

THEY WILL CALL HIM IMMANUEL

Matthew 1:18-25

Key Verse: 1:23

"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"--which means, 'God with us.'"

This passage is Matthew's Christmas message mainly for himself. In this story we learn about Joseph, who made an environment for the birth of Jesus. Especially we learn about the baby Jesus, who is the Immanuel God. May the Immanuel God come to you and be with you.

I. Joseph, a son of David (18-20,24,25)

As history attests, romance is the starting point of history: Where there is no romance, there is no history. Likewise, Matthew's Christmas message begins with a beautiful romance between Joseph and Mary. Look at verse 18a. "This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph...." Joseph was a country man who lived in the country town of Nazareth. Though Joseph was a carpenter, he was born in the lineage of King David. No doubt Joseph was very handsome and well-built, with a lofty and kingly bearing. Joseph was the right person to be married to Mary, the mother of Jesus. In God's providence, Joseph was engaged to her. According to Jewish custom, engagement was tantamount to marriage, but the couple had to spend one year of engagement time before the wedding. Obviously Joseph worked harder and harder day by day in the hope of getting together with Mary.

One day an unexpected thing happened to them. Look at verse 18b. "...but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit." As God had promised, a Savior of the world was to be born from the offspring of a woman (Ge 3:15). This Savior had to be a perfect man (Heb 4:15), and at the same time he had to be the perfect God. So Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit through the virgin Mary. This great work of God demanded that Joseph and Mary sacrifice their dream of happy marriage and a sweet home. Before marriage Mary had to bear a son--the Savior of the world. For this, Mary had to be pregnant by the Holy Spirit before she got together with Joseph.

What did Joseph do in this situation? Everybody knows that human beings are made up of 90% of emotional feelings and 10% of earth, as well as with the immortal soul of God. There is a story about a young man. He misunderstood someone who talked about his daughter. Then he became irrational and outrageous.

On the other hand, at the news of Mary's pregnancy, Joseph did not give in to his emotional turmoil, nor was his love transmuted into hatred. Joseph dealt with this problem in God. Verse 19 says, "Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly." It was the custom of the time to expose a woman who became pregnant before marriage to public disgrace, and then stone her to death. But Joseph made a decision in God not to expose Mary to public disgrace. The concept of Joseph in regard to God's righteousness is clear that love

of God is it's [foundation](#). Thinking is one thing and acting is another. How could he decide to help Mary? It was because he had personal faith in the righteous God. At that time, to [the Jewish](#) people, tradition was everything to them. But Joseph honored God's law more than tradition. Joseph did not mind breaking the Jewish tradition because of Mary. He was in for trouble. But he was not nervous. He did not look at the situation. He only looked at God in prayer.

However, there was a problem: If she were exposed to public disgrace, she might be stoned to death (Dt 22:20,21); if he were to hide her pregnancy, he would turn out to be a violator of Moses' law. Joseph was in a storm of life. It is certain that he knelt down and prayed earnestly, asking God's mercy on him. Then God gave him the power of faith to make a decision to save Mary at any cost. We learn from Joseph the quality of being a Christian at a crucial moment. He thought of God first, second of Mary, and lastly of himself. He did not care about himself, if only he could save Mary. We see in him the image of Jesus, who took up our infirmities and transgressions (Isa 53:4).

What happened next? Look at verse 20. "But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.'" When he woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. At that time, according to Jewish custom, it was beyond imagination for Joseph to bring pregnant Mary to his home; it was shame for his family; it was shame for his relatives; it was against the law of Moses. But Joseph took Mary home. Probably Joseph's family members pushed him out to sleep in the stable of an animal.

Look at verse 25. "But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus." Joseph was pure in heart. Even though he brought Mary home, he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. Humanly speaking, he was a carpenter. Spiritually speaking, he was a man who could see God. Matthew 5:8 says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." Thank God that we can see God when our hearts are pure. Joseph also gave him the name Jesus, as he was told by the angel of God. God was pleased with Joseph and used him to make an environment for the birth of Jesus. We must think about Joseph's pure heart seriously.

II. Jesus saves his people from their sins (21)

Look at verse 21. "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." The name Jesus means, "the Lord saves." In this verse, "his people" refers to the people of Israel. At that time, the people of Israel were under the oppression of the Roman Empire. They lived in constant fear and misery. All of them thought they were miserable because of the Roman occupation. But they were miserable not because of the Roman occupation but because of their sins.

Russian communists thought they were miserable because they could not share bread equally. When they could share bread among themselves equally, just as they had wanted they should be happy. But they were

still miserable, not because of human conditions, but because of their sins. Sin also torments sinsick people. One young man looked good outwardly, but he had a severe lust problem inwardly. He will get into his 30's in several months, but he is still a freshman. He determined to study well at the beginning of every semester. But in the middle of the semester he was habitually carried away by lustful desire, which is as strong as a locomotive.

We thank God that God saves us to overcome our carnal desire and press on the upward way. As we studied, Joseph was nothing but a country carpenter in Nazareth. But he had a loftiness and kingly bearing, because he was not ruled by his sinful desire but by the word of God. These days, in order to shape himself up, many a young man makes himself very strange and smelly especially in his sheepdog hairstyle. But it is not a fashionable style; it is the sign that he is a helplessly corrupted man. We should not live by peer pressure; we must live like Joseph. Even though we look very ordinary outwardly, we must have a kingly bearing. We children of God must have the kingly bearing of Jesus in our character.

