

The Promised Son and Saviour

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- [0 : 0 0] My name is Paul Brennan, one of the staff here at the church, and over the next few weeks as we lead into Christmas, I'll be working our way through Matthew's gospel.
- This morning from Matthew chapter 1 and verses 18 to 25. So let me read Matthew 1 and from verse 18.
- Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in 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.
- 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.
- [1 : 2 3] 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. Amen.
- Well, before we come to look at that together, let me pray as we gather here this afternoon. Let me pray. Long ago, at many times, and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.
- But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son. Our Heavenly Father, we give you thanks that you are a God who speaks, and that you have now, in the person of Jesus Christ, spoken fully and finally.
- Thank you that at this time of year, we can remember his birth, but not just his birth, but his life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension. We remember the very purpose for his coming, and the implications for frail folk, just like us, and the implications are staggering.
- [2 : 5 5] That the Lord Jesus is our Savior brings us hope and certainty, because he is the promised light who has dawned on a dark world. How we can but praise you for your grace and for your mercy shown to us in Jesus.
- So help us now, as we come to your word, help us to hold fast to the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given to us, in our Savior, Jesus Christ.
- Amen. Well, we are well and truly into the Christmas season now, I'm afraid, whether you like it or not.
- I've succumbed. We brought our Christmas tree on Saturday, and this is the first Christmas where my eldest daughter is fully aware of what is going on, and she is pretty excited, I have to tell you.
- All the lights, all the fuss, she's ready for it. She knows what's going on this year. But of course, it's not just children that get caught up with all the hype.

- [4 : 03] For many folks, Christmas is a time of escapism, of a pushing reality to the side.
- We spend more than we ought because, well, it's Christmas. But January comes, and so do the bills. We spend time with people who we really ought not to spend so much time with.
- Family strains, difficult friendships. We tend to try and paper over the cracks, but the wrapping paper is barely in the bin before old tensions bubble to the surface.
- Perhaps it's the routines and traditions that we happily lose ourselves in. We look forward to our favorite films and foods. And of course, there's nothing wrong with those things in themselves, but we invest so much hope in them.
- We lose ourselves in the revelry. And we wake up in January, and reality meets us unmoved. Christmas has, for many, become a means of escaping reality just for a few weeks.
- [5 : 12] But the true meaning of Christmas, far from being a matter of escapism, is about as real as it gets. And that's what we see here in the opening pages of Matthew's Gospel.
- We see here the real person at the center of Christmas. And we see here the real purpose at the center of Christmas. It's a carefully put together account.
- It's a well-ordered account of Jesus' life from Matthew, the former employee of the Roman Revenue and Customs Local Tax Office. And he gives us a carefully recorded account of the life and work of Jesus.
- But not only does he give an account of what's happened, not only does Matthew record real events, but he also gives us the divine explanation of those events.
- And we see those two perspectives really clearly in our passage this lunchtime. Events as they seem from a human point of view, but also events as they really are from God's point of view.
- [6 : 18] From a human perspective, this is a pretty disastrous beginning. We all know that Jesus Christ is one of the, if not the most, influential figure in all of human history.
- But things get off to a pretty unpromising, even scandalous start here. Look at how Matthew begins the account there in verse 18. Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way.
- This is a matter-of-fact statement. This is how things went down. This gives us great certainty about what we're about to read. This is how it happened. And what we read at first seems a little unsettling.
- It's the stuff of Jerry Springer or Jeremy Kyle. And I'll not ask you to own up to watching those programs, but they're fairly standard daytime TV. And what we read here wouldn't be entirely out of place on one of those TV shows.
- What we read about is a scandalous pregnancy. Matthew makes it abundantly clear that Mary becomes pregnant out of wedlock. Okay, she was betrothed to Joseph, but he wasn't even the father.
- [7 : 37] Look at the second half of verse 18 there. Before they came together, she was found to be with child. Imagine how poor Joseph would have felt in light of that revelation.
- You can imagine Mary pulling him aside one day and trembling, telling him that she's pregnant. Joseph's draw would no doubt have dropped.
- This was utterly scandalous. In verse 19 we read that he would have been absolutely within his rights to publicly shame her, to divorce her.
- But he doesn't do that. Because he's a just man. He resolved to deal with it quietly. Quite a thing for Joseph. He wasn't yet in possession of the astonishing reality.

