

Third Sunday of Advent – December 22, 2013
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Matthew 1:18-25

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.**

Dear friends in Christ:

When will it be Christmas? Those of us who are parents or grandparents of young children have probably heard that question lots over the last several days or weeks. Well it's not quite Christmas yet but as our text assures us

Theme: Immanuel has Come

1. Born as the prophet foretold (22-23)
2. Born of a virgin (18-20, 22-25)
3. Born to save us from our sins (21)

And that's really what Christmas is all about, isn't it? Christmas is really about Immanuel – which means God with us. And that's a point worth noting that Jesus is God, true God together with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The point is worth noting because there are those who would try to tell us differently. In the last presidential election one of candidates who is a member of the Church of the Latter Day Saints of Christ sought to identify his Mormon faith as being one with the Christian faith – because both believed that Jesus is the Son of God. What few failed to point out is that Christians confess more than that. They confess that Jesus is the Holy one the Son of God and that he is Immanuel. He is God the Son equal in every way with the Father as he himself said: (John 10:30) **"I and the Father are one."** Other portions of Scripture also teach that same truth: In Philippians 2:6 and following, the inspired Apostle Paul spoke of Jesus **Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; (7) rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. (8) And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death-- even death on a cross!**

When Christians celebrate Christmas they are celebrating the fact that God became one of us as the prophet Isaiah foretold and as Matthew explained in our text: **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."**

Our text for today is Matthew's account of the birth of Immanuel. It's short and sweet and to the point. Matthew's account of Immanuel's birth may be more concise and less familiar than Luke's account which is the account used most frequently in our Christmas Eve and Christmas day worship services but it is every bit as

filled with the amazing Gospel message that Jesus is our Immanuel, our Savior. While Luke records many of the incidental details of Christ's birth, Matthew was inspired by God to record the miraculous fulfillment of the OT prophecies by Jesus in a rather straightforward fashion. Both of these accounts supplement each other. Luke's account of Jesus' birth focuses on God-fearing Mary while Matthew directs our attention to God-fearing Joseph.

Immanuel has come ... born as the prophet foretold. By pointing us to the fulfillment of the OT prophecies Matthew not only assures us that Jesus is the Savior promised from of old, he also is assuring us that we can count on what God tells us in his word and rely on it. We can trust that God will bless us as he has promised. We can even believe the accounts of the miracles such as the miraculous Virgin birth of Jesus.

Immanuel has come born of the Virgin Mary. This is a miraculous truth which is highlighted in Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus Christ. **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.**

Matthew begins his account of the Lord's birth with an engagement announcement. For most people today engagement simply means that they are planning to get married someday. It's a time when they put their wedding plans together. Although they may have promised that they are planning to get married – the marriage isn't complete until the couple legally declares their promise to live together as husband and wife before witnesses. That is when they are first regarded as husband and wife.

When two people become engaged it's a happy time in their lives. That is true today and that was true also at the time of Mary and Joseph – but there are also some differences between the customs in Biblical times and our times. Mary and Joseph had promised each other that they would live their lives together as husband and wife and in God's eyes that was the beginning of their marriage.

Even though Mary and Joseph were married in God's eyes they would wait for a certain period of time before they actually began living together as husband and wife. The events of our text took place during this waiting time. The Gospel of Matthew emphasizes the fact that Joseph was not Jesus' father and that Mary was a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus.

While Joseph was waiting to take Mary home as his wife and before he had any sexual relations with her he discovered that she was pregnant. Previously the angel Gabriel had made his announcement to Mary that she would give birth to a son, Mary wondered how this could be since she was virgin. The angel explained: **"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."**

Mary then went to the hillside of Judea to spend time with her relative Elizabeth who was also expecting a child. It would seem that it was after Mary returned from visiting Elizabeth that Joseph discovered Mary's pregnancy. This was a disturbing situation for him. The only logical explanation for this situation was that Mary had been unfaithful to him – that she had broken their vow. More than that she appeared to be guilty of adultery – and for that she could have been punished with death according to Old Testament laws. As I mentioned, when Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph she was treated as if she was already his wife. The only way to dissolve such a union was through a divorce. That is exactly what Joseph was contemplating doing. **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.**

Notice once again how the Scriptures speak of the relationship of Mary and Joseph during the time of their engagement – Joseph is called her husband. He's portrayed to us as a thoughtful, loving, God-fearing

man. It was while Joseph was deciding what to do next that God gave him the answer. **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."**

Joseph's thoughts and actions make it clear that he was not that Father of Mary's child. So do the words of the angel – words which also make it clear that Mary had not been unfaithful, words which assured Joseph that Mary's Son would be the son of God – the Savior promised of old.

Joseph – take Mary home as your wife with the assurance that she is every bit the virgin she was when you became engaged to her – the angel told him. And just so that we can be clear about this too – Matthew assured us: **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."**

And then Matthew tells us that Joseph did as the angel instructed – he's a man of action carefully following the Lord's directions for his life. **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.**

Although Joseph had taken Mary home as his wife he did not have a sexual relationship with her. By reporting this "private" information to us Matthew again assures us that Immanuel has come – born as the prophets foretold, born of a virgin – the Virgin Mary, born to save us from our sins.

Dear friends it's easy to lose sight of the meaning of Christmas, isn't it? There's so much going on in the lives of God's people as they await the coming of the Lord and the celebration of his birth. Much of what keeps us busy this season has more to do with our families, our children than with Jesus. But for a few moments today we've been immersed in the Christmas message. As we've considered the message of our text it's as if we've been carefully unwrapped the truths about God's gift to us. But now there's one more truth to unwrap – a truth which makes Christmas a personal celebration for us.

So many of our thoughts this time of year are on giving to others as God gave to us. I know the thought of self almost seems contrary to the spirit of Christmas. But for just a short time this morning I'd like to focus your attention on what Christmas means to you. Immanuel has come for you to save you from your sins. Like Mary, you have found favor with God. In his grace he has called you to faith in his Son. Your sins no longer separate you from him. Immanuel is with you wherever you go, what ever you do with his saving power, with his loving forgiveness and with guiding hand.

Just as the Lord was with Mary and Joseph during the busy time that preceded the birth of Immanuel so the Lord is with us to guide us with his word during the busy days of our lives.

Dear friends rejoice – Immanuel has come for you. He was born as proclaimed by the prophets. He was born of the Virgin Mary. He was born to save you from your sins. He is God's gift to you this Christmas and always – may you rejoice in this gift always. Amen.