

The Importance of the Incarnation

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[0 : 00] Matthew chapter 1 verses 18 through 25.

! And her husband Joseph, 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 : 21] 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?

I recently came across a video on social media where a pastor was promoting his Christmas series, which he entitled Christmas at the Movies.

And so each Sunday, he'll be playing clips from a secular Christmas movie during the service, taking those clips from those movies and then connecting them to Scripture.

Now, there are many Christmas movies that I like, but I'll watch those movies at home, because the church is not a movie theater.

The church is a pillar and buttress of truth, that truth which is contained in God's Word. Our Bibles contain the Christmas story, the hope that we have in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

[2 : 37] And so watching that pastor promote that series honestly made me sick and angry, because it's just another cheap tactic to fill pews with the promise of entertainment.

And so it's no wonder to me that as the research reveals fewer and fewer Christians believe in the virgin birth of Jesus or understand the theological significance of the incarnation of the Son of God. During this time of year, there is great opportunities to advance the gospel. Unbelievers will visit churches, and God forbid that when they do, they will be shown a movie instead of being shown God's Word.

The Christmas story is not meant primarily for our entertainment. It's God's declaration to us that there is hope for humanity which has been ruined by sin.

There is hope for our entertainment. There is hope of pardon. There is hope of peace with God. Hope of glory, because at the Father's will, Jesus Christ became poor and was born in a stable.

[3 : 52] Thirty-some years later, He then hung on a cross to purchase those things just mentioned for us. It is the most powerful and wonderful message that the world has ever heard or will ever hear.

And it's a message then that doesn't need to be dressed up with clips of movies about Buddy the Elf, Frosty the Snowman, or the kid that shot his eye out with a BB gun. Movies that I enjoy, but don't bring me further to Christ.

The story of the first Christmas isn't as pretty as we tend to make it either. Our Lord was rejected by the world He created and came to save before He was even born.

As exemplified by the fact that no one in Bethlehem was willing to make space for a woman who was in labor. And instead, she and Joseph were forced to have Jesus, who was born in the most humblest of circumstances, in a stable or a barn, cradled in a cattle trough.

Our Savior's birth was humble, but is glorious and mysterious. God became a baby.

[5 : 19] Fully and truly human, yet simultaneously fully and truly God. He who made man was now learning what it was like to be man.

As J.I. Packer said, the mystery of the Incarnation is unfathomable. We cannot explain it. We can only formulate it.

And so, through this text, that's what I intend to do this morning, to formulate the incredible significance of the Incarnation for us. And in this text, we find three principles which formulate the main idea for this morning's sermon, which is this.

The essence and power of the gospel is that God became man to reconcile men to God. The essence and power of the gospel is that God became man to reconcile men to God.

And so, as we've been in Matthew, we saw from last week that Matthew has already provided the genealogy of Jesus which connects him to the royal line of David and fulfillment of God's promises made in the Old Testament of who the Messiah would be.

[6 : 36] And then we saw also, through that genealogy, how God, throughout the history of Israel, was declaring himself and proving himself and showing himself to be sovereign, to be one who keeps his promises, and one who is also gracious to sinners.

And now, as we continue in Matthew's gospel today, we will see how the incarnation, though mysterious, is formulated by three timeless theological principles that, as we grasp them in a greater way, will give us, I hope and I pray, the true spirit of Christmas.

Movies are no substitute for the gospel. And the first timeless theological principle that our text gives us this morning is that Jesus is God.

Jesus is God. In verse 18, again, it says, 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 bound to be with child by the Holy Spirit. Now, we don't know a whole lot about Mary. It's likely that Nazareth was her hometown and that she came up raised in a relatively poor family, in a relatively poor community.

[8 : 08] From Luke 3, we receive information about her connection to the Davidic line. But other than that, we don't know a whole lot about her. But I think it's safe for us to say that in the eyes of the world, Mary was insignificant, young, raised in relative obscurity, and a part of a family who was not influential at all.

But we do know that Mary was a godly young woman, that she was a young lady who was sensitive and submissive to the Lord's will.

