

# Promises Kept

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph,<sup>1</sup> Before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

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.

He took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son, and he called his name Jesus. Well, good morning, friends.

[ 1 : 2 5 ] It's good to be with you all this morning. Now, it's the most wonderful time of the year, or so the song tells us, with all its festivities, the glitz, the glamour, the Christmas carols, and the Christmas cheer.

But I wonder, is that what Christmas is truly all about? Is that what you think Christmas is all about? Well, thankfully, the Bible tells us, no.

Christmas isn't just about the fancy lights, the presents, or even the festive cheer. Pleasant as all those things are. But at its heart, Christmas is a celebration of something far more significant, more substantial.

It is a celebration of promises. Promises made, promises kept, and promises fulfilled by God. It is a celebration and declaration of God's promised salvation, of divine grace breaking into human history, into our world, to deal with our deepest problem.

And that's how we see Matthew begins his gospel, with the nativity account. And amazingly, we see that the first Christmas was far more troubling, but also far more glorious than we often imagine.

[ 2 : 5 2 ] Now, boys and girls, it's great to have you with us this morning, but I've got a challenge for you. If you can pay attention closely and come up to me at the end of the service and tell me the three points, I've got a little treat for you.

So, listen attentively. Now, Matthew records for us this account in three movements. First, with a seeming scandal that threatens to derail everything.

He then follows it with a rescue of God's gracious intervention. And finally, we see a response that reflects humble obedience and trust.

But throughout it all, we see that it is a story of how God keeps his promises and sending Jesus to accomplish redemption and reconciliation.

So first, look with me at verses 18 to 19, where we see the scandal. Now, the birth of Jesus Christ took place this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

[ 3 : 57 ] And her husband, Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. Now, it's striking, isn't it?

Matthew doesn't begin his account with angels singing or shepherds rejoicing, as Luke does in his account, but with a situation that would make most of us whisper. A scandal.

Mary is betrothed to Joseph, and though not living together, betrothal in Jewish culture was legally binding. It was effectively marriage. And yet, she was now found to be with child.

And Joseph knew that this child is not his. Perhaps for us today, it's easy to pass over how shocking this would have been. But for Joseph, it would have been not just disappointing, but utterly devastating.

He would have felt a sense of betrayal, shame, and disgrace. And yet, we see, being the just and compassionate man that he was, a man who sought what is right in the Lord's eyes, well, he decides to divorce her quietly.

[ 5 : 04 ] But up to this point, from a human perspective, well, it looks like everything has gone wrong, doesn't it? Things are failing. We wouldn't possibly imagine that anything good would come out from this.

And yet, we see that this is where and how God chooses to begin his work of salvation. A clear demonstration that salvation comes from him and not from us.

His greatest acts of grace doesn't depend on the perfect circumstances or perfect people, but often enters our world in spite of our mess and our weakness.

And that's what we see happens next in verses 20 to 23, an act of divine rescue. You see, as Joseph was wrestling with this situation, trying to understand what best, what's right to do, we see then God speaks.

An angel appears to Joseph and says to him, Joseph, son of David, do not fear. What Joseph could never have discovered on his own, what God graciously reveals to him.

[ 6 : 15 ] The angel informs Joseph that the child Mary conceived is from the Holy Spirit. And so what appears to be a scandal, what was in fact God's intervention and unfolding of his saving plan, of God carrying out his eternal purposes.

This conception was not a moral failure, but it was a miraculous work of divine faithfulness. And for what purpose? Well, we see that clearly spelt out in the name that Joseph is commanded to give the child.

Verse 21, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. Now that is the very heart of Christmas.

The name Jesus means the Lord saves. And notice first what Matthew tells us this salvation is all about. Jesus didn't come to save his people merely from hardship, from political oppression, nor from suffering, but from their sins.

Because you see, friends, that is humanity's deepest and greatest problem. Sin. It is what separates us from God, and it is what leaves us guilty standing before him.

[ 7 : 42 ] Right back at the very beginning in Genesis, from the time in the Garden of Eden, when God had made man in his image and was in a fruitful, covenantal relationship with him. But when Adam and Eve decided to eat of the tree of good and evil, seeking to be like God, well, they sinned against God.

They rebelled. They disobeyed God. And so the Lord cursed them out of the garden to deal with the wages of sin, that is death. And he placed the cherubim and flaming sword guarding the way to the tree of life.

So since that very moment, humanity has been unable to return to God by our own efforts. No amount of religious effort, moral improvement, generosity can possibly deal with the problem of sin.

