



Unit .16

Bonus Session

Immanuel, God with Us

Scripture



Matthew 1:18-25

18 The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way: After his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, it was discovered before they came together that she was pregnant from the Holy Spirit. **19** So her husband Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly. **20** But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. **21** She will give birth

to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” **22** Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: **23** See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel, which is translated “God is with us.” **24** When Joseph woke up, he did as the Lord’s angel had commanded him. He married her **25** but did not have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son. And he named him Jesus.

Intro Options



Main Point:
**The gift of Christmas
is the promise of
God's presence.**

Option 1

The Christmas season fills many people with incredible delight in the experience of family, food, and fun. But for others, the Christmas season means anything but delight. Family strife, broken marriages, and illnesses protrude in this season like a mountain of pain standing in the way of joy.

- **What are the joys you are experiencing this Christmas season?**
- **What are some of the hurts you're feeling this Christmas season?**

A mountain of pain with winding roads may lay before some of us, yet the Book of Matthew stands tall as a billboard in front of this mountain, and it says: "The promised Christ has come, and He is far greater than we ever could have imagined."

In the midst of any difficulties this Christmas, remember that Matthew's Christmas account serves as a reminder that God Himself has come to be with us, granting us joy now as we look forward to the joy that awaits us on the other side of our pains.

Option 2

Imagine you had to spend the rest of your life chained to someone else; you are connected by ankle-cuffs with a long chain (about thirty feet). So you have some limited freedom, but you still have to be pretty doggone close to that person for decades. Literally nothing but death will separate you (pretend the chains are made of vibranium or adamantium or some other unbreakable material). To whom would you want to be chained? It could be anyone in the world. Why this person?

- **Expand the possibilities now: if they could choose anyone from any period of history, or any person, real or imaginary (e.g., a movie character), would they change whom they would pick? Why?**

After students have shared their answers, ask them how they would feel about being chained to Jesus for the rest of their lives. What would be good about it? What would be bad about it?


Having God with us would be (and is!) absolutely fantastic. He's there to comfort us when we need it; to confront us when we need it; to protect us when we need it; to meet our every need and be our never-failing friend. Nothing could be better. So the promise of Christmas, that God will dwell with his people, is flabbergastingly amazing.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Matthew 1:18-21.



The apostle Matthew wrote his Gospel primarily for a Jewish audience in the first century, challenging them, and us, with this question: What will you do with Jesus of Nazareth? From the outset, Matthew was proving his point—Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham, the promised King of Israel to bless all the peoples of the earth (Matt. 1:1-17; Gen. 12:3; 2 Sam. 7:11-16).

The Christ's birth story, however, began with a scandal, or so it appeared. Matthew's opening genealogy made it plain that Joseph did not "father" Jesus (Matt. 1:16). Mary was engaged to Joseph but was found to be pregnant before they ever had sexual relations at the conclusion of their betrothal period. So Joseph naturally assumed that Mary had been unfaithful and adulterous. 

This left Joseph in a great dilemma. Joseph did not yet understand that Mary's pregnancy was not a result of adultery but a miraculous conception through the agency of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin, Mary. Unlike everyone in His genealogy, Jesus was not born through a natural conception. Our sinless Savior's miraculous conception was as profoundly unique as He is.

While the details of Jesus' miraculous conception are vague, its reality cannot be denied without a host of important beliefs tumbling down around it, like removing the bottom piece of a balanced block tower. If Jesus were conceived by normal means with a human mother and father—not through the Holy Spirit—then He would have been only human and not the God-man we need. If He were only human and not also God, then He couldn't have lived a sinless life (Ps. 14:2-3). If He couldn't live a sinless life, then He couldn't die on the cross as our righteous substitute (Ps. 65:3). If He couldn't pay the penalty for our sins as a sinless Savior, then we are lost with no hope of a righteous standing before God (Isa. 53:4-12).

■ In your own words, how would you explain to someone the importance of the virgin birth?

Read Matthew 1:22-23.



Matthew unveiled a divinely orchestrated parallel between the immediate fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of a boy named Immanuel born to a young woman and the future fulfillment of Jesus' birth to the virgin Mary. The immediate fulfillment entailed a young woman conceiving a son through natural means, but the complete fulfillment entailed an actual virgin conceiving a son through supernatural means. The immediate fulfillment of the prophecy ensured military salvation for Judah, but the complete fulfillment ensured the spiritual salvation of God's people. Matthew highlighted this prophecy to drive home his point: Jesus is the promised Christ, the fulfillment of Israel's expectation.

