

They Will Call Him Immanuel
Matthew 1:18-25
Key Verse: 1:23

by Tim Fitch

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

In three weeks it will be Christmas. It's so hard to believe how time flies by so fast. Just yesterday it seemed like the trees were blooming with spring flowers. Now it's cold outside. Today's passage however will help us to look forward to Christmas. This passage is about the joyous birth of Jesus Christ. We'll learn how it all came about. We'll also learn who Jesus is. May God help us to accept the baby Jesus into our hearts.

First, God prepares for the birth of Jesus Christ (18-21; 24-25).

Verse 18a says, "This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about." In the first part of Matthew chapter one, Matthew shows us how God carefully prepared for the birth of Jesus Christ. In it, we see how God called and used many patriarchs of faith; like Abraham and David. Now after forty-two generations, God in his great sovereignty and faithfulness was ready to send his Son Jesus into the world. But in order to do so, he first needed to choose a mother and a father who could parent him. What kind of people did God choose? Let's see. Look at verse 18b. "His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit." God promised that he would send his Son through the offspring of King David. Joseph was born in David's line. He was a carpenter. He was tall and handsome like Tim McEathron. And he was a hard working man. Everyday he would get up at the crack of dawn in order to make tables, chairs and desks. And occasionally he would make a wooden heart for his fiancé Mary. And as he made it, he would sing, "Ave Maria." Mary was a young pure-hearted country girl. She also was hard working. Everyday she would grind wheat into flour, prepare all kinds of food, and knit some clothes. And every once in a while she would bake a chocolate heart-shaped cake with sprinkles on it for her future husband "Joe". God in his sovereignty had brought Joseph and Mary together. He chose them to be the parents of the baby Jesus.

Look at verse 18b again. "His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit." Here we learn how Jesus was conceived. In Genesis 3:15, God promised to send his Son Jesus through the offspring of a woman. God wanted to be with mankind. But because of their sins, he couldn't. However God found a way. To be with them, God had to be fully human and at the same time he had to be fully God. By being born of a woman, God could be with us. And by being born through the Holy Spirit, he was God, a man without sin (Heb 4:15).

Joseph loved Mary and Mary loved Joseph. They both couldn't wait for the day when their wedding bells would ring. They looked like M. Daniel and Grace Park on their wedding day. One day however, their hopes and dreams of marriage were suddenly changed. Verse 18b says, "Found to be with child." Mary was found to be with child before marriage. This changed everything for them. After realizing that Mary was pregnant, Joseph could have exploded. And according to Deuteronomy 22 he could have carried her to the door of her father's house, publicly announced all over the TV stations what she had done, and watched as the men of the town came and stoned her to death (Det 22:20,21). Most men probably would have done this. However, Joseph was different. He didn't react according to his feelings, rather he reacted based upon the word of God. Verse 19 says, "Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly." Here, Matthew tells us that Joseph was a righteous man. "Righteous" means "right with God". Joseph wanted to do what was right before God. He loved God but he also loved Mary. Through Bible study, he realized that what God desires most is not sacrifice, but mercy (Hos 6:6). In John 8, a woman was caught in the act of adultery and was brought before Jesus to be stoned. Jesus could have had her stoned to death. However, he said to her accusers, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." At this, everyone left. Then Jesus looked up at the woman and asked, "Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she replied. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." Out of his love for Mary and for God, Joseph decided to divorce her quietly.

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.'" Here, God called Joseph the son of David. David was Israel's second king whom God had chosen to rule over his people. God chose David because of his love and fear of God. God also chose David because of his broken shepherd's heart for his people. Though Joseph was a carpenter, he had compassion, just like David. And though Joseph was a carpenter, he had the fear of God in his heart, just like David. In order to prepare for the birth of Jesus, God chose Joseph to be the human father of Jesus.

Look at verses 24-25. "When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus." Joseph obeyed the angel's message. First, he took Mary home as his wife. By doing so, he wanted to share in her struggles. Second, after taking Mary home as his wife, he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. In doing so, Joseph revealed his heart of purity. Finally, Joseph named his son Jesus. At that time, it was tradition for a father to name his own son. However, Joseph obeyed God and named his son Jesus. Joseph believed Jesus was the Son of God, the promised Messiah, the Savior of the world.

In this part, we see how God carefully prepared for the birth of Jesus Christ. God chose the right people. God chose Joseph and Mary to be part of his world salvation plan. God also wants to choose and use us to spread his message of salvation at this Christmas time. Have you accepted this? May God help you to do so.

Second, 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." In those days a child's name was most important, for it revealed something about him. For example, after God had called Abram, he changed his name to Abraham, which means, "Father of many nations". In the same way, God wanted to name his Son Jesus. Jesus means, "The Lord saves". At that time, the Israelites were under Roman oppression. Because of this, they thought that the Romans were their problem. But from God's point of view, their problem was not the Romans, but sin. Sin is our real problem. What is sin? Sin means to separate or to cut. Sin cuts our relationship with our Heavenly Father. We need our Heavenly Father. Imagine if a parachuter jumps out of an airplane and cuts his parachute from his back. What will happen? He needs his parachute in order to live. In the same way, to truly live, we need our Heavenly Father.

Sin has consequences. Sometimes our sins cause us to do things we don't want to do. It also causes depression, anxiety, despair, and even suicide. Today, young students who should be filled with joy and meaning are filled with hopelessness. One young girl was suffering from psychotic episodes after getting into a fight with her mother. Out of despair, she left her home and tried to kill herself by running stop lights. However, she wound up hitting someone else, killing him instead. One young boy was doing so well with his spiritual life. However, after finding out that his dad wasn't his biological father, he fell into major depression. These are consequences of sin. What can we do? Look again 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." God gave his Son the name Jesus because "he will save his people from their sins." Jesus has come to be our Savior!

