

Immanuel

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[0 : 00] Matthew chapter 1 verses 18 through 25, if you would stand with me as we honor the reading of God's word together.

! Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

And her husband, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us. When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.

[1 : 30] He took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son, and he called his name Jesus. May God add a blessing to the reading of his word.

Would you please be seated? At one of our staff meetings recently, we talked about our favorite Christmas movie.

My favorite Christmas movie is A Christmas Story. Maybe one of my favorite movies, period. There are so many scenes in that movie, but the central focus of that movie is Ralphie's desire.

His fantasizing over a Red Rider carbon action 200 shot range BB gun. Though Ralph's mother, his teacher, and even Santa Claus discouraged his Christmas wish with the warning, you'll shoot your eye out.

But he remained determined to get his hands on what he believed was the ultimate Christmas gift. Nothing would deter him from pursuing what he most valued.

[2 : 49] I was a lot like Ralphie growing up. Each year I had something on my Christmas list that I felt like I had to have. And I would daydream about it.

That I would stay up late at night, couldn't fall asleep because I couldn't stop thinking about it.

Maybe that describes some of you today. Whether it's a gift, or maybe it's a bonus, or maybe you're going on some kind of trip in a couple of weeks.

Whatever the case may be, those things can easily consume us. We are easily consumed by what we most treasure. And like Ralphie, we passionately pursue things that we place a great or a high value on.

In Matthew 13, 44 through 46, Jesus tells consecutive parables with an identical meaning. Meaning, he says, The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which a man found and covered up.

Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who on finding one pearl of great value went and sold all that he had and bought it.

[4 : 10] The men in these parables cherish these new found treasures so much that they sell everything that they have to acquire them.

What treasure would be so valuable that a person would sell his house, their cars, all of their electronics, their clothes, empty out all of their banking and saving accounts to acquire?

Well, Jesus tells us it's the kingdom of heaven. More simply, it's Jesus himself. Jesus says that the greatest treasure is the kingdom of heaven, his eternal kingdom which he rules over as king of kings and lord of lords.

And the Bible says that entrance into this kingdom comes by faith in him. It comes through the new birth in salvation which Jesus made possible.

Some theologians argue that the supreme miracle of Christianity is not the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, as amazing and as important as that is, but they say it's the incarnation.

[5 : 24] When the beginningless, omnipotent creator of the universe took on a human nature without the loss of his divine nature.

J.I. Packer, one of those theologians, said, God became man. The divine son became a Jew. The almighty appeared on earth as a helpless human baby, unable to do more than lie down and stare and wiggle and make noises, needing to be fed and changed and taught to talk like any other child. The babyhood of the son of God was a reality. The more you think about it, the more staggering it gets. Nothing is so fantastic as is this truth of the incarnation.

Packer goes on to point out that many people say, I can't believe in miracles. They can't believe Jesus would walk on water or rise from the dead. They may also find that the atonement, one man's death, could wipe out the sins of billions of people seems impossible to them.

It is from misbelief, or at least inadequate belief, about the incarnation that difficulties at other points in the gospel story usually spring. But once the incarnation is grasped as a reality, these other difficulties dissolve, he concludes.

[6 : 48] In other words, if God became a human, why would you think it, or find it, incredible, or unbelievable that he could do miracles?

That he could atone for the sins of the world? And that he could rise from the dead? Matthew begins his gospel, his eyewitness testimony, as a disciple of Jesus Christ, by sharing Jesus' genealogy, which we looked at last week, and now giving more details about his birth to communicate to his readers, to us, that Jesus is a gracious savior, a sovereign king, promised Messiah, and that he is Emmanuel.

He is God with us. And he hopes that we will draw these conclusions by first helping us understand that the eternal son of God became a human being.

And that is the main idea for this morning's sermon. The eternal son of God became a human being. The eternal son of God became a human being. In Matthew 18 through 25, he answers two questions.

First, how did the eternal son of God become a human being? And then second, why? Why did the eternal son of God become a human being?

[8 : 16] And knowing the answers to these questions will help you to see and know Jesus as the priceless treasure that he is because of the priceless gift that he gives of salvation.

Why is this important? Well, again, I think it's just knowing the answers to these questions about how and why the eternal son of God became a human being.