There was simply no way for sinners like you and I to work our way back to God. So friends, you see Christmas at its very core, it's not about sentiment, but it's about rescue.

It is about God doing and accomplishing what we could never do for ourselves. But notice as well, who is it that Jesus will save? Well, he will save his people.

[ 9 : 03 ] This salvation is not accidental. God's rescue is not just an afterthought, but it is the fulfillment of God's covenant promises to redeem a people for himself, that they would be his people and he would be their God.

To clarify this point, we see Matthew states, all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. Centuries earlier, the prophet Isaiah had declared, behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel.

And just in case you missed it, Matthew plainly explains, which means God with us. Here is the wonder, the glory of the rescue.

This child is called Jesus because he saves his people from their sins. And he is also called Emmanuel because in him, God himself has drawn near.

God has come to be with his people. God did not merely send forgiveness from heaven. He didn't just shout salvation from a distance, but he came down, entered our world, took on flesh, dwelt among us.

[ 10 : 28 ] The rescue of Christmas isn't just that our sins are forgiven, but that the God we sinned against has now come to dwell with us. that is what makes Christmas so astonishing, so amazing.

The holy God draws near to sinful people. The creator God stepping into his creation, not to condemn, but to save.

Not to remain distant, separated, but to draw close, to be with us. Friends, you see, this is God keeping his promises, not only to forgive, but to be with his people forever.

Isn't that just wonderful news? Because now we have a way back to God. Now we have a way to life, eternal life.

Now there is rescue, there is deliverance from this age of sin and death, and this rescue is what God had promised all those years before. And this is the rescue that he accomplished in Jesus Christ.

[ 11 : 47 ] Well, having seen the scandal that shocks us and the rescue that saves us, well, in the final movement, verses 24 to 25, we see a response. How does Joseph respond to a God who has done such a marvelous thing?

Well, Matthew tells us simply, when Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. Now there's something wonderfully simple about that statement, isn't it?

No objections, no requests for further explanation, no delay, but Joseph wakes up and he obeys. Friends, you see, faith doesn't have to be loud or dramatic, take, but often it is quiet and costly obedience.

It is about trusting God's word and to shape, to order our lives around it. And that is what we see Joseph does. He takes Mary as his wife, he accepts the misunderstanding, the suspicion that comes with that decision, he embraces his path that will not be easy, but is faithful.

And notice the final detail that Matthew ends his account on. And he called his name Jesus. In naming the child Jesus, Joseph is publicly identifying himself with God's saving plan.

[ 13 : 19 ] He's acknowledging that this child is his own, legally adopting and bringing the child into the line of David. And that matters because why?

God had promised from the line of David would come a king whose kingdom would never end, an eternal king whose reign would last forever.

So we see through Joseph's quiet and costly obedience what God's ancient promises was unfolding at its fulfillment. Now we must be clear, Joseph is not the hero of this story.

His obedience, his response is important, but only because of the one that he obeys. His faith is significant, but in itself it does not save.

The hope of Christmas does not rest on Joseph's faithfulness, but on God's. The child born into this family is the true focus, the one who entered the scandal, accomplished the rescue, and now calls and invites a response from all of us.

[ 14 : 29 ] And so friends, the question Christmas presses upon all of us is not simply whether we would admire this marvelous and miraculous story, but whether we will trust in the Savior.

Will we receive this Jesus, the one who saves us from our sin, the promised King, Emmanuel, God with us?

And not just God who came as a babe those 2,000 years ago, but also who promises to be with us to the very end of the age, the promise that Matthew concludes his gospel account with?

Well, friends, I hope that we will. I pray that we will. Let's not miss the point of Christmas by stopping short at admiration. Let's not just be content marveling at the story, but failing to receive Christ the Savior.

because Jesus was born in Bethlehem, not to be merely observed, but to be trusted. Jesus came to save his people from their sins and to bring us back to God.

[ 15 : 45 ] He came to be Emmanuel, God with us. The God who comes near in Jesus, promises never to leave or forsake his people.

So I wonder, will we trust? Will we keep trusting in the promise keeper? Will you? Well, let us pray.

Heavenly Father, how we thank you and praise you for the wonder of the Christmas story. How you sent your son as a helpless babe to take on flesh, but above all else that in him you've kept and fulfilled your promises of old to save and to rescue us from our sin and to be with us.

So, Father, help us to rejoice in this time of hope, of the Christmas story, and help us to be standing, trusting in you, for you are trustworthy, for you are the promise keeper.

For we ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen.