

Fourth Sunday in Advent

Text: Matthew 1:18-25 (NIV)

¹⁸This 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. ¹⁹Because 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. ²⁰But 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. ²¹She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” ²²All 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.” ²⁴When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Theme: In this Child God Is always Near with His Salvation

Two things have always been very important in our Christian confession of faith. They are who Jesus is and what He has done for us. For instance Martin Luther begins his explanation of the second article of the apostles creed with an explanation of who Jesus is. He writes, **“I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord.”** Luther then goes on to say what Jesus has done for us. He writes, **“who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death.”**

The angel who came to Joseph told him those two things: who this child is and what He would do for us. The angel told Joseph, *“What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.”* This child is the Son of Mary and the Son of God. Then the angel said that this child would save His people from their sins. Today I would like to look at the names which the angel gave the child. The name Immanuel shows who Jesus is. He is “God with us.” The name Jesus means “the LORD saves.” Together Jesus’ names show that God is always near with His Salvation.

I. There are times when both God and His help seem very far away.

Think of Joseph. He was about to be married. The woman whom he was about to marry would be the most famous and honored woman in all of history. Jewish weddings were joyous times. The celebration lasted for a whole week. But then Joseph found out that Mary was expecting a child. It appeared as though his beloved had been unfaithful to him, even before the wedding. He must have been devastated. Even if Mary told him that an angel came to her and told her that the child would be conceived by the Holy Spirit while she was still a virgin, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to believe. Joseph was a righteous, God-fearing man, but at this point in his life, it must have seemed like God and His help were very far away. What was he to do?

There are times when we all fall into the same predicament. Christmas is coming soon. We should feel happy, but do you? Are there things that are trying to steal your Christmas joy? It’s interesting

that our property tax bills come right at Christmastime. When we add those to our credit card bills, it takes away a lot of the holiday cheer. When we miss people or have struggles, they are magnified at this time of year. We think that we should feel happy, but it makes us even more depressed when we want to be happy, but we're not. When we are depressed, down and out, grieving, or worried, God and His help can sometimes feel very far away.

God might feel far away, but actually He is very near. An angel appeared to Joseph and told Him that God had everything under control. Even when God feels or seems far away, He really does have everything under control. The message that the angel brought to Joseph also assures us that God is with us and will give us the help that we need.

II. Jesus names show that all is well.

Matthew quotes Isaiah 7:14 which says that they will call this child "Immanuel" which means "God with us." **That name proclaims who Jesus is.** The angel told Joseph who this child is when he said, "*What is conceived in [Mary] is from the Holy Spirit.*" In the flesh of that child God has come to be with us. Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. That is why we can even say that Mary is the mother of God.

This prophecy was first given to King Ahaz. He was terrified because both the northern kingdom of Israel and Aram were threatening to attack him. Isaiah reminded Ahaz of the promise that the Savior would come, whose name is "God with Us." There was nothing to fear because God was always with His people, and especially because God had promised to be with His people when the Savior would be born.

So many of our Christmas hymns sing of the miracle of the incarnation, which is that God took on our flesh and became one of us. For instance Hark the Herald Angels Sing says, "**Veiled in flesh the God-head see! Hail, the incarnate deity!**" I love how the Advent and Christmas hymns of Paul Gerhardt show that if God is with us, then God must also be for us. For instance, "O Lord, How Shall I Greet Thee says,

**Rejoice then, ye sad-hearted, Who sit in deepest gloom,
And mourn o'er joys departed and tremble at your doom.
Despair not; He is near you, Yea, standing at the door,
Who best can help and cheer you And bid you weep no more.**

In his letters Paul also makes clear that Jesus is God in the flesh. He writes in Colossians 2:9, "*In Christ all the fullness of the Deity dwells in bodily form.*" If there is any doubt as to who Christ is, Paul writes in Romans 9:5, "*Christ is God over all, forever praised. Amen!*"

However, the most comforting verses about Jesus being God in the flesh are from the book of Hebrews. It says in Hebrews 4:15, "*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are— yet was without sin*" Because Jesus was one of us, He knows exactly what we are going through. He was made fun of; He was tempted just as we are; He mourned; He hurt; He even died. We can never say to God, "You just don't know what it's like." God does know what it's like. He knows what you are going through. He is even with you when you suffer and are tempted. God has come to be with us

in the flesh of Jesus Christ.

Jesus' other name shows what he would do. "Jesus" means Savior. The angel told Joseph, "You are to give Him the name Jesus because He will save His people from their sins." Jesus means "The Lord Saves." There were many people with different forms of this name throughout the Bible. It is also what Joshua and Isaiah mean. But in this child, this name would find fulfillment. Jesus would come into this world to save us from all of our sins. He would bear them in our place on Calvary's cross. Psalm 130 begins, "*Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord; O lord hear my voice.*" The psalm ends, "*O Israel put you hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love, and with Him is full redemption. He Himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.*" God promised that He Himself would redeem Israel. In Jesus this prophecy finds its fulfillment. Jesus came to save us from our sins. He came to save us from our fears, our worries, and even our grief. That is expressed well in another hymn verse by Paul Gerhardt,

From the bondage that oppressed us, From sin's fetters that possessed us, From the grief that sore distressed us, we the captives now are free.

Jesus has not only come to be with us. He has come to save us. The little child in Mary's womb saved Joseph from his distress that day. He will also save us from every one of our sins and troubles. He is our Savior dear.

In just a few days we will be singing, "Joy to the world, the Lord is Come." So many of our Christmas readings and Christmas hymns show who Jesus is and what He has done for us. The two names that Jesus was given in our text, Immanuel and Jesus, show those two things. This confession that Jesus is God in the flesh and that He is our Savior is not just some meaningless words. That confession of faith is what saves us as Paul writes in Romans 10, "*If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved... As the Scripture says, 'Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.'*" (Rom 10:9,11) Faith in who Jesus is and what He has done for us saves us. It alone can take away our sins and make us righteous. It alone can take away our grief and give us joy; it alone can take away our worries and give us hope; it alone can save us from death and give us eternal life. May God give us true Christmas joy in this child who is Emanuel (God with us) and Jesus (our Savior).

Amen

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