

Christmas Unwrapped “The Birth of King Messiah” Matthew 1:18-25

Introduction

- [Video]
- [Slide #1] I don't know what comes to your mind when you think about Christmas. Good memories. Sweet memories. Terrible memories. For some it's the most wonderful time of the year. For others it's a dreaded month to skip. Wherever you're at, whatever you've brought to the table, whatever Christmas memories might be haunting you, all I know is that God's gift is big enough for everyone. His gift to you is special. He can't wait for you to see what's inside. Don't just do the same old Christmas thing this year. God's invitation to you this year is to unwrap Christmas itself.

Transition

For the next four Sundays we are going to take the wraps off Christmas and I want to begin with Matthew 1:18-25. Please turn to Matthew chapter 1 if you haven't already done so and let's begin to pull the ribbon. Slide off the bow. Tear the corner of the paper. This is God's gift.

[Slide #2]

Proposition

- **Jesus is the promised Messiah of the line of David—He is ‘Immanuel,’ God with us**
- Part of what it means to unwrap Christmas means unwrapping what it means for God to tell us that that Jesus is Immanuel—God with us. Jesus is the Messiah King. *The mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed.*¹ He is God in the flesh come to us for a very specific purpose.

Transition

Let's begin to unwrap this gift by looking at [verses 18-19](#). The story begins as the protagonist, the hero Joseph is faced with a dilemma. He almost never even gets to unwrap this gift. He almost misses it. [Slide #3] Verses 18-19 describe the **potential tragedy** surrounding this gift. Listen. *This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: 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. 19 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.*

Main Points

- Joseph and Mary are engaged to be married. Pre-marital bliss until the bomb drops. Mary's pregnant. But not by Joseph; there's no hanky-panky. *Before they came together, verse 18* says, before any kind of sexual intercourse Mary is found to be with child. And it wasn't like Mary two-timed Joseph and then hid the thing from him either. In the words of [D.A. Carson](#), “That Mary was “found” to be with child does not suggest a surreptitious attempt at

¹ Colossians 1:25

concealment but only that her pregnancy became obvious.”² *She was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.* And the only explanation for Mary’s pregnancy was God. But not sex with a deity. That’s not what Matthew is suggesting here. By the Holy Spirit God touched Mary’s womb so that she conceived without any male intervention. *This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: 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.*

- So what does Joseph do? What should Joseph do? What would you do in Joseph’s shoes? His first reaction? Run as far away as possible. Divorce. End the thing and move on. In Joseph’s case what he had in mind to do was harder, more difficult than trying to break a wedding off after the invitations had been sent out. In that day engagement constituted a legal bond which could only be broken by divorce. Technically they were already married. So what should Joseph do?
- Matthew suggests in [verse 19](#), that *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.* Joseph couldn’t in good conscience proceed with the marriage because he believed Mary to be unfaithful. If he proceeded and they were married, he’d be admitting his own guilt. His only option real option was divorce. He’d follow the Law and do what the Law prescribed. And the Old Testament Law demanded an adulteress be divorced—stoning may or may not follow. It was up to the offended party.³ Joseph had it in mind to divorce Mary quietly to avoid public disgrace; both his and Mary’s.
- It’s in this context that God presents his gift. There’s no neat, tidy wrapping on this present. The package is torn. The bow in shambles. God presents Jesus, the promised Messiah of the line of David—Immanuel, God with us, in the midst of a perceived scandal. The present may not even be opened unless there’s intervention, which is what takes place in verses 20-21.

Transition

[Slide #4] A **divine sanction** encourages Joseph to proceed. Look and listen to [verses 20-21](#). *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."*

- God’s messenger, *an angel of the Lord*, appears to Joseph and gives him a specific message with specific instructions. Don’t be afraid the angel says. Continue on with the marriage. The Holy Spirit has caused Mary to conceive. A son will be born. He’s to be named Jesus. This Jesus will save God’s people from their sins.
- What do you say in response to a dream like that? Does Joseph wake up thinking it was the late night sausage snack that caused the heartburn and the crazy dreams? How hard would it be to take a message like that seriously? If Joseph’s anything like me he wakes up with a billion questions. Why did the angel address me as Joseph son of David—why a famous relative of the distant past? The Messiah is to be the Son of David. Is this baby the promised Messiah? Somehow this child is conceived, not by the will of man, but by God’s purpose and will? Is that legal? How does God do that? And what’s with his name? Joshua? The

² D.A. Carson, *Expositors Bible Commentary on Matthew*

³ Grant Osborne, Class notes from the class *The Gospels and Johannine Literature*.

Hebrew of Jesus is Joshua and means “Yahweh is salvation.” This boy is Yahweh himself in the flesh? This boy Joshua is going to save God’s people from their sins? If Joseph knows his Old Testament he probably hears the words of Psalm 130:8 ringing in the angel’s message. *He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.* How in the world is this boy going to do that? He’s going to save people from their sins? What kind of freak of nature is this? This can’t be, can it?

- And thus the wonder of Christmas unwrapped. While we still may not fully understand all this message means. It’s clear what God says. Jesus is the promised Messiah of the line of David. In this boy rides the hopes and dreams of the entire nation of Israel. This Messiah comes to save people. But he’s more than just a future national hero. God’s gift is big enough for everyone. He saves people from their sins. In the world of the bible sin is the basic (if not always the immediate) cause of all other calamities.”⁴ The birth of this boy Jesus to Joseph and Mary is the heir of David’s throne, King Messiah, whose sole purpose in life is to undo the calamity of the human condition. All pain, all suffering, all sorrow, all sickness is undone and redeemed by this boy. No wonder God can’t wait for us to see what’s inside.