Luke records in his gospel that when the angel Gabriel appeared to her with the news that she would be the mother of the Son of God, Mary didn't reply to that news with something like this, well, you know, honestly, God couldn't have picked a better vessel to be the mother of his Son.

That was not her comment. Instead, she said, behold, I am a servant. I am a servant of the Lord.

She said, in humility and with obedience and with gratitude, I am your servant, God.

And so, let it be to me according to your word, according to your plan. But prior to making that statement, we read that Mary was believing.

[9 : 42] When she received the news from the angel, she had questions, but they weren't questions in regard to the doubt of God, but questions in regard to the execution of his plan.

She said, how will this be since I am a virgin? We see Mary's humility, reverence, and love for God and her praise of him in Luke chapter 1 verses 46 through 55.

There it says, and Mary said, my soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed, for he who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is his name.

See, Mary knew that the son that she bore was the son of God and she greatly rejoiced in the role she was given by God to serve as his mother.

We know even less about Joseph. We know his father's name was Jacob from chapter 1 verse 16, that he was a craftsman, most likely a carpenter.

[10 : 58] But the most important thing that Scripture notes about Joseph comes from verse 19 that we've read, that he was a just man or a righteous man as some of your translations put it.

It is likely that both Joseph and Mary were very young when they were betrothed. In this time and culture, girls were betrothed as young as 12 or 13 years old and boys when they were several years older than that, probably in their late teens or early 20s.

A betrothal, according to Jewish custom, was similar in some ways to our engagements and our culture, but it was also very, very different in at least a few ways.

It was similar to our engagement and then marriage because there was two stages in Hebrew culture as well. However, in this time, unlike our time, the marriage was often arranged by families without consulting either the bride or groom.

A contract was then made between the fathers and it was sealed by the father of the groom or the family of a groom with a payment called the mohar in Hebrew.

[12 : 23] That was the bride price and it was paid by the groom to the father of the bride or the family of the bride and that mohar, that bride price served to compensate the father of the bride for whatever expenses he might incur for that wedding and also provide a sort of insurance in case the groom got cold feet.

The contract that was signed was considered binding. And so, as soon as it was made, in the eyes of that society, the man and the woman who were betrothed were legally married even though they had not had their marriage ceremony and had not consummated their marriage and wouldn't in most cases up until a year after the contract was signed.

The betrothal period served as a time of preparation for the wedding ceremony and also a testing of the couple's fidelity. During that time, the bride and groom would have little to no contact with one another and often the groom was busy preparing the place where he would live with his bride which most often was an addition to his parents' house.

It was during this time with all these things going on during this betrothal before Mary and Joseph had come together and when they had little contact with one another that Mary was visited by the angel with the news that she would conceive God's Son by the Holy Spirit.

Now we think of that, that's mysterious. I like how John MacArthur put it. He said, obviously Jesus' conception by 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?

[14 : 33] How such a blending of divine and human could have been accomplished? We could no more fathom such a thing than we can fathom God's creating the universe from nothing, 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. And so he says we accept it by faith.

So we see here and what we know and what Scripture is telling us is that Jesus is God's Son. The eternal second person of the Trinity, the Word of God, added a human nature to his divine nature and was conceived by the third person of the Trinity who is the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb.

This is mysterious. But we know from Scripture that Joseph is never referred to as Jesus' father in the Bible. Had Jesus been conceived by an act of man, whether Joseph or any other, it would mean that he could not be and would not be divine.

And then he could not be our Savior because he could not die in our place and for our sins and us be declared righteous because of his sinlessness and his being the Son of God.

[15 : 55] Also, his own claims, he said that I am the Son of God over and over again. If he wasn't, then he would have been lying. And his resurrection and his ascension would then be hoaxes and we would have no hope at all.

Mary had never known a man when the Son of God was conceived in her womb mysteriously and miraculously by the Holy Spirit. Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, reiterates this truth when he tells us in Galatians 4, 4-5, 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.

You know, Joseph would eventually come to learn this mystery or understand what had happened to the woman he was betrothed to, but for a time he didn't know.

We go to verse 19 and we see in her husband Joseph being a just and unwilling to put her to shame resolved to divorce her quietly. So you have to understand that Joseph in the eyes of this culture was legally married to Mary.

