

Text: Matthew 1:18-25

¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ 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. 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 be with child and will 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 had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus. – NIV

Prayer of the Day:

Stir up your power, O Lord, and come. Take away the burden of our sins and make us ready for the celebration of your birth, that we may receive you in joy and serve you always; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel. Alleluia. (Matthew 1:23)

Sermon Text:

Advent is quickly drawing to a close. The Christmas Season will soon burst into blossom, not unlike that crocus in the desert we heard about last week. But have you noticed something else? Christmas Day is quickly followed by the big returns for whatever people really wanted but didn't get and then everything moves on another year, more problems, the Child and the promise He brings usually forgotten. Jesus, He's a little bright spot in the winter season, good for a little boost to the economy and then, then, put Him away with the Christmas tree and move on. Of course, Jesus is so much more than that and we see it in the announcement to Joseph in our lesson today. It's impossible ... It's impressive ... It's Immanuel!

Funny, how Jesus was born into a family which, while it is ancient in our eyes, was ever so modern. Our lesson focuses us on Joseph, a righteous man. He was faith-filled and faithful to his God. It must have torn him apart to hear the news. "Uh, Joseph ... your wife, she is pregnant Joseph. She was gone for a while visiting family and now, well, either you guys have sinned and acted like married people outside of marriage or um, Joseph ... maybe you have some thinking to do." Joseph knew the truth. This was a problem in this newly blossoming home. Or imagine if it wasn't heard at all but seen and Mary tried to tell him, "Joseph it's okay an angel spoke to me and God overshadowed me and well, it's the Messiah Joseph." Joseph knew ... This was impossible ... It was time to end this infidelity but he would do it with as much discretion as he could. A righteous man finds no delight in the ruin of another, especially in one he loves.

Of course, this course of action did not last long in the mind of Joseph. Our lesson tells us that having come to this conclusion, God steps in, this time outside the bounds of natural means. The angel speaks the real truth, Mary has not been unfaithful. "*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.*" Joseph, of the line of David, would serve as protector, as stepfather for the King of the Nations, Of God Himself. Impossible? Sure, but then the baby already alive and growing in the womb of His still virgin mother would later say it best, "*With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.*" (Matthew 19:26)"

Weird story, no? So what's the point of all of these rather complicated events? Our lesson tells 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.” Isaiah had spoken these words, words of our Old Testament lesson, hundreds of years before this but here we are. The “incarnation” is the fancy church word for it. And in the incarnation, which occurs not at Christmas but as soon as Mary is overshadowed and the Baby begins to grow in her virgin womb, God takes on flesh that He might be with us.

But still, why all the drama? Because God had said it would be this way and so it is. Strange as it sounds, as impossible as it sounds, the virgin conceived and as we will celebrate, gave birth to a Son, the Son of God. He was born into David’s line through Mary and adopted into David’s line through Joseph, the Root of Jesse and the Key of David as the Scriptures had said.

It must have been surreal for Joseph and yet, what faith is on display. As a righteous man, he knows his Scriptures, recalls the promises and believes the words of the angel. The grief and pain over what he had expected vanished and he takes Mary home, but he is also careful not to put the promises in jeopardy. All this exactly as foretold, God’s plan is coming to its perfect fulfillment. Impressive!

But why put Joseph and Mary through all of this? Why should God become one with us and be born into a world which is so corrupted by sin that we contemplate divorce and struggle to control our emotions? God’s response is, “that’s exactly why.”

The angel 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. ... 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 had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.” More impressive than eternal spirit taking on temporal flesh or the Creator of all things allowing Himself to be confined to a womb and grow in wisdom and in stature, is this purpose for it all.

The simple fact is that we are sinful. Scripture is blunt when it announces, “*all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23).” We live in the filth and the mire of it every day. It’s at least a piece of why we so often want things just so and chase after every glimmer of glee as human beings. We are hoping for just a bit of happiness in the hopelessness of the world we live in. We want just a moment of peace in the sea of frantic hostility which sin has brought into existence. The sad reality is that the presents and the planning, the gatherings and festivities will never accomplish that. We are incapable of making peace. *The sinful mind is hostile to God* (Romans 8:7). We are tainted with sin. It’s impossible.

Ah, but then hopefully we are quick to respond now. What is impossible with man well it’s possible with God. What we could never do, Jesus will. He remains perfect for us. Outside of the womb, when He has every reason to divorce His church and be done with His relationship with Jew and Gentile, with us all, He remains faithful. With every breath, with every Word, He fulfills the Scriptures, God’s holy will for a world which has seen countless generations of those who don’t keep His Word. He is everything we are not, though we may think we are, though we may strive to be.

Having done it all, He doesn’t ascend into heaven saying, “Told you it could be done. Now take My example. Hope to see you someday if you make it.” No, instead He endures more than the false accusation of infidelity, the Son allows the Father to make *Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God* (2 Corinthians 5:21). He endures the punishment of your sin, that God’s justice might find fulfillment in His death on the cross. All so that having lived up to all the names the sacred Scriptures assigned to Him, we might have peace and hope not just for a season of the year, but into all eternity. It’s impressive ... it’s miraculous ... its undeserved

Yes, Advent is quickly drawing to a close. John’s message has been preached. Through that Word, I can only pray that repentance is alive and well. Repentance which acknowledges what we are and who we need. In the coming Christmas celebrations, may our voices boom with excitement and joy, with the comfort and the peace not of worldly stuff packed under trees or even in the hope that next year will be easier than the last, but in the timeless truths and lasting comforts of Christ Jesus, and then may we hold on to Him not just for Christmas but for life. He has done the impossible, His every action and being are impressive. He is Immanuel God with us to save us. Amen!