

## **And They Shall Call His Name Immanuel**

### **Matthew 1:18-25**

**Key Verse 1:23, “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).”**

Today we hear the story of Jesus’ birth as written by Matthew. Matthew alone records that Jesus’ birth fulfills the prophecy of Immanuel, God with us. Two weeks ago, we learned from Missionary Stephen that God gave the promise of Immanuel 600 years before Christ. Last week we learned from Missionary Daniel that God kept the promise of Immanuel through 42 generations—through good times, bad times and every kind of time in between. Matthew could not help but proclaim that in the birth of Jesus God fulfilled his promise of Immanuel, “God with us.” It was a miracle, God’s gift, as evidence by the virgin being with child. “God with us” means so many things. It means God loves us. It means God has not given up on us. It means God wants to walk with us now and forever. Especially Immanuel saves us from our sins. It is the best news for all people. May God bless each of us to receive Immanuel this Christmas.

#### 1. God was with Joseph

The story of Immanuel’s birth begins with a romance. One pastor said, “There is no history without romance.” Let’s look at verse 18. “Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.” Luke focuses on Mary’s story, but Matthew spotlights Joseph. Joseph and Mary were an ordinary young couple from a small country town in Galilee. From the first time Joseph saw Mary, he must have dreamt about a beautiful life with her. He worked hard to prepare a future for them and finally, they were engaged. The wedding invitations were sent, and all was set. What a beautiful dream Joseph had.

However, one day, the unthinkable happened. The innocent, pure and devoted young woman, Mary, was found to be with child. Mary had become pregnant by the Holy Spirit to give birth to the Immanuel God, Jesus. Can you imagine Joseph’s shattered heart? How could this happen? It was impossible. But it was reality. Joseph had to decide what to do. According to the Law, he could have Mary stoned. At a minimum he could have her exposed and humiliated for life. What did he do?

Let’s look at verse 19, “And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.” Matthew comments that Mary’s

husband Joseph was a “just” man. The Greek word for “just” can also mean “righteous,” meaning “right with God”. It gives us a glimpse into Joseph’s mind and heart. Joseph’s priority was to be right with God. Even in this unbearable heartbreak, Joseph wanted to be right with God and please God. The words must have come to him, “love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength”, and “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:37-40). Many would want to exact revenge to reflect their hurt. But when Joseph sought to please God, God’s love through his word overcame the pain in his heart. Then he decided to divorce her quietly, to protect her and the baby.

What happened next? Look at verse 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.’” When Joseph sought to please God and was in his deepest agony, God sent an angel to comfort and guide him. God was indeed with Joseph! The angel explained everything to Joseph. He said Mary’s baby was from God himself through the Holy Spirit. He counseled Joseph not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife. Joseph could be afraid of marrying a woman already pregnant. He could be afraid of peoples’ reactions and being terribly misunderstood. But the angel said, “...do not fear to take Mary as your wife...” Through the angel’s words, Joseph had strength to overcome fear and fulfill God’s purpose for himself and Mary. God had chosen Joseph to be the human father of the Immanuel God Jesus. It shattered his human dream. But it was God’s glorious plan for him and his family. Through the angel’s message, Joseph could courageously continue God’s plan and be the human father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What do we think when we face impossible situations as Joseph did? Surely sometimes our hearts are broken. What should we do? Then we should remember what Joseph did. We need to do our best to be right with God and please him, especially by holding his word in our hearts and trusting that God is with us. Then we can wait for God to reveal himself to us. We can be filled with his love that surpasses understanding. This year we have witnessed a war in the Ukraine that no one imagined. In this time of unimaginable suffering, groups of people from the Ukraine and all over the world have been praying every day for God to end the war. They believe God will reveal his good will and they wait for Him. They are right before God. They pray to practice the love of God, overcoming hatred and proclaiming the gospel. How beautiful is their prayer. God may help us to seek to please God believing He is with us.

## 2. He Will Save His People from Their Sins

The angel continued his message to Joseph in verse 21, “She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” Now, the

angel focuses on the baby to be born. He said Mary would give birth to a boy and he was to give him the name Jesus. Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua, which means, "The Lord Saves." Then the angel said, "...for he will save his people from their sins." Naming the boy Jesus is incredibly significant. The name of Jesus is the source of spiritual power for salvation. Peter said in Acts 4:11 & 12, "This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." The name of Jesus brings salvation. Whenever someone proclaims Jesus' name, they proclaim, "The Lord saves!" Often we sing the hymn, "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name!" It is to shout faith that the name of Jesus saves.