The details surrounding Jesus' birth not only prove His identity, they also remind us of the faithfulness and trustworthiness of God and His Word. Jesus was born to fulfill Old Testament prophecy that God would provide a way to dwell with His people. If God has kept His numerous promises to Israel by sending the Christ, won't He also keep His numerous promises to us now?

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
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Matthew 1

18-21. It took God's intervention through an angel to clarify for Joseph the uniqueness and glory of Jesus' conception, because while God had foreshadowed it in the Scriptures, nothing in human experience can prepare one for this miracle.

The angel addressed Joseph as a "son of David," a nod to Joseph's royal lineage, through which the promised Christ would come. God, who knows the depths of our hearts, spoke directly to Joseph's fear. The angel told him to marry Mary because her baby was not conceived out of sin but through the Holy Spirit. Through this marriage, Joseph assumed legal fatherhood for the child and bore responsibility for naming Him. Therefore, the baby to be born of the virgin was indeed the promised "Son of David."

The name Jesus is the Greek rendering of the Hebrew name Joshua, which means "Yahweh is salvation." Yahweh is the personal, covenant name of God that He revealed to Moses (Ex. 3:14). Mary's son was named Jesus, not simply as an acknowledgment that Yahweh is the Savior of His people but because Jesus Himself would save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). So does Yahweh save or does Jesus save? The answer is yes and yes because Jesus is Yahweh, the sinless Savior of sinful people.

Jesus' very name communicated His mission: to save people from their sins. This primary purpose of Jesus' coming was not what many Jews expected of the Christ. Many were anticipating the Christ to free Israel from their Roman oppressors and establish the military and political dominance they had enjoyed in the time of King David and King Solomon. Jesus' revolution, however, would be focused on the greatest need of all humans at all times—freedom from the sin that separates us from God.

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 32, DDG)

Virgin Birth

The Bible affirms that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin (Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38). The virgin birth affirms the historicity of the incarnation, where the eternal Son of God took on human flesh. The virgin birth is significant in that it serves as a reminder of Old Testament prophecies (Isa. 7) while also affirming both the deity and humanity of Christ.



TEACHING PLAN

▪ How have you seen God keep His promises in your life or in the life of someone you know?

Matthew proclaimed that Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. The claim that Jesus is God greatly offended many of His Jewish contemporaries and contributed to His path to the cross (John 5:18; Matt. 26:62-66). Yet Matthew boldly asserted this truth as a fulfillment of Scripture.

The events surrounding Jesus' birth lined up with Isaiah's prophecy. The name He was given means "Yahweh is salvation." The purpose of Jesus' name—that He would save His people from their sins—implied that He, indeed, is Yahweh. Understanding this divine implication, Matthew applied the name "Immanuel" to Jesus as a title that people would call Him. Jesus is God in the flesh who came to dwell with His people and save us from our sin.

▪ Why is God's presence with His people such an encouragement?

Read Matthew 1:24-25.



We may like to think that if an angel of the Lord spoke to us, we'd immediately obey like Joseph. But how often are we fully aware of what God has commanded us in His Word and yet still choose to disobey? How often do we come up with a list of excuses about why we didn't do what God tells us to do in His Word?

Obedience to God is an act of faith. When we distrust God's goodness, wisdom, power, and authority, we aren't inclined to do what He says. But when we are convinced that God is good enough, gracious enough, and powerful enough to both command what He wants and empower us to do what He wants, we're compelled to obey. Our obedience or disobedience to God communicates whether or not we believe He is trustworthy.

▪ What are some ways you are struggling to obey God?

▪ What are some Scripture passages that speak directly to that sin and encourage faith in God?

Joseph is a model of faith for us. But could he ever have imagined the significance of his faith-driven obedience? He was a man from a no-name town who simply sought to pattern his life after God's word. Yet this is the very kind of person God delights to use in great ways for His glory.

If Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, then you can trust that every single step of obedience you take is well worth it. The God who used Joseph in the coming of Immanuel is the same God who is eager to use you for His eternal purposes as you daily yield to His Word in faith and obedience.



▪ How does the promise of Jesus encourage you to walk in faithful obedience this week? What might this look like in your day to day life?

COMMENTARY

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Matthew 1

24-25. There is only one God, and He has forever existed in three Persons—Father, Son, and Spirit. The triune (three-in-one) nature of God is a reality taught throughout the Bible, but it is not something we can fully wrap our minds around. Likewise, the miraculous incarnation of Christ—when God the Son took on a human nature through the work of the Holy Spirit in the virgin Mary's womb—is a reality we can't completely grasp. Jesus is one hundred percent God and one hundred percent man! He is the only Man worthy of our worship.