Transition

Even so, there are still questions. Lots of them. And rightly so. Which is why Matthew helps to fill in some gaps. [Slide #5] That’s the purpose of **the prophetic link** in **verses 22-23**. Listen. *All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 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."*

- Matthew interrupts the story of Jesus’ birth to let us know as readers one very important bit of information. The birth of Jesus fulfills Old Testament prophecy. Seven hundred years before the events of Matthew 1, Isaiah prophesied about a son being born. Immanuel. That prophecy is fulfilled in the birth of Christ.
- I need you to turn to Isaiah 7:14. I want us to look at this section more closely. Let me see if I can summarize for you what’s happening here in order to shed light on Matthew 1. Isaiah 7:14. Israel’s disobedience has led God to use the surrounding nations to get their attention. In fact, spiritual conditions have deteriorated so much that the nation of Israel had already split into two kingdoms, the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Ahaz has come to power as king of the tiny southern kingdom. And he’s terrified of the enemies at his doorstep, Rezin in Aram and Pekah in Israel, AKA the son of Remaliah here. So God tells Isaiah to give Ahaz a message regarding these enemies. Look at **verse 4**. *Say to him, "Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood--because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and of the son of Remaliah. 5 Aram, Ephraim and Remaliah's son have plotted your ruin, saying, 6 "Let us invade Judah; let us tear it apart and divide it among ourselves, and make the son of Tabeel king over it."*
- God tells Ahaz not to fear because He promises to destroy these two kings that were threatening Judah. He tells Ahaz to stand firm in his faith, **verse 9**. But Ahaz doesn’t believe. And so God makes an offer. **Verse 10**. *Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, 11 "Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights."*

⁴ D.A. Carson, *Expositors Bible Commentary on Matthew*

- And Ahaz insincerely protests. [Verse 12](#). *But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test."* God then berates Ahaz for trying his patience and then gives the sign to Ahaz anyway, the sign proving he will do what he says he's going to do. And so the famous words of [verse 14](#); the prophecy of the imminent birth of a child to a young woman. *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.* In other words, within a year, in the time it takes for a woman to come full term and deliver a baby and give birth to a son named Immanuel, Israel's enemies will be destroyed.
- Turn to Isaiah 8:3. Isaiah says, *Then I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and gave birth to a son. And the LORD said to me, "Name him Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. And you grew up hating your own name. Poor kid. Isaiah's son's name means "quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil."*⁵ The birth of Isaiah's son is God's short-term fulfillment to the promise given to Ahaz. Look at [verse 8](#). Isaiah calls his own son Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, he calls him Immanuel. *O Immanuel.* In the birth of his own son Isaiah sees the short-term fulfillment of God's promise to Ahaz. The naming of the boy "Immanuel" meaning *God with us* was purposely meant to convince Ahaz that God would rescue him from his enemies. That's how Isaiah understood it in Isaiah 8:10. *Devise your strategy, but it will be thwarted; propose your plan, but it will not stand, for God is with us.* In other words, if God was present with his people no terror could harm them; no evil could possibly destroy them. God with Israel was Ahaz's hope and Israel's hope.
- Now back to Matthew 1. [Verse 22](#). *All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 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."* Do you see what God is saying here? There's an aspect of double fulfillment to Isaiah's prophecy. It was partially fulfilled by the birth of Isaiah's son. Now, here, Matthew applies the prophecy given to Ahaz to Jesus. Jesus is Israel's hope. Through Jesus God will be present with his people. Through Jesus God will rescue and save. He is God with us.
- Wherever you're at, whatever you've brought to the table, whatever Christmas memories might be haunting you, good or bad, God has stepped into your story to offer a gift to you—not just Joseph. His gift is your hope. And through this gift, through Jesus, God has purposed to undo your greatest enemy like he promised to undo Ahaz's enemies. He's purposed to undo the calamity of your sin, the cause of all your pain, of all your suffering, of all your sorrow. He's promised through this gift, through Jesus, that you might know and personally experience the active presence of God in all you do so that no matter what you face in life you never have to face those things alone. God is with you.
- Do you see what Matthew is saying? He is not saying something vague and syrupy like, "Jesus was so wonderful there must be a touch of the divine about him."⁶ That's not what Matthew is saying. He's saying, **Jesus is the promised Messiah of the line of David—He is 'Immanuel,' God with us.** This is Christmas unwrapped.

Transition

I've found it amazing, still do, that the record of Jesus' birth in Matthew's gospel is so simple, understated, so matter of fact. [[Slide #6](#)] In [verses 24-25](#) all we have is **the birth**. Nothing more,

⁵ *Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament*, p. 4.

⁶ D.A. Carson, *Expositors Bible Commentary on Matthew*

nothing less. To me that speaks of authenticity. 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. 25 But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.*

- Matthew skips all the events of the census and tax by the Roman Emperor Augustus in the year 8 BC. The emphasis here is on Joseph's obedience. He believes. He trusts. He wakes up and follows through on what he's heard. He's come to see his child's birth as God's greatest gift. And since we know Herod died in 4 BC, some time around 6 BC the Messiah King was born. And he was given the name Jesus. And it is God's hope that we never see Christmas the same way again.
- [Slide #7] What would it mean for you to unwrap Christmas this year? Seriously. Quit playing the Christmas charade as if Christmas was about a meal and a tree and toys and family and parties. What would it mean for you to unwrap Christmas? What would it mean for you personally to sit down with God's gift and the two of you have your own gift exchange, just you and him? What would it mean for you to slide off the bow, tear the paper, lift the lid? Would you scoff? Have you scoffed at his gift like Ahaz? Or would you believe and trust and receive this gift like Joseph? What would it mean for you to unwrap Christmas now, today?

Conclusion

- [Video]