I hope, in seeing and understanding that, that it will open your eyes to see and your ears to hear and your mind to comprehend the infinite worth and value of knowing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and the joy that he brings, which is a greater joy, and a greater gift and salvation than any other joy, than any other gift that you could ever receive.

And so we need to reflect upon that always, but especially, I think, here as we've entered into Christmastime. So let's look at the first question. How? How did the eternal son of God become a human being?

Well, Matthew tells us that he was conceived by the Holy Spirit. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Verse 18 again, Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

[9 : 43] The Bible doesn't give us much information about Mary. It gives us even less information about Joseph. Mary was more than likely a native of Nazareth and came from a relatively poor family.

She was also probably between the age of 12 or 13 when the angel Gabriel came to her with the news that she would conceive a son who would be called Son of the Most High and whom the Lord would give the throne of David to reign over the house of Jacob and whose kingdom would never end.

That's pretty big news to give to such a young girl. But Mary was a godly woman who was sensitive and submissive to the Lord's will.

She was willing to accept this incredible responsibility but she did have a question. Mary was smart. Mary knew how things work but she wasn't sure how this was going to work.

And so in Luke's gospel verse 1 through 34 through 35 it says, And Mary said to the angel, How will this be since I am a virgin?

[11 : 03] And the angel answered her, The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born shall be called Holy the Son of God.

Now I mentioned last week that Gabriel, he didn't go to each person's house in Nazareth. He didn't go to all of Mary and Joseph's neighbors and explain to them how she was going to be pregnant before she had gotten married.

And so Mary was willing to endure the sneers, the dirty looks, the rumors, the lies about her purity because she trusted God and praised Him for fulfilling His promise to send the Savior which she does in Luke chapter 1 verses 47 through 46.

Mary received this news before Joseph did. And we don't know how long it was between when Mary was told about the miraculous conception of God's Son in her womb and when Joseph was told about it in a dream.

But at some point, prior to receiving that dream, Joseph realized that Mary was pregnant and he knew that the child wasn't his.

[12 : 28] But he knew it was somebody's. So in verse 19 it says, and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

Two facts are clear at this point. Mary is with child and consequently Joseph, excuse me, doesn't want to be with her as a result of that.

What is less clear is how Joseph can be called Mary's husband when they are yet married and how they are not married but Joseph can divorce her.

That confusion is cleared up with a better understanding of how marriages were arranged during this time and place. Mary and Joseph probably knew that one day they were going to get married when they were little kids.

Their fathers would have come together and they would have played matchmakers. Maybe they consulted their wives.

[13 : 32] maybe they consulted the children that they were going to be married. Maybe not. We don't know. But as the children would get older, early teenage years for girls, more later teenage years for boys, they entered into a betrothal period.

And at that time the fathers would come together and they would make a contract which sealed the marriage. and it was sealed also with a dowry, a payment that was made by the bride's father to the groom's father which served to compensate for the wedding and also provided sort of like insurance in case the groom backed out of the agreement.

And that contract was binding as soon as it was made. And the young man and the young woman were considered at that point in time legally married even though the ceremony and consummation of the relationship didn't take place up until a year afterward.

During the betrothal the couple had very little interaction with one another to demonstrate and to prove their purity and fidelity to each other. So that's where Joseph and Mary are at this point in the story.

Betrothed, legally married, but having no physical contact with each other. Now Joseph was missing a pertinent piece of information that Mary had already received and that Matthew has already given to us.

[15 : 09] That this child was from the Holy Spirit. Matthew emphasizes that truth twice. Once we've read in verse 18 and he does it again in verse 20.

But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

Have you ever thought much about the role of the Holy Spirit in the conception of Jesus? I know in the past when I've preached this message or on this text, I've focused more on the decision that Joseph had to make about divorcing Mary.

He could have made it public. Stoning was the penalty in this culture in this time for committing adultery. He could have sought that. But instead, he chose to protect her as much as he could while also doing the just thing and being obedient to God's law.

But seldom, I think, do we stop to consider the work of the Holy Spirit to knit together the physical form of the preexistent Son of God.

[16:31] The Holy Spirit doesn't get much attention at Christmas time as the other members of the Trinity do. In fact, I think the Holy Spirit is often in the church treated as the forgotten member of the Trinity.