Even though their ceremony had not yet taken place and even though they had not yet come together, they were considered to be husband and wife.

[17 : 27] He would have known her or considered her in his mind as his wife from the moment that contract was signed. But he knew that she was with child and he knew that that child wasn't his.

And so that situation, think about it, put him in a troubling position. First of all, it was troubling because of his moral standards.

He knew that he should not go through with this marriage. However, he loved Mary and he cared about her and he could not bear the thought of putting her to shame, much less demanding that she be put to death, which Deuteronomy 22, 23 through 24 would have afforded him to do.

You see, from Scripture, we have no indication here that Joseph was angry, that Joseph was bitter, that Joseph was jealous, or that he was vengeful.

but I think it's safe to say that he was broken hearted, at least. If what he assumed was true, was true then, he had been shamed by Mary.

[19 : 04] But still, as we see here, his concern was not for himself, but for her. And the Bible says he was not willing to put her to shame, so in love, he sought to do the right thing in a way that would cause the least amount of harm to her.

And so, his plan was that he would be discreet and he would secretly find out and do what he needed to do to dissolve this marriage in a divorce.

And that way, at least for a time, Mary would be protected. And so, Joseph decided to be as gracious to Mary as he could be, but before he could go through with that plan, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream.

We see in verses 20 and 21, but as he considered these things, Mary's pregnancy and how that could be, 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 from the Holy Spirit and she will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins.

And so, once again, this passage reinforces the spiritual nature of Jesus' birth. Mary was a virgin. Jesus was conceived not by a man but by the Holy Spirit.

[20 : 31] Joseph, though not Jesus' true father, would be his father in a legal sense, the man commissioned by God to raise his son. That's what the Bible says.

And that's what we as Christians are commanded to believe, that Jesus is the Son of God. God. But let's take a quick time out here for a second to try to wrap our minds around what else this meant for both Joseph and Mary.

Because you see, God sent an angel to them but he didn't send an angel as far as we know to anybody else in Nazareth explaining what was going on.

And so for them what this meant was that their neighbors would begin to start looking at them suspiciously and would begin chattering about them behind their backs assuming things that were not true because they didn't have that explanation that Mary and Joseph did.

And so what we see here is they're accepting a responsibility that meant that they would be the subject of gossip and the recipients of scornful looks.

[21 : 59] Later in Jesus' ministry if you remember the Pharisees accused him of being born out of wedlock no doubt they at some point had gone back to where Jesus grew up and tried to dig up as much dirt as they could on him to discredit him in his ministry and they got their hands on that story.

But Joseph and Mary knew the truth. They had the truth and they didn't shy away from the awesome responsibility that God had given to them. And so like them you and I as believers we accept that God's word is true and we accept what it says regarding the incarnation of his son Jesus Christ.

And so we believe and we affirm everything that it says about that that he was conceived by the Holy Spirit that he is truly the God man fully God and fully human that he was crucified to atone for our sins on the cross that he was dead that on the third day he rose from the dead in vindication of his claims and who he said that he was as first fruits of the resurrection that you and I who follow him will one day experience as well that then he ascended into heaven where he sits at the right hand of the father and where we anticipate his soon return for those beliefs and for our faith in Jesus and for our desire to be obedient to what he has commanded and our desire to stand for what is true and counter error we will like Joseph and Mary then and as Christ was be the subject of scorn and ridicule for these beliefs that we hold so dear but like them and like him we have come to know the truth we know the truth and it's a truth that we will not exchange for the lies of Satan or this world it's our declaration that Jesus was not just a good moral teacher that he was not some kind of political revolutionary or even a prophet but that he is who he declared himself to be the son of God and nothing less and in knowing that he is the son of God we also know secondly our second timeless theological principle that Jesus is God with us he's God with us again in verse

22 and 23 and 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 here Matthew sort of pauses his narrative to focus our attention on this Old Testament prophecy which foretold the coming of the Messiah he quotes the book of Isaiah and an instance with King Ahaz when he was given a sign by God a sign that God chose which promised that God would preserve his people but the promise had far reaching farther implications than he understood at that time 700 years after King Ahaz Jesus the Son of God came in fulfillment of that prophecy being Emmanuel which means God with us and Jesus was truly literally God with us he was fully human yet still fully God he came to live in Israel with his people as Isaiah foretold John's gospel provides us a great description of what all this means for us John chapter 1 verses 14 and 18 and the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory glory as the only son of the father full of grace and truth verse 18 no one has ever seen

