

## God With Us Matthew 1:23

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Two New Testament books known as gospels tell us the birth narrative of Jesus—Matthew and Luke. Matthew gives the shorter of the two accounts. His account doesn't include some really famous parts of the story. He doesn't include the angel telling young Mary what would happen or shepherds or angels singing. Matthew's account is told from the perspective of Joseph. Men tend to be briefer and Joseph's account is certainly that.

We are going to focus on one verse but the story up to that verse is that Joseph and Mary were your normal, average, run-of-the-mill young couples engaged to be married. They were following the customs of their day. This included an engagement that was like ours today only on steroids. The couple's times together were carefully controlled. The Ten Commandments made it clear that sex outside of marriage was strictly forbidden and to do so could mean death by stoning. First century Jewish engagements required a divorce to end. Engagement was a big deal and much closer to actual marriage than our own engagements.

So guess what Joseph thought when it was revealed that Mary was pregnant? What would every normal man think? *Mary has been unfaithful to me.* What would the townspeople think? Probably that Joseph lacked virtue and they had failed to control themselves and wait. All of it was a nightmare for Joseph. Compounding this was that Mary told him, *the Holy Spirit has made me pregnant.*

Can you see him rolling his eyes? *Yeah, right. I'm sure that's what happened. God did it.* Everything changed for Joseph when he had his own angelic encounter. The angel Gabriel appeared to him and verified Mary's story. Gabriel went on and said, marry her for "*She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.*" (Matthew 1:21)

Matthew doesn't include shepherds or angels singing, but he does include names. Two of them. And not just the names but the meaning of the names. That's what I want us to consider today.

You shall call his name Jesus. That's no real shocker for us and it wasn't for them either. Why? Jesus was a very common name in that day. By one study, Jesus was the sixth most common name for a boy. I looked on the current most popular baby name chart, and you know what name is number 6 right now? Ethan. You shall call him, Ethan. OK. I know a lot guys named Ethan. Strong name. But may I ask, why "Jesus"?

The angel says, "*for he will save his people from their sins.*" Jesus literally means *Savior*. His name explains his mission. He came to save. His name wasn't chosen for popularity but for clarity of purpose and mission.

Matthew goes on to explain what is going on and he reaches back into the Old Testament to show this birth as prophecy fulfilled.

*"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 Immanuel" (which means, God with us)."*

This little parenthesis is not in Isaiah, it's in Matthew. It shows us what he wants us to realize. Yes, born of a virgin. But if so, what does it mean? When Scripture prophesies it and angels announce it and a virgin gives birth to a son, it can only mean one thing, *God is here*. God has visited us. God is with us. You would never know it to look at him. He seems so very normal. Crying. Suckling. Filling his diaper. Normal baby stuff but within this child's being is the very nature of God. He was the God-man. The God-child. The God-infant.

Are you familiar with the show *Undercover Boss*? This past week's episode the undercover boss was the Mayor of Gary, Karen Freeman-Wilson. I really enjoyed watching it because Mayor Wilson has been a very helpful partner with our Gary campus and the City Life Center. So it was fun to watch someone local on the show. She cleaned up the beach where we do our baptisms each summer. The way the show works is that the boss, CEO, or president of a company goes undercover and works alongside unsuspecting employees to see what it's like to work on that level of the organization. Then in the end there is the unveiling of who he or she really is and they give out gifts or not depending on what the boss saw. Some are praised. Some are fired.

Imagine the waste treatment plant of Gary on Thursday, the day after the show. *The mayor was here? Really? Or in the maintenance shed, the mayor drove the trash pickup? Can you believe it?*

Why does the show work? Nobody expects the mayor to stir the human waste in the waste treatment plant. Mayors aren't known for lowering themselves to do such things. The manger was just like that only on a much grander scale. That child lying there was God. God came here. Right here in all our mess, and stench, all our sin and brokenness, God came here. Undercover God. Immanuel. *God with us*.

So what? So he came. How does that help me? Immanuel AND Jesus. The God who has come is a Savior. Isn't that what both names mean? Immanuel. *God with us*. Jesus. *Savior*. God has come, he is with us, and his purpose is to save us from our sins. It is both/and. For God's salvation to be applied to us, both have to be embraced.

My daughter Madeline is one and for a couple months has been right on the edge of walking. She can do it but she just can't quite bring herself to let go. So we walk around with her holding our fingers. She holds her hands up when she wants to know we are right there with her. The world is a scary place when you are one year old.

The world is a scary place all the time. Think Berlin this week. Think of what 2016 has endured. Orlando. ISIS. Syria. Terror attacks here and abroad. There is so much turmoil in the world. How about your 2016? Any drama? Anything scary, frustrating, devastating? Don't we feel at times like our inner child wants to hold our hands up? Anyone there? God are you with us?

God assures us of his love in the best way possible. Not from a distance. Not from the mayor's office. But by coming right down here with us, not just to be here, but to save us. How? Immanuel. *God with us*. Jesus. *Savior*. This child grew to be a man whose life and teaching changed the world. But it was his death on the cross for our sins that fulfilled the mission of his name. *Savior*. He becomes our personal Savior when we turn in faith and believe in Jesus as our Savior. Here's what it looks like: raise your hands up over your head.

Maybe this Christmas, for the first time in your life, with the world or your world crumbling around you, might you extend the hands of faith and believe?

*"Veiled in flesh the Godhead see  
Hail the Incarnate deity  
Pleased as man with men to dwell  
Jesus our Emmanuel  
Hark! the Herald Angels sing  
'Glory to the newborn King'" (Charles Wesley, Hark! The Herald Angels Sing)*

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