The angel said that Jesus will save his people from their sins. What is sin? Sin is invisible. But is the deadliest enemy to mankind. The word "sin" means to cut our relationship with God. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden, they lost paradise and were cut off from God. Some are happy to be cut off from God. But God is the only source of life, and when they were cut off, they died. Then, until they died, they would live cursed lives. God told the man that because of his sin the land would produce thorns and thistles. We experience that without God, we work hard, but mostly produce thorns and thistles. Sin is the worst news for all mankind. But all have sinned. Romans 3:23 says, "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..." Human beings have no power to break the power of sin and death. I could not keep my father from getting old and dying of Covid last year. Sin even affected by cute dog, and she died last year too. We need a Savior from the curse of sin and death.

The angel said of Jesus, "...for he will save his people from their sins." This is the true meaning of Christmas. Jesus was born to become our Savior by taking our curse upon himself on the cross. Isaiah 53:5 says, "But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed." When Jesus was crucified, he bore all the punishment our sins deserve. He shed his holy blood in our place. Now anyone who looks up to Jesus on the cross with faith, receives forgiveness of sins. They no longer live under curse but live in God's blessing. They receive eternal life. There is a wonderful stanza in the famous hymn, "Joy To the World." It goes, "No more let sins and sorrows grow/Nor thorns infest the ground/He comes to make His blessings flow/Far as the curse is found/Far as the curse is found/Far as, far as the curse is found." In Jesus, who saves his people from their sins, we are no longer cursed, but have blessings flow. Amen!

Jesus also saves us from our sins every day. Sin is similar to the coronavirus—it keeps coming back and making people sick. There is no vaccine for sin. Only our Lord Jesus Christ has power save us from our sins. Jesus fights for us to defeat the power of

sin in our lives. When we call to Jesus, he saves us from our sin today and every day. When we studied the history of Israel in Jesus' genealogy, God's saw people's history was tragically marred by their sin. Even their best king David got caught in it. Surely Abraham's descendants wanted to love and serve God as his people, but they couldn't because of their sin. It's why their nation was divided and deported to Babylon. We're just the same as them. No matter how sincere we are, we're all helpless to our sin. We all need a Savior, every single one of us. Jesus was born "to save his people from their sins" (1:21). Praise God who kept his promise and sent his own Son to truly solve our problem of sin. In America today we face so many serious problems. There is gun violence, immorality, crime, anger, injustice, etc. We have to be very careful when driving not to spark road rage against us. With so many Christians in America, I thought it should be like a paradise. But it is not. The root cause is sin. We treat sin too casually. We need to be saved from our sins, so we can love and bless others with a pure heart. We pray for America to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. It means to be a shepherd nation and a prayer servant nation for the world. Then we can be a blessing to the each other and the world. May Jesus come to all of us and save us from our sins. May God heal our land through the birth of Jesus who saves us from our sins.

### 3. And They Shall Call His Name Immanuel

After the angel's message to Joseph, Matthew adds a comment on Jesus' birth. Verses 22 & 23 say, "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)." It must have astounded Matthew that Jesus, Immanuel, came to be with us. Jesus is the holy God. He lives in unapproachable light. On the other hand, our world is so dirty and wretched. But Jesus came to be with us. He took on human form to be recognized as one of us. He did not come as a super-being, but as one of us in every way. It is to be our friend. It is so we can trust him and have a relationship with him. How beautiful is our God who came to be with us!

Last month I heard something that surprised me. It is that the world population passed 8 billion. That is 8,000,000,000. Is it so many people. With so many people in the world, many wonder how anyone can care for them among so many needy people. They may wonder if they are important amongst this sea of humanity. It seems a main concern these days is identity—what makes me special amongst so many people. Some may feel like a number or a product of an assembly line. But it is not so. Jesus is Almighty God who came to be with each person. Moreover, to Jesus each person is unique. Did you know that each snowflake falling from the sky has its own design. It is true. God who made each snowflake, makes each person unique as well.