[26 : 21] God the only God who is at the father's side he has made him know you want to know what God is like examine the life and the ministry and the person of his son Jesus in Jesus God walked with us and talked with us just as he did Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden Christ's arrival proved that God is faithful to keep his promises Jesus was not a sign of God with us he was God with us in person visibly demonstrably Jesus is not a partial revelation of God he is God with us in his fullness as Colossians 2 9 says for in him Jesus the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily Jesus the son of God left the glories of heaven and took on the form of a servant so that he could identify with us in our day today human struggles and ultimately then to satisfy

God the Father's wrath by dying in our place on the cross for our sins Philippians chapter 2 verses 5 through 11 is one of my favorite passages of scripture have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus who though he was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death even death on a cross therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father Jesus Christ is our Emmanuel and though he's currently seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven we know from his word that he's given us his spirit his spirit which indwells us at salvation his spirit who keeps us his spirit who sanctifies us and who ministers through us to advance the gospel and we know that because we have received his spirit that nothing can ever separate us from our Emmanuel Romans 8 35 through 39 who shall separate us from the love of Christ shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword as it is written for your sake we are being killed all the day long we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered no in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us for I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all of creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord see God who is with us will one day bring us into his eternal presence and his everlasting kingdom and so if you know

Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior you know that you are his forever you will never experience a time when you do not know God and his love and his grace and then thirdly we see that Jesus is God's son that that Jesus is God with us and that Jesus is Savior he's Savior verse 24 and 25 when Joseph woke up from sleep he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him he took his wife but he knew her not until she had given birth to a son and he called his name Jesus see again we see in Joseph and Mary that their faith was not a half-hearted faith they trusted God completely and in his instruction totally they knew that the child in Mary's womb was the son of God that he was God with us and they knew that his name was Jesus and that revealed what this child would do though they didn't fully apprehend it that first

Christmas day you know it's exciting when you're a parent well it can be exciting when you're a parent and you're you're trying to think of a name for your child and you know if you've been in that situation before that there's a lot of there's a lot of suggestions that you'll receive from your friends from your co-workers from your family and honestly it can be it can be stressful right because you think I don't want to I don't want to give them a name that the kids are going to tease them about and you know kids kids will you could be named John Smith and kids will find a reason to make fun of you right and you you try to think well will it you know will it flow with our last name what should

the middle name be and all those different kinds of things and it can be very very stressful but we like to help couples think up with names don't we

[32 : 29] Evan and Hannah right aren't you aren't you so glad that we have given you so many recommendations for names that you could name your child and I'm sure that you appreciate every single one don't you it can also be stressful whenever you have that name picked out but you don't want to share it with people because you know they might say oh well that's a that's an interesting name is that a family name but you know what Mary and Joseph didn't have that stress and they didn't have that worry because God had a name for his son and his name would be Jesus from the Hebrew name Joshua which has the same basic meaning that that Jehovah or Yahweh saves other men had had that name but in their having that name it was simply a reminder of who God was that God is a God who saves and they were testifying to that but Jesus was

God's son and he would do more than just testify to God's salvation he would be God's salvation for his people by his own life by his own death resurrection he would save his people from their sins and as a final act of obedience to God's instruction through the angel Joseph called his name Jesus indicating that truly he is the Savior God's I came across a poem I think it's brand new it's called The Gift and it's a long poem it's 26 stanzas truly you know we say we say this time of year and we mean it I believe that you know the greatest gift we'll ever receive is Jesus the Son of God and what he's done for us and sometimes those can just be words that we mean but you know we're focused on other things as well but man