How does Jesus save us from our sins? To save means, "Risking or ending one's own life in order to rescue someone else from harm or death." There is a heart moving story from 9-11. There was a man known as the "man in the red bandanna". Instead of leaving the South Tower, he carried and escorted many people to safety. He could have escaped, but instead he kept going back, in order to save more people. Finally, the building collapsed and he died. Many people remembered this man. One person he saved said, "He was the cowboy coming in to save the town." In the same way, Jesus Christ saves us from our sins by laying down his life on the cross. Isaiah 53:5 says, "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." Jesus died in our place in order to save us from our sins. Thank you Jesus. On the third day Jesus was raised to life in order to give us eternal life in the kingdom of heaven. Praise Jesus! May God help us to accept Jesus as our Savior.

Third, Jesus, our Immanuel God (22-23).

Look at verses 22 and 23. “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.’” Our gracious God was fulfilling his prophecy. The Israelites had been waiting for God to come and to rescue them and to be with them once again. For the past four hundred years, they hadn’t heard anything from God. So they were crying out, “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, And ransom captive Israel.” Now God had heard their cries. Look at verse 23 again. “‘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 is not just a God who creates and leaves his children all alone. He is a God who wants to be with us. Today, there are so many broken families due to fathers leaving their wives and children. One young man has been without a father for many years. Because of this, his heart is broken. But our Almighty Creator God who created the heavens and the earth wants to be with us. How amazing this is! But why does God want to be with us? God wants to be with us in order to save us from our sins.

Since the fall, God had been with his people Israel. God had been with Abraham and made him into a great nation (Gen 12:2). God had been with Joseph who was sold into slavery by his brothers (Gen 39:2). God had been with the Israelites who had been slaves in Egypt for four hundred years. God called them to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex 19:5,6). After freeing them from the hands of Pharaoh, God was with them. God promised to give them a land flowing with milk and honey. But after receiving their promised land, they became corrupted and sinned against God and wouldn’t repent. Finally God sent them to Babylon as exiles. Nevertheless, for seventy years, God was with them, suffering along with them by their side (Isa 43:2). According to Matthew 1:17, God was with his people during forty-two generations. God loved them and he wanted to be with them. He wanted to save them from their sins and raise them up to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Even though we are sinful human beings, God still wants to be with us. He wants to save us from our sins. And the only way he could do this was by giving up all of his Heavenly Glory and coming down as a humble baby born in a manger (Isa 9:6). God’s way of salvation is by being with us. While on earth, Jesus was with many kinds of people. He was with sorrowful people like Mary Magdalene. He was with broken hearted people like the Samaritan woman. He was even with lonely people like Matthew. Matthew, the author of this book, really understood the words “God with us”. His name was once Levi. He was a lonely tax collector whom no one liked. At that time, Israelites who became tax collectors were known as traitors. So everyone hated Levi. Whenever Levi came up to a group of people, they would all take out their cell phones and would pretend to be talking. When he came home at night, his wife would suddenly leave the room and his children would all scream. And whenever he would walk into a bedroom, his pet cat Buddy would raise its back and would hiss at him until he left. Levi was so depressed, sad and lonely. No one wanted to be with him. But one day, while sitting in his tax collector’s booth playing solitaire, Jesus came to him and said, “Follow me.” These two simple words were the most beautiful words that Levi had ever heard. They were life giving to his soul. No one wanted to be with Levi. But Jesus wanted to be with him. By being with him, Levi was changed into St. Matthew. Matthew wrote this passage. He also wrote the most popular key verse that everyone chooses each year; Matthew 6:33, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” Jesus is our Immanuel God!

“God with us” also means a lot to me. At the age of seven, my parents divorced. I grew up pretty much without a father. As a result, I was an emotional wreck. However, through Bible study, Jesus came to be with me. Jesus became my Shepherd, my Friend, my Everlasting Father, and my Savior. By being with me, Jesus healed me from my sins and has grown me into a shepherd and Bible teacher for American college students. When I was asked to deliver this message, I became confused wondering why God wanted to use a sinner such as I. But after meditating on this passage, God helped me to realize that he wants to be with me. God wants to be with our new West Loop ministry starting in January. God wants to use me a messenger of God’s word and as a co-worker to Dr. Ben Toh. God loves me and wants to bless me and use my life. He wants to save me from my sins by being with me. Jesus is indeed our Immanuel God! Thank you Jesus!

In verse 21 we see the words “his people” and in verse 23 we see the word “us”. This means God wants to also be with all people of all nations. He wants to be with people in N. Korea, in China, in Muslim nations, in Africa, in all nations. Jesus came as a baby in order to experience everything that we experience - as a baby, a child, a teenager, a high school student, a college student, and an adult. So Jesus understands everything about us. This reveals how he wants to be with us. Jesus is our Immanuel. We too must be willing to be with others. We must be willing to be with our Bible students, our children, our family, and our friends. When we do, then they too can experience Jesus, our Immanuel God and be saved from their sins.

Let's thank and praise Jesus who is our Immanuel God! Let's thank God who is a God of faithfulness. May God help us to prepare the proper environment this Christmas so that the baby Jesus may be born into our hearts. May God help us to accept Jesus as our Savior. And may God help us to accept Jesus, our Immanuel God.