III. Jesus, the Immanuel God (22,23)

Verses 22 and 23 tell us how Jesus, the Immanuel God, saves his people from their sins. Look at verse 23. "'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel'--which means, 'God with us.'" God saves us by being with us. Even New Guineans cannot be with other New Guineans who speak different dialects. "God with us" does not sound so impressive. But the Holy God Almighty being with sinsick people is mystery and full of grace and truth. God with us is like a mother being with her sick child, staying up all night to take care of him, shedding many tears. Even today, "God be with you" might be the best greeting to all helpless people. We cannot say to a dying patient, "Take care." Our God is the Immanuel God. What does "God with us" mean, and how was God with his people? Let's think about why our God is the God of Immanuel.

Before talking about the God of Immanuel, it seems good to think about how sinful human beings are. Sin has the connotation of separation or cutting off. There is a beautiful girl. She is so pretty like a tiger cub. But she is very sorrowful and her self-confidence is less than nothing. She is bright. But her school records are below average. It is because of her lifestyle. She cooked a boy with her womanliness and enjoyed him, and then she deeply regretted it. Her guilty conscience was tranquilized through Bible study. Then she caught another boy and enjoyed her fleeting pleasure of sin. She thinks that her lifestyle is normal. But she is not normal. She feels always that her existence is crumbling moment by moment. She must know the seriousness of sin. There are many young people like her. But God does not abandon them. He wants to be with them.

First, God was with his people Israel. God chose Israel as his people to raise them to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. When God brought them out of Egypt to the promised land flowing with milk and honey, he wanted them to proclaim the knowledge of God to all Gentile people. God wanted to overflow the world with the knowledge of God through his people. Amen. But living in the promised land, his people

only liked milk and honey. As a result, they abandoned God. They also abandoned God's holy mission for them. They became corrupt and useless to God.

God was sorry. God sent them into exile to Babylon for divine discipline. But God did not send them there by themselves; he was with them (Isa 43:2). God suffered together with them in the Babylonian captivity. God identified himself as a captive together with them. God was with them until the 70 years of captivity was over. According to Matthew 1:17, God was with his people for 42 generations, even though they were too sinful for him to be with. God never gave up to save them from their sins and to raise them as a nation of Bible teachers. God was with them until Christ the Savior of the world was born (1:17). We believe that God will be with us until this nation is raised as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Second, Jesus was with Matthew. In the time of Jesus there was a man named Levi. He was a tax collector. At that time, the people of Israel hated tax collectors extremely, branding them as quislings and enemies of the suffering people of Israel. The more the people of Israel were oppressed, the more they hated the tax collectors. As a young man, Matthew must have had a dream to be the greatest man who ever lived. But like all other young men, he had to figure out how to survive in this world. So he hardened his heart and chose to be realistic about his future. He became a tax collector, thinking that money could make him happy. His realistic idea made him very selfish. He did not care about his suffering people, if only he could make money. He did not mind losing his national identity, if only he could make money. Maybe he frequently pretended to be a Roman. But his conscience made him feel like a man with leprosy. There are two kinds of people in the world. One is lovely people, to whom we want to give whatever we have. The other is unconditionally hateful people. Levi was the hateful kind of people because of his selfishness. It was hard for anyone to be with him. As soon as he appeared on the street or in a restaurant, people and even dogs pretended to be busy and scurried away one by one until nobody was left.

One day Matthew was sitting in his tax collector's booth all by himself. He was lonely--so lonely that he felt like dying. What was worse, no one approached him; everyone ran away from him. But Jesus came to him and said, "Follow me." It meant, "be my disciple." Matthew could not believe his ears. But it was reality. At the moment, Matthew could see God in Jesus. This is the reason he could follow Jesus immediately. Matthew was a very difficult person to help because of his blind selfishness. Matthew made Jesus sick and tired every day. But Jesus was always with him, until he was healed of his blind selfishness. Jesus was with him until his greatness in God was fully restored. To Matthew, "God with us" was the good news of great joy for all the people, especially for himself.

In the past, Matthew had no life direction. But since Jesus was with him, he found true life direction. When Jesus saw him, he was an able man despite his wretchedness. Filled with compassion, Jesus said to him, "Follow me." It meant, "You must live a new life. And you must grow slowly and steadily to be one of my disciples." In the past, Matthew loved money. Yet money only gave him a huge potbelly until he

could not get into his expensive car. But since Jesus was with him, he began to open his spiritual eyes. Since he met Jesus, he could see the kingdom of God. He found his life mission. Obviously Matthew said again and again, "You know, nobody wanted to be around me. I was lonely. I was like a leper. But Jesus came to me and was with me until I was changed into St. Matthew!" His life problem was a future security problem. But he said in Matthew 6:33, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

Third, the Immanuel God came to this world as a child. It was prophesied in Isaiah 9:6, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given...." This verse is a vivid expression that God is love. This verse means that God would send his one and only Son to this world as a child to be born of Mary. Almighty God came down to this world as a helpless child. Why did God do so? It was so that he might be with all sorrowful people and save them from their sins. While on earth, Jesus was always with sorrowful people. While on earth, Jesus was always with helpless people. While on earth, Jesus was always with very fatalistic people. It was to save them from their sins of fatalism and bring them back to his glorious kingdom. All men are fatalistic because of the sting of death. But in Jesus there is no death, because he came to this world to save fatalistic sinners by being with us. Jesus is the God of Immanuel.

In a few years, the way of greeting has been changed. In the past, people said "God be with you" when they departed from each other. Last several years time people said to each other "Take care" instead of saying "God be with you" (goodbye). Soon they began to say "Have fun." These changes clearly show the power of ungodliness overpowering in men's souls. We must say again "God be with you." May the God of Immanuel be with us so that the God of Immanuel may be with our children.