I was really you know inspired by this poem I won't read all of it to you I'll read the last four lines but talking about how great of a gift we've received in Jesus Christ it says with sufferers I came to sympathize to take their pain and with them agonize in me their high priest they'll soon recognize was ever a gift like mine is this not why I've come I'm born to die a ransom for many their souls I'll buy that all wretchedness I might beautify was ever there a gift like mine the tree of life I made for man's good the cross of death men made not knowing I would as a carpenter's son trade wood for wood was ever their gift like mine so as angels sing celestial chorus Emmanuel will be the most joyous carol men will ever sing

God with us never was a gift like mine and so here's the main point of application for our sermon this morning that those who truly know Jesus have been reconciled to God and they have been given the ministry of reconciliation those who truly know Jesus have been reconciled to God and they have been given the ministry of reconciliation and we should always be seeking to be obedient to the Lord's command for us to go and make disciples and we know that during this time of year he provides us with wonderful opportunities to share the good news that God's son has come that he has lived sinlessly that he has died on the cross and suffered for our sins that in faith and belief in him and his resurrection we are saved we have peace with God now and forevermore what a great opportunity for us during this time of year and you know so many people in our world in our culture right now celebrate

Christmas and they have no idea what happened on that first Christmas day or why we truly celebrate Christmas I think sometimes we have this thought that everybody knows about the birth of Jesus maybe they know a little bit of it but they don't know the rest first person I ever witnessed to was my neighbor when I was a boy maybe fourth or fifth grade the first person I really ever witnessed to we were up in my room and we had we were showing each other some of the toys that we had just recently got from Christmas and I don't recall everything but I remember that I was talking about how you know we had gone to church and just sharing about the birth of Jesus I mean he just looked at me like what are you talking about he had no idea and so you know he was the first person I ever preached to

[38 : 24] I sat him in my room in a chair in my room and I just shared with him you know this is who Jesus is this is what Jesus has done and he was flabbergasted!

Never heard it before and then I remember he asked me will you take me to church someday will you take me to church yeah I got to talk to my parents but yeah we'll take you to church and he started coming with us to church every Sunday live right down the road drive the car down pick him up take him to church before too long his mom started taking him to church not long after that his brother came with him and his mom to church and not long after that his father and they started coming as a family it's the greatest story it's the greatest truth that we can share the good news of who Jesus Christ is and what he came to do and the salvation that he brings it's a truth that we rejoice in it's a truth that we celebrate it's a truth that we have been commanded to share and may

we not forget that as we celebrate

Christmas that we have wonderful opportunities to share the true meaning of it with a world in desperate need of hearing the hope that comes only through knowing Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior three questions of application tonight is our children's Christmas pageant I invite you to come kids need to be here at six o'clock but come for that they're going to retell this story to us it's going to be great so we won't have we won't meet tonight to discuss these questions we'll have that instead but I encourage you to think about these questions today or later this week question number one why is the incarnation such an essential doctrine of the Christian faith telling you there are people who call themselves Christians who are abandoning this truth left and right it is critical that we understand the importance of the incarnation if you want to have a conversation with me about that

I'd love to have that conversation with you too as we dig deeper into scripture as to why that is so important question number two what does this passage say about the character of Joseph and Mary what does it say about their character are you willing to obey God's commands and submit to his will for your life as they were what does it say about their character their faith and their trust in God and then finally who has God put in your life who you need to share the gospel with who has God put in your life who you need to share this good news this gospel with who you love who is that you are close to who is it that the Lord has put on your heart that you need to either invite to come tonight to a

Christmas Eve service that you need to share the gospel with that you need to declare the good news of who Jesus Christ is to let's pray Heavenly Father thank you for this day we thank you for your word we thank you for Jesus Christ your son who is God with us who is our savior who willingly came lived sinlessly died to atone for our sins rose on the third day ascended to your right hand Lord there is no greater story than the one contained in your word that gives man sinful mankind his only hope for salvation and so Lord we pray that we would rejoice in this truth that we would be reminded that we always have reason to hope because

[42 : 47] Christ is truly with us and that Lord we would share this message with those whom you put us in contact with God we don't save people you do but you use us to do that so Lord this Christmas may we focus on the reality of who Christ is what Christ has done and share that truth with others that they would know the hope and the peace and the joy that comes in knowing the true meaning of Christmas and we ask these things Lord in Jesus name amen