Makes me think of a time growing up, my best friend had an older brother and he had a younger brother. And my friend and me and our friends, we would play baseball and football in the backyard with his oldest brother and all of his friends.

But his younger brother didn't care about sports and he was quite a bit younger than the rest of us. And so he would come outside and he would just kind of pop in and out.

He'd run in and out of the house, around the house, out into the woods and he would just kind of be there. And he was kind of strange but he was also really smart.

And sometimes he would show us these things that he had done and we would be astounded by him. But most people who knew my friend, our friends, had no idea that he had a younger brother.

[17:41] They knew he had an older brother because they saw them together a lot. But his little brother was much less visible. He was sort of kind of like the forgotten brother.

And I think that's how a lot of people view the Holy Spirit. Like that strange relative who kind of pops in and out of our lives but is off doing some kind of mysterious thing.

Here Matthew wants us to understand the work of the Holy Spirit to conceive, to merge the infinite with the finite, to unite the divine nature and the human nature into the God-man Jesus Christ.

In verse 18, the Greek term translated as birth is Genesis. Now the Bible, the Bible's testimony is that Jesus is the eternal word of God.

John points that out at the beginning of his gospel that he was involved in the Genesis of all things. John 1, 1-4 In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God.

[18:56] He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life and the life was the light of men.

And then in verse 14, The Holy Spirit was also in Genesis.

He was hovering over the face of the waters of creation. And so here in Jesus' birth, he is hovering over. He is overshadowing Mary's womb, forming the eternal word of God into one of us.

A divine and human being with bones, brains, blood, lungs, lips, lymph nodes, head, heart, and hands. Where am I going with all of this?

Well, I think for many of us, we've heard this story so many times that it becomes less awesome to us.

[20:07] And so I've hoped to hopefully stir some awe in you, in the mysteriousness of a virgin who conceives a holy child, who has always been, yet has this beginning by the work of the Holy Spirit to unite the divine and human natures of Jesus, forming his body inside of his mother's womb as God put on flesh to become like us in every way yet without sin.

That's the best I can do to answer the how question. Here's a quote from John MacArthur.

Obviously, Jesus' conception of the Holy Spirit is a great mystery.

Even had he wanted to do so, how could God have explained it to us in terms we could comprehend, how such a blending of the divine and human nature could have been accomplished. We could no more fathom such a thing than we can fathom God's creating the universe from nothing, or his being God in three persons, or his giving an entirely new spiritual nature to those who trust in his Son.

Understanding of such things will have to await heaven when we see our Lord face to face and know fully, just as we have been fully known, we accept it by faith.

So how did the eternal Son of God become a human being? He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. But why? Why?

[21:38] Why would God do this? Why would God descend to such lows? Why would he come to visit those who have rejected him and who have denied his existence?

sins? Why would he do this? Well, the answer to the why question is to save his people from their sins. Why did the eternal Son of God become a human being?

To save his people from their sins. In the rest of Joseph's dream, the angel revealed that she, Mary, will bear a son and that you shall call his name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins.

As I mentioned last week, Jesus is Yeshua or Joshua in Hebrew and it means Jehovah, God will save. All the other men prior to Jesus who received that name received it as a testimony of God's salvation.

But this child would not only testify to God's salvation, he himself would be that salvation. At this point, Matthew sort of hits the pause button on this narrative of Jesus' birth to quote an Old Testament prophecy which foretold the coming of the Messiah in verse 22.

[23 : 02] Quoting from Isaiah chapter 7 verse 14, all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel which means God with us.

This prophecy that Isaiah received came, he received it I should say, 700 years before Jesus' birth. Back then, King Ahaz was being threatened by enemies and God told him to ask for a sign to encourage his faith, to encourage his trust in God, that God would preserve him and his people. Ahaz, he feigned humility and he didn't ask for a sign. And so God chose his own sign with implications that far exceeded anything Ahaz could have ever hoped for or anyone else.

700 years later, Jesus, the Son of God, came in fulfillment of that prophecy. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and was literally, truly, God with us.

Truly God and truly human. He is God with us and has revealed God to us in all of God's fullness. Colossians 1, 15 through 20 points this out.

[24 : 23] He, speaking of Jesus, is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities.

All things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things. And in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body of the church.

