

**December 9, 2007**

*Matthew 1:18-25*

Alright – good morning. Grab your Bibles and let's look at a part of the Christmas story together. Open your Bibles to Matthew chapter 1.

TEXT 18-25

The apostle Paul in Galatians 4:4 talks about this when he writes that “But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.” Your version may say, “when in the fullness of time, God sent his Son...” The point we see there is the same we see in the Gospel of Matthew, when the time came, God fulfilled his word.

In fact if you read through the opening chapters of Matthew as he presents his version of the Nativity and all that goes with it, you see not so much an account of Jesus' birth and childhood because he doesn't really talk about them – instead what you see is a series of scenes designed to show us how what God said in the Old Testament comes to fulfillment in the coming of Jesus. He uses what's actually called a “**formula of fulfillment**” which is **focusing on a prominent quotation of Old Testament PROPHECY and then how that prophecy was being FULFILLED** – in this case in Matthew's day.

Today we're going to look at just one part of this – go back to **verse 22**. “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.””

In the margin of your Bible you probably see **that is a quotation of a prophecy in ISAIAH 7:14** – that a virgin would have a baby – and Matthew is showing us how that prophecy came about and is fulfilled. And then at the end of verse 23 in Matthew he builds on that and shows how not only was Jesus the baby born of a virgin, but that what Matthew describes is also a fulfillment of Jesus being called Immanuel, God with us – and we'll get to that in a minute.

But first of all – I want you to see that Matthew's overwhelming theme through this narrative is that God fulfills His word. And the first thing I want us to understand about that is that **God fulfills his word even when situations seem to OPPOSE it**.

Now as we read through Matthew, we can see that it is written from the perspective of Joseph, where Luke 1 & 2 is written from the perspective of Mary. So as we think about Joseph in this passage we read, we saw back in verse 18 that “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....”

Now I stop there and didn't read “through the Holy Spirit” because that's where Joseph's version stops. He's pledged to be married to Mary and Mary is found to be pregnant.

This being pledged is more than our engagement but not quite actually married – they were still referred to as husband and wife in most circles even though they weren't together yet and then she is found to be pregnant and Joseph is totally in the dark.

Now Mary knows what's going on. Over in Luke chapter 1 we see Mary get the script – an angel appears to her and fills her in and tells her she's chosen and favored and going to bring the Messiah into the world. But at this point – not Joseph. Why didn't Mary tell him? I don't know. Maybe she thought if God can tell me, God can tell Joseph. Who knows – but at this point Joseph is in the dark about all this. To him there is only one explanation – Mary was unfaithful to him.

Now think about that. What do you do?

Well we see what Joseph has in mind to do. **Verse 19** says that “Because Joseph was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.” He was righteous in two ways that we can learn from this morning. First he didn’t just ignore the problem – **he was going to deal with the apparent sin of Mary and do so LEGALLY**. But second he didn’t want to make her a spectacle. So even though his pride had to have been hurt, he is going to divorce her quietly. **He was going to deal with the situation QUIETLY when he didn’t have to.**

Here he is totally in the dark – doesn’t have all the facts – but in the midst of that confusion, **even without all the facts, Joseph behaves both JUSTLY and LOVINGLY.**

Here’s a question for us – **do WE?** Apply this to us – how many times do things happen in our lives and we’re going – why did this happen? Why did this happen now? Why did this happen this way? Do we handle difficult situations in our lives with justice and love OR

**Are we pretty much the kind of people who have to have almost the whole story BEFORE we’ll put any faith in God?** We need to know it inside out before we trust him and even into the future – I want to know how this is going to turn out before I take your hand God and trust you.

One pastor put it like this, “Please see the greatness of Joseph here: he was in the dark, yet he must have trusted God for only that could have given him such a justice to deal with apparent sin, yet deal with it in a gracious way.”

Well we keep going and we see that in **verse 20**, Joseph is given a clue. Matthew tells us that while Joseph was thinking about these things, an angel of the Lord appears to him in a dream. So an angel shows up and fills him in.

Now it would be easy for us to think – well there you go. Joseph gets an angel, too – how could he not believe God? It’s easy to believe what Mary’s going to tell him now because an angel just told him. If an angel told me, I’d believe it all, too. But hang on a minute. The angel tells Joseph that the baby in Mary is by the Holy Spirit. She is still a virgin. And that has never happened in the history of humanity – a virgin birth to take place. And if you think back to what Luke told us in Luke chapter 1 when an angel appeared to Zachariah to tell him that he was going to be the father of John the Baptist, the Bible says that Zachariah doubted the angel. Why? Because this kind of stuff isn’t easy to believe – even if an angel is telling you.

Think about it – **we have the living Word of God** – right here – in our hands today. Yet the big question is how much of this do we believe – and by believe I mean experientially – **how much of this are we really putting into PRACTICE?** We have God’s Word written down – Joseph had a dream of an angel talking to him and we say it ought to be easy to believe.

