Matthew 1:18-25

18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. 19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

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. 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.”

22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25 But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

A challenge at Christmas worship: we’re back to familiar words and themes. Letting the scriptures address you rather than lull you to sleep.

The biggest difficulty: they have sentimental value. They hijack your heart. They put your on a purely emotional track. Instead of these words addressing your heart, I want you to see the reality of them.

We’re going to try to overcome that natural tendency. Listen again to our text from Matthew’s gospel.

Verse 23 comes from Isaiah 7:14

4 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

We’re going to look at that one word this morning: Immanuel. “Isn’t that going to be a lot of time spent on just one word?”
Some have devoted their entire life to focusing on that one word, and it still wasn’t enough.

John Wesley’s last words: “And the best of all, is that God is with us.”
He died with that on his lips.
I propose that you live with it on your hearts.

Immanuel is 3 words in English: God With Us.
Each of these words is greater than the whole earth, because they will outlast the earth.
We’re going to look at each of these:

1. Jesus is GOD
2. Jesus is God WITH
3. Jesus is God with US

No. 1 – Jesus is God
The simple meaning of Christmas is that the Creator of the universe has become a human being.
That is the message of Christmas.
Everything else is secondary.
  • peace on earth
  • good will toward men

The Scriptures cannot resist telling us this at every spot.
This is the first place where Jesus is introduced.
Right away we’re told he is God.
All the way through the Bible it’s told in every possible way: Jesus is God.
Nothing about Christianity makes sense without understanding this.

Where does the Bible say this?

John 1
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.
Peter’s sermon in the Book of Acts 20:
Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

Jesus forgives sins.
Do you understand the ramifications of this?
Every sin is against him.
Jesus owns us; He is our Creator.

Jesus receives worship
Angels in scripture: “We’re creatures like you.”
Jesus: “I am not created.”

The Issue: His followers believed him.
This is most important.
It gives proof that he is who he said he is.
The last people in the entire world who would believe that a human being would be
God were first century Jews.

Eastern religions – pantheism; God is a force in everything.
Always believed some people were Avatars – manifestations of the god-force.

Greeks / Romans – polytheists
Many gods who would come to earth in a human form
(Paul and Barnabas were called Zeus and Hermes.)

But Jews believed in the God of the Bible.
God was uncreated.
Infinite
Infinitely greater than the universe.
They would be the last to believe that God became a man.

But weren’t they looking for the Messiah?
Yes, a deliverer.
But not God becoming a man.

Not only that, these were people who lived with Jesus.
If you were trying to convince people you were God, would you start with your family?
The people who worship Elvis never lived with him.
You can’t fool the people you live with into thinking you’re perfect.

What could have possibly led them to believe?
They had to see a moral glory that went along with Jesus’ claims.
Truth and love combined.
Tenderness and power combined.

They see it all – and they believed.
Seeing the very Being of God through the filter of a human nature.

Who is He?
Only one answer can account for the data.
As insane as it may seem, all other alternatives are even more insane.
Jesus is God with us.
They believed.
The people who lived with him eventually died for their conviction that he is who he says he is.

How do you deal with that?
Have you wrestled with it the way they did?
Are you willing to put you life on the line the way they did?

One thing for sure: This explains the exclusivity of Christianity.
This first part is the hard part.
The second part is the soft part.
But before we move there we need to talk about the demands of Christianity.

Christmas is the cause of this.
Every other religion says this:

We have a founder who was a great teacher.
They have given us teachings to follow.
If we follow them our morality and goodness will be enough.

The founders of these religions claim that if you follow their teachings you will reach God.
Morality and goodness are enough.
They have different views of morality and goodness, but if you follow their teachings you will reach God.

Christianity is the complete opposite:

Your situation is so dire, morality and goodness will never be enough. The unique Son of God had to come and die for you. You have to place all of your hope in him, not in the things you do.

Is this narrow-minded?
No. It’s a whole different diagnosis of your problem.

Example:
You are sick; you’ve seen several doctors. All say to rest, drink plenty of fluids, and you’ll be fine. But you see me, and I’m a doctor, and I say, “They are wrong. What you have is terminal. Unless you take this medicine you will die.”

Would you say I’m being narrow-minded?
Arrogant?
What would you do?
• You could ignore me.
• You could say I’m crazy.
• Or you could investigate my record as a healer.
• If I had shown myself to be right and trustworthy in all previous cases …
• What would you do then?

Haven’t you lived life long enough to see that your efforts to live up to moral standards isn’t enough?
Aren’t you ready to believe what Christianity has said all along?
You don’t need teaching.
You don’t need a teacher.
You need God Himself to rescue you.
You have to give your complete trust and allegiance to Him.
If Christmas is right, the rest of Christianity makes sense. If Christmas is wrong, everything else falls apart.
Jesus is **God** with us.

**Number Two: Jesus is God WITH us**
This is the beautiful part.
God in His majesty put Himself in a form of “withness.”
Personal. Intimate.

Until Jesus came God’s presence is always shown as powerful and terrifying.
A whirlwind, a tornado.
A pillar of fire.

The point: It’s one thing to experience God (i.e. in nature, at a concert).
It’s quite another thing to meet Him personally.

Then Jesus Came.

Moses asked God to show him His glory.
God said He would shield Moses in the cleft of a rock, and then only let him see His backside (whatever that means) as he passed by.
The Bible says that in just that instance the glory of God so radiated on Moses that when he came off the mountain he had to cover his face with a veil for hours, days, because he was too radiant to look at.

Can you imagine if Moses were here and heard the message of Christmas?

**John 1:14**
The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

**John 1:17**
For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

**2 Corinthians 3:12-18**
Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. 13 We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away.

16 But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Moses would say, “Do you know what this means? This was the very thing I was denied.”

Through Jesus:
- you can meet God
- without terror
- He will be part of your life.

Where is your amazement in all this?

**Martin Luther’s Story**
- Seminary teacher; Romans
- Confession 2x daily
- Sacraments
- Wasn’t a Christian.

He experienced God. He just never knew God.
Romans 1:17 – *For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed*—a *righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”*

Realized he was trying to gain God’s favor through his own efforts.
Opened his heart to God.
Moved from Jesus being God, to Jesus being God WITH

Why would God come as a baby?
(Instead of as a tornado, pillar of fire?) Because this time Jesus came to take away the barrier.

**Number Three: God with US**

You need to notice this word. It’s a limited term. It doesn’t say God is with all. God with US. So who is the US? Some super-morality group? Those with hidden-knowledge?

No. The us are people who have been invited; Who come humbly; Who believe.


**Application:**

1. If Jesus is God with us, you have to remove the limitations you’ve placed on Him. He’s greater that any problem you face. If He’s God, do you think your bad habits are any match for Him? Get rid of your cynicism.

2. Christmas is all about getting near Him. Look what He did to get near to you. What are you doing to get near to Him? What’s keeping you from Him? More specifically – what do you think it will cost you? (Is any amount too much?)

3. If Jesus is God, your lukewarm response to Him isn’t a rational one.