Why is this important? Jesus, our Immanuel God, came to be with us to show us our uniqueness and to be with us to grow our unique character to the end of our days. These days many people follow trends on TikTok or Instagram. They follow influencers to pattern their lives after, hoping to get recognition. But how can we be happy following the pattern of another person? Jesus came to be with us to show us who God created us to be and restore us to his image. He shows us God's will for our lives and gives us power to carry it out. Jesus came to be with us to give us abundant life. Jesus said in John 10:10, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." Peter wrote in 1 Peter 4:2, "...so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God." Jesus did not come to this world to be our genie. He came to be our Savior and give us abundant life. Jesus walks with us every day until we grow in this abundant life. Jesus came to be with us because we were lost. We were groping in the darkness. But praise Jesus who came to take us by the hand and lead us to God's purpose for us and his abundant life. Praise God for Jesus who will lead us to the kingdom of heaven to reign with him forever!

Matthew must have included that Jesus is Immanuel God because he experienced God with us in Jesus personally. Matthew was originally Levi. He must have thought God abandoned his people because there had not been a prophet for 400 years. He made a reasonable assumption that money was everything. To make money sold his conscience and betrayed his people by becoming tax collector. But it didn't turn out as he had expected. No one wanted to be around him, and he felt condemned in his soul. He ate his delicious meals in his home by himself and was avoided when he walked the streets. But one day, Jesus came up to his tax booth and said, "Follow me." It moved Matthew beyond what we can describe. Jesus wanted Levi to be with him and changed his name to Matthew. Matthew had symptoms of his selfishness exposed here and there. But Jesus bore with Matthew and loved him until Matthew was completely changed. Matthew became a new person who is known as the greatest teacher who ever lived and who wrote the Sermon on the Mount—the constitution of the kingdom of God.

One woman I know is a brilliant scientist. She received her PhD in Edinburgh Scotland and has worked as a post-doc at Northwestern University. She gave her life to further her career and her prestige. She worked on cancer treating drugs. But though she worked hard, she felt dead in her soul. She said, "Though I work on drugs to save lives, I feel like dying every day." Then Jesus visited her through several coworkers and later through 1:1 Bible study at UBF. She found the meaning of life in Jesus. She had been alone. But Jesus helped her to marry and have a beautiful baby boy. Now she still works on cancer drugs but serves Jesus and prays for her husband and son to be great men of God. Jesus walks with her every day and is growing her and her family to be a blessing.

I didn't know what I should do with my life, growing up kind of poor in Wisconsin. But I was introduced to music and decided it was the best life—I could play music and enjoy pleasure all my days. But I was caught by sin—especially immorality—and my life went nowhere. I thought my life was over at 25. But Jesus visited me through 1:1 Bible study. In Genesis Bible study I learned God created me to be a steward and blessing to the world. I found I had hope—me a nobody from the countryside like Joseph. Jesus was with me to study engineering from scratch especially through the sacrifice of many missionaries, so I could be self-supporting and live as a Bible teacher. He blessed me to establish a beautiful family. Then he was with me to give my music training to serve our music ministry for almost 30 years. It is astounding how Jesus has been with me. Praise Jesus who is Immanuel, God with us. Now as I approach retirement, I wonder what my future will hold. But I believe Jesus, our Immanuel God, will guide me into his purpose to the end of my days for his glory. Praise you Jesus who is with me now and forever.

When Joseph heard the angel's message, he immediately took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she birth to a son, and they named him Jesus.

Among the Gospel writers, Matthew alone quotes from Hosea, twice: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice" (9:13; 12:7). Immanuel Jesus is so merciful to be with sinners like us. And only Matthew quotes from Isaiah 42: "...a bruised reed he will not break..." (Mt 12:20). It's sin that makes us like a bruised reed, about to break, or a smoldering wick, about to be snuffed out. But no matter how broken or wounded we are, Immanuel Jesus in his great mercy is always with us, in his gentle, lowly heart, to nurse us back to spiritual health, as he was with Matthew. It's what the world needs most. Patient, merciful shepherds like our Immanuel Jesus, who are gentle and lowly and willing to be with those who wounded so deeply. This Christmas may we experience this grace personally and resolve to become more like him. May God bless each of you to receive Immanuel God Jesus. Merry Christmas!