clear the infinite ability of the God-Man as our Substitute and Sin-bearer.

(3) **Our salvation demands that God put on human flesh in the incarnation because justice demands that the penalty of sin be paid by a human being.** The ones needing deliverance and salvation are men and women; the penalty for sin is against human beings. For that reason, justice demands that the penalty be satisfied either by every member of the human race or by One who is qualified to stand for men and women before the justice of God. (**Hebrews 2:17, ESV**) This need is met only in the Incarnation, as God became a man.

(4) **Our salvation demands that God put on human flesh because our salvation demands a perfect sacrifice.** He must become a man and dwell with us because in order to be a sacrifice that is qualified to turn away God's wrath, He must be a man, yet be fully free of sin,

having kept the law perfectly. He must prove His sinlessness and righteousness so that he would be a worthy sacrifice, free of blemish. Only Jesus, the God-man, qualifies.

**(5) Our salvation demands that God put on flesh and dwell with us because our salvation demands the blood of God.** The Redeemer must be capable of dying, of shedding His blood, since the penalty for sin is death and by the shedding of blood is the remission of sins. Yet His blood must be of such value as to secure by His death pardon for all whom God would redeem. In this, only the God man, Jesus, qualifies. He is God who bleeds and so God who saves.

Do you see? It is not by accident that Matthew, at the beginning of his gospel sets out to show us that Jesus is fully God and fully man. Jesus is the one who has taken to Himself human flesh with no diminishing of His deity. How vital this is. Apart from Jesus being both human and divine, there is no gospel. The incarnation of Jesus Christ is the central truth of Christianity. All of Christian theology, the whole of the gospel, all hope is built on this: that God became man and being both fully God and fully man, He alone could reconcile men to God and save His people from their sins. Jesus Christ's incarnation – his virgin birth, fully righteous life, His sacrificial, substitutionary atoning death, resurrection, ascension and return are all fundamental and essential aspects of His gospel. They all stand or fall together. To reject any of these truths is to reject the gospel itself. None of these aspects of Christ's life and ministry could have any significance or power apart from the others.

**4) Immanuel is with us – how will we respond?** What a great gift is this Immanuel, God-With-Us. If you will receive Him, He is Immanuel, the limitless-in-power, boundless-in-love, and gracious-to-save God With Us. He has visited us with redemption, with salvation. He is Jesus – God's appointed Savior. Unlike the rulers of this world who take names like Great, Conqueror, Bold, Magnificent, and the like, the Son of God was content to be called Savior. What an encouraging name to heavy laden sinners, a sweet name and precious to believers who have found in Him every promise of God to be Yes and Amen – eternal life, forgiveness, grace to stand, hope, joy, peace, provision, strength, endurance, abundant life. He is Immanuel God with us, and if you will receive Him, God for us.

But as Ahaz discovered, even if we do not receive Him, He is still God with Us, not to bless but to judge. Matthew wants us to know that the true Immanuel has come and he is either Immanuel come to bless or Immanuel come to curse. Some people respond to the birth of Jesus with indifference, much as Ahaz was indifferent to Isaiah's promise of Immanuel. They think it is a nice tradition and a good story that some people happen to believe. But that misses the whole point of what Matthew is saying. Immanuel is not an option for those who chose to embrace it. Immanuel is the truth whether one chooses to embrace it or not. Matthew declares that God is with us. If we believe, He is with us to save and to bless. If not, God is still with us to call us to repentance and faith. If you reject that, God is still with you as judge.

Immanuel is here... how will you respond?

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