The attitude of Jesus should both humble and encourage us (Phil. 2:5-8). The all-powerful Creator of the universe humbled Himself by putting on human flesh. He lived in submission to God the Father through prayer, meditation on the Scriptures, and obedience rather than simply flexing His abilities as God. He easily could have executed His opposition, but instead, He loved, served, and laid His life down for His enemies. Only Immanuel, God with us, could exercise such unbelievable patience.

Jesus felt hunger, fatigue, and great grief. He felt the sting of being misunderstood, hated, abandoned, betrayed, and left to hang. God the Son in the flesh completely immersed Himself in our physical, emotional, and spiritual pain. Jesus is God with us in every sorrow.

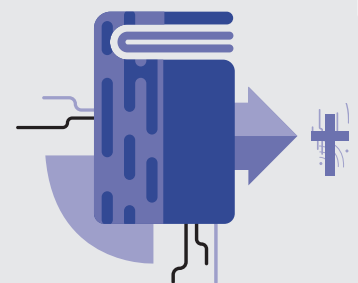
Jesus did all of this so that He might become the perfect sacrifice to pay for our sins. On the cross, Jesus, who never sinned, became sin and endured the full wrath of God for our sins (2 Cor. 5:21). Only the death of a perfectly righteous human could atone for the sins of other humans. But only God the Son could endure the fullness of God's wrath for sin and rise from the dead three days later. Only Immanuel, God with us, could accomplish such a great salvation. Jesus is God with us in every moral failure.

After He rose from the grave, Jesus gave His followers an incredible commission: Go and make more followers of Him from every nation (Matt. 28:18-20). Attached to this command was an incredible promise: "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). Jesus is God with us on mission.

When all things are said and done, God will again come down to be with us. The apostle John offers us a glimpse: "Look, God's dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away" (Rev. 21:3-4). Jesus is God with us forever and ever.

(p. 34, DDG) Christ Connection

Jesus was born to the Virgin Mary to fulfill Old Testament prophecy and to affirm that He is the sinless Savior—God in the flesh who came to dwell with people and save us from our sin.



Our Mission

God's Story has always been designed to connect with our story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own. Suggested answers to these questions can be found on the right-hand side of the page for leaders.

Head



Do we tend to think that following Jesus will result in an easy and carefree life? Why or why not?

How does the promise of Jesus, as Immanuel, help you to see difficulties in a different perspective?

Heart



How does God's Word increase our trust in who He is and His plan in our lives?

What are some verses you can focus on this week that will help increase your faith and trust in God?

Hands



What are some practical lessons we can learn from Jesus' willingness to take up residence among us?

If someone's only picture of who God is came from the way you live, what kind of picture would they get? What needs to change this week to be a better representative of Christ to those around you?

Main Point: **The gift of Christmas is the promise of God's presence.**



Head

For many today, the Christmas story evokes all kinds of warmth and glee. But for Joseph, the coming of the promised Christ meant great heartache (Matt. 1:18-19), great loss to his reputation and comfort (Matt. 1:20-21), and great danger (Matt. 2:13-14). The first Christmas was no jolly sleigh ride for the man who resolved to obey God at all costs.

Isn't that how following Christ often feels—confounding and painful, thankless and marginalizing? We seek to live for God and then we face hardships due to our decision. We may know of Jesus' promise that we will experience trouble in this life (John 16:33), yet the pain of a new or lingering trial always feels like a shock. Grief has a way of making us feel abandoned and condemned. Yet at the crossroads of our brokenness and faith, God is at work to sanctify us and to use us for His glory in ways we could never imagine. You may see this truth in Joseph's life, but do you believe it for your own?



Heart

Romans 10:17 tells us that faith comes by hearing the word of God. As we immerse ourselves in God's Word, we behold the millions of ways God has proven His holiness, His love, His power, and His faithfulness over and over again throughout history and in our own lives. As we learn and discuss God's Word among His people week in and week out, branches of faith grow in our hearts. As that faith grows, sweet fruits of obedience come forth.

We see this pattern in Joseph's life. God's words, spoken through the angel, empowered Joseph's faith and consequent obedience. First, God reminded Joseph who he was, a "son of David" through whom the promised Christ would come (Matt. 1:20). By addressing Joseph in this way, God reminded Joseph that He never forgot His promise to David. God was now calling Joseph to take his place in the lineage that led to the Savior.



Hands

One of the practical takeaways from the incarnation, the fact that God took up residence among us, is the fact that we, too, should live like Christ with those around us. This means that we love people enough to be with them, bear with them, to be patient as we show them the love of Christ. It means we are open about God's ongoing work in our lives, and we point the people around us to Jesus that He might work in their lives too.