He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

the Greek word for reconcile in that passage means to change or exchange. Jesus lived sinlessly, something he could do since he was God.

And he willingly died as a sacrifice on the cross to atone for our sins. In salvation, an exchange and a change take place.

[25 : 40] Jesus takes our sin and he gives us his righteousness, his sinlessness. In that exchange, we are changed.

We are regenerated. We are transformed through the new birth which is a work of the Holy Spirit. when Nicodemus came to Jesus early on in his ministry, he was a Pharisee.

He realized that there was something special about him. And Jesus spoke to him and I want to record or share a little bit of that interaction in John 3 verses 3 through 7. Jesus answered him, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Nicodemus said to him, how can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born? Jesus answered, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, you must be born again.

[26 : 58] The wind blows where it wishes and you hear it sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.

Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God, the Son of God, was conceived by the Holy Spirit and was born to save people from their sins through the work of the Holy Spirit in the new birth.

Jesus was born so that we can be reborn. We are reborn when the Spirit opens our eyes to see our need for a Savior and when we turn to Jesus in faith, submitting to his kingship, his lordship over our redeemed lives.

Listen, Jesus didn't come merely to set an example of morality for people. Jesus didn't come primarily to teach us how to live and how to love. His mission, he declared from the beginning, was to preach repentance for sin and declare that he is the only way, the only truth, and the only life, the only one through whom there is eternal life.

And it was for that message that sinful men put him to death. but his death achieved the eternal redemptive plan of God.

[28 : 27] After Jesus rose again, after he commissioned his disciples to go into the world and make disciples and he ascended into heaven, Peter got up to preach when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost.

And I want to read a portion, a pretty large portion of his sermon in Jerusalem. Men of Israel, he says to them, hear these words, Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know, this Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death because it was not possible for him to be held by it. And Peter goes on to share more about Israel's history and their rejection of God.

And then in Acts 2, 22 through, or Acts 2, 37 through 39, excuse me, these men have heard this. They've been convicted. And we read, they say, now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart.

And Peter and the rest of the apostles, they asked, brothers, what shall we do? And Peter said to them, repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

[29 : 49] You will be reborn for the promises for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord God calls to himself. When we place our faith in the risen Christ, a divine transaction takes place.

2 Corinthians 5, 21 says, for our sake, he, God the Father, made him, God the Son, who knew no sin, to be sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

In salvation, God removes our sin, our guilt, our condemnation, all those things that we deserve for our rebellion against him and he separates us from our sin.

Psalms 103, verse 12 says, as far as the east is from the west, and again, those two points never meet, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. At the moment of repentance and faith, the Holy Spirit breathes new life into us and our bodies become his temple.

God dwells within us and thus our spirits can commune with God's spirit as he assures us that we truly have been saved, that we truly belong to him.

[31 : 06] Romans 8, 16 through 17 testifies to this truth. The spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God and if children then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ provided we suffer with him in order that we also may be glorified with him.

Jesus was born miraculously, lived sinlessly, died sacrificially and rose victoriously to save sinners. Okay, why? Why would he do that?

John 3, 16 says it pretty simply. For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

People in our culture like to segregate people into all different kinds of groups but the Bible says there's really only two groups. Those who have been born again and those who have not been born again.

When Jesus returns his testimony is that he will separate all people into those two groups. Those on his left and those on his right. And it is those on his right who have trusted in him for salvation who will enter the eternal joy of their Lord and Savior their Master Jesus Christ.

[32 : 34] This is important. This is so important. Nothing is more important than that you understand who Jesus is and that you understand why he came.

Why did he come? To save his people from their sins by taking their sins upon himself that by faith in him those who do so are adopted into his family.

They're adopted as sons and daughters of God who receive his righteousness and who receive eternal life. Who receive the spirit of adoption.

Romans 8 15 says for you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear but you have received the spirit of adoptions as sons by whom we cry Abba Father.

Now let's turn back to our passage and make some final connections. In verses 24-25 in Matthew 1 it says when Joseph woke from sleep he had been told about Jesus being conceived by the Holy Spirit the Son of God.

[33 : 50] When Joseph woke from his sleep he didn't think well that was a crazy dream. What did I have to eat last night? No? Well I guess it's time to go get that divorce. No.