And one more question for you to think about – was the angel going to tell Mary & Joseph’s families? Was he going to tell the townspeople? Was he going to tell their family rabbi? See it’s easy for us sitting here in 2007 with the whole story in our hands to think all this would be easy to obey God now. But everyone in Mary & Joseph’s lives is going to come to one of two conclusions – either Mary cheated on Joseph or Joseph defiled Mary before their wedding.

Because Joseph was going to be the adoptive father of Jesus on earth, there was a stigma attached to him right from the beginning. **When you’re associated with CHRIST, there are sufferings, even oppressions, that come on you because of the stand you take.**

You’d think that being the parents of Jesus would be easy right – I mean, he’s never going to sin – awesome. But it wasn’t. Right from the beginning it was hard to obey.

And yet we read here in Matthew in spite of all this, the remarkable thing is that Joseph wasn’t like I would be or maybe how you would be, he didn’t question. He didn’t argue. In **verses 24-25** it says “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.”

The angel gave Joseph one command and he obeyed it instantly. He took Mary to be his wife, he wasn't with her physically, when the baby was born he called the baby Jesus just like he was told. You think that's how Joseph expected things to roll out when he got engaged to Mary? I'm thinking not so much.

What happens to you when you find yourself in situations that are the opposite of what you thought God promised you – the opposite of what you expected God to bring into your life? Maybe you're here today and feeling that everything is going wrong – it's not meant to be this way – how can God ever fix this mess?

What the angel told Joseph was to not be afraid – this thing going on is because of the Holy Spirit. The issue at stake was the sovereignty of God. Joseph had no problem with it. Do we? **Do we believe in the sovereignty and PROVIDENCE of God?** Do we believe that He is leading and directing our circumstances? Because the reality we see in this first part of the text is that God fulfills his word even when situations seem to oppose it.

The second thing we see is that **God fulfills his word regardless of the passage of TIME.** Back in **verse 22 & 23** Matthew tells us that God first said these words about a virgin giving birth and that baby being called Immanuel. We saw that that came in Isaiah 7:14. Let that sink in. Sometimes all the dates & times in bible-speak can get lost as if it isn't real. **Isaiah 7:14 was spoken 700 YEARS before the events of Matthew 1 took place.**

Now think about that. 700 years. This is 2007 so we're talking 1307 a prophecy is made and it doesn't come true until 2007. 1307 may be hard to remember since none of us were there. But we're not talking the Gulf War – we're talking the Middle East being ruled by the Ottoman Empire. We're not talking the Cold War – we're talking Russia being ruled by the Golden Horde of Mongols. We're not talking Civil War – we're talking 200 years before Columbus even found this continent. We can't even really talk science – I mean Copernicus wasn't until the 1500s and the same with art, Leonardo da Vinci wasn't till the 1400s.

700 years and in that time from Isaiah to Matthew, the people's view of God was anything other than "God with us." In fact **in those 700 years the people began to WONDER if God was still around – did he still care – is there still hope?**

And then 700 years later an angel comes to Mary and Joseph to say, its time. I mean come on – if we don't get an answer to prayer in a week we start having doubts about our faith! But 700 years later in **verse 21** the angel told Joseph to name the boy "Jesus" because he would save his people from their sins. The name Jesus in Hebrew is basically Joshua and it simply means "the Lord saves." But don't miss the importance of it. This name "Jesus" was as common in that day as John or Kathy is now. **"Jesus" was a COMMON name by which the Christ was identifying with His people.** He would come to save his people as one of them.

That prophecy – he will be called **Immanuel – in Hebrew usage - doesn't refer to a TITLE but a characterization. It shows that he really was God WITH US.** He is God incarnate – God with flesh – all we talked about last week – so he could be with us.

John Wesley – the founder of the Methodist church – right before he died, opened his eyes and said in a clear voice – "The best of all is God with us." To be without God in the world is the worst state imaginable. But to have God with us is to have everything – for if you have God with you, what or who can stand up against you?

As one pastor put it – He is the captain of our salvation, he is the everlasting father, he is the omnipotent companion. He is the one who draws beside the sick, who comforts the elderly, who companions the lonely, who retrieves the deserted, and who travels with those who are going down the very valley of the shadow of death. He is Emmanuel – God with us. God in the form of man to be at our side.

God's word never fails. Matthew 24:35 – Jesus says, Heaven and earth will pass away, but not my words. My words – what I say – will never fall.

God fulfills his word even when situations seem to oppose it.  
God fulfills his word regardless of the passage of time.

And **God will keep his word TO YOU**. If God can fulfill his word about Jesus – after 700 years – in the face of all that seemingly opposed it – then everything else God promises pales in comparison. Which is why all God's promises are yes in Christ Jesus. In fact that's exactly what 2 Corinthians 1:20 says, "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God."

**This Christmas – as you remember that Jesus was the fulfillment of God's word, let it remind you that God NEVER FAILS.**

And that same principle continues today. God's word never fails. God is who He says He is and God does what He promised to do.

Listen – on that truth our entire faith and hope rests. **The reason we are a PEOPLE of the Word is because we serve a God who KEEPS His word.**

Amen? Amen.

Let's pray.