He knew that this message was from God and he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. He took his wife Mary but knew her not until she had given birth to a son and he called his name Jesus which means God saves.

Jesus or excuse me Joseph adopted Jesus as his son. Picturing the adoption we receive from God as his sons and his daughters when we trust in him the one in whom he has sent Jesus to save us from our sins.

In the book Ben-Hur there is a vivid portrayal of Roman adoption. In the movie Judah Ben-Hur a Jew was imprisoned on a Roman ship as a rower and when the ship sinks in battle Judah escapes and he saves one of the Roman commanders Arius.

Arius' only son had been killed and so he ultimately adopts Judah who is pardoned for his supposed crimes. He is also given a new name in this adoption young Arius and he has all the rights of his now adopted father and in the scene where this adoption is announced Arius takes off his ancestral signet ring and he gives it to the young Arius and young Arius says that he has received a new life a new home and a new father.

[35 : 41] This friend is what happens when God saves you. This is what happens to you when God saves you. Galatians 4 3-7 says in the same way we also when we were children were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world but when the fullness of time had come God sent forth his son born of a woman born under the law to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons and because you are sons God has sent the spirit of his son into our hearts crying Abba Father you are no longer a slave but a son and if a son then an heir through God.

So now you have the answers to the questions but another answer or another question I should say still remains to be answered and that's our adjustment for this morning are you one of his people? Are you one of his people? The Bible testifies that Jesus came to save his people are you one of his people?

In Mark 2 16-17 Jesus has one of his many interactions with the scribes and the Pharisees these men who were religious who had developed their own law their own system of works based salvation and they were indignant with Jesus and by the ones that he had come to save who they thought were too low too ugly too unworthy of such a gift and there it says and the scribes and the Pharisees when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors said to his disciples why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners and when Jesus heard it he said to them those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick I came not to call the righteous but sinners sinners and we are all sinners and we have all fallen short way short of God's perfect and righteous standard thus Jesus had to come if we were going to be saved and he has come and you've heard why he's come and if you know that he's come to save you then what greater treasure is there for you to have to want or to desire

Jesus is the greatest treasure that there is and in salvation you have him and you have reason to be joyful and hopeful at all times in all seasons in life and if you have not been saved listen friend he has brought you here this God who has ordained all things from the beginning has brought you here today to learn to hear and hopefully to believe how his son came and why his son came he came to save sinners and he offers you that gift right now today you don't have to clean yourself up you don't have to go on some kind of pilgrimage or some kind of journey all you do is turn to Jesus away from your sin I'm a sinner Lord I need a savior and he is you save me and he will he will exchange your sinfulness and give you his righteousness he will transform you and you'll have eternal life praise God that in his love and in his grace he sent his son and praise the son who came and fulfilled all that we could not and who willingly died on the cross enduring our shame being forsaken by the father and who rose again that by belief in him the Holy

[39 : 58] Spirit changes us and dwells inside of us and keeps us forever and for always if you don't know that truth and I hope that you've believed it today I'll be down here during our invitation him please come talk to me if that's not comfortable come find me afterwards or some other time I would love to talk to you for those of you who have been saved rejoice friend rejoice the greatest treasure the greatest gift that there ever is is yours in Jesus Emmanuel God with us let's pray Lord we are so thankful for this wonderful glorious reality of who you are and what you've done to save us we who've rejected you who've denied you time and time again yet Lord in your grace you have provided to us the greatest treasure in Jesus

Christ your son and Lord we are so thankful for your willingness to come your willingness to die on the cross in our place for our sins and we rejoice that the tomb could not keep you that on the third day you rose again you've ascended into heaven where you make intercessions on our behalf right now as I as I speak and we anticipate your coming back Holy Spirit we're so thankful for your work to save us to make us new creations and to continue to work in us conforming us and making us more like Jesus Christ what a wonderful wonderful message this is what great hope and joy it brings to us God not just during Christmas time but at all times and so Father

I pray for those of us who are of your people that as we continue to go into this Christmas season that you would remind us that no matter what we get or don't get no matter how our plans go or don't go that we have you and that's more than enough and Lord for those who are not of your people I pray that today you would save them and that you would change them and that they would receive Jesus Christ as the true and great treasure that he is Lord we love you thank you for first loving us in Jesus name we pray Amen you