Which we read there at the end of verse 18. Mary was with child by the Holy Spirit. Joseph's in a tricky spot. He considers this mess, start of verse 20.

[8 : 41] He had a lot to think about, didn't he? Just think of him for a moment. All the thoughts running through his head. Seemingly betrayed. Hurt. The shame.

The loss. But as he's thinking about these things. The reality of it all. Comes to light. From an earthly point of view, things were a complete mess.

A scandalous mess. But an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. And revealed reality. And as the Lord reveals the reality of the situation.

He reveals the reality to us. To every reader of Matthew's gospel. Here is the true meaning of Christmas. Of that scandalous pregnancy. Here is why that first Christmas is history changing.

Here is why that first Christmas is seismic in its implications. And we see two key things. Two key realities about this apparent scandalous pregnancy.

[9 : 46] Firstly, we see that Jesus is God's son. Come to dwell with us. The real person at the center of Christmas. And secondly, we see that Jesus is God's savior.

Come to rescue us. The real purpose at the center of Christmas. So let's look firstly at verses 22 and 23. Jesus is God's son. Come to dwell with us.

Look again. All this, verse 22, 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. Jesus, the son born to Mary, is to be called Emmanuel.

This reality explodes the perception on the ground that this was a small scale scandal. Now if you were there living at the time, you might have read about this out of wedlock pregnancy in the Nazareth Daily Express.

[10 : 50] But today's scandal becomes tomorrow's fish and chip wrappings or fuel for the fire. It would have been quickly forgotten. But this pregnancy wasn't some local scandal.

It wasn't a side thing in a place nobody had heard of. No, this was the central event in all of human history. Because this was no ordinary baby.

Twice we're told that Mary was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Not only was Joseph not the father, but no other man was a father either.

Mary was a virgin. And this was a miraculous conception. This truly was God come to dwell with man. That God comes to dwell with his people really is the central subject of the whole Bible.

God created the universe, the world, so that he could dwell with his people. That is how the Bible begins. With God's people in his place, the Garden of Eden.

[11 : 54] And there they dwell with each other. But as the story unfolds, we see that that wonderful dwelling together is utterly ruined.

It is made impossible. God was no longer able to dwell with his people because his people rebelled. The great and insurmountable problem of sin entered the human story.

And his people were banished from his presence. But since then, since the beginning, God has been at work to bring about a great restoration. A great recovery of all that was lost in Eden.

Of God dwelling in the midst and walking with his people. So how does God invite us back into relationships so that he can dwell with us?

And that we can dwell with him? Well, as we see here at the beginning of Matthew. He delivers the invitation in the only way that we could possibly comprehend it.

- [12 : 52] By literally bringing it in a person. God through all of history has called us to himself to return to him. But he does so fully and finally. In the person of his son.
- Jesus Christ. The son born to Mary. The big story of the Bible is of a God who urges us. Who appeals to us.
- To come back to him. Who steps into the human story in Jesus Christ. He is God with us. God with us. So yes, the relational chasm between God and us is vast.
- Yes, the pain for him and us is unspeakable. But yes, God himself bears the cost of that relational chasm. So that we can once again be truly in relationship with him.
- And truly in relationship with each other. That is what you and I were created for. And only when that relationship is restored. Can the deepest longings of our hearts be fulfilled.
- [13 : 57] And so God calls out. As he comes to the world, the earth. He calls to us. Come to me. That is the true hope. Held out to all humanity at Christmas time.
- That is the true and only hope for you. In the midst of a confusing and perplexing and often disappointing world. In Christ, God is again with his people.
- And he came to overcome the great obstacle of sin. There is a way back to God. Because Jesus Christ is God's son.
- And he came to dwell with us. But not only does God's son dwell with us. But the great promise of Christ's birth is that through the spirit.
- Our hearts become the dwelling place of God's son. Paul exclaims in Galatians chapter 2 that Christ lives in me. That is the extraordinary meaning and reality of Christmas.
- [15 : 02] That is the true significance of this seemingly scandalous pregnancy. Jesus Christ, the son of God, came to dwell with us.
- We've seen who Jesus is. God's son with us. But we also see what he uniquely has come to do. And that is our second point this lunchtime.
- Jesus is God's savior. Come to rescue us. So not only does the angel tell Joseph who Jesus is. But he also tells him what it is that Jesus has come to do.
- He tells him right here at the beginning of Matthew's gospel what the whole purpose of his coming is. Look again at verse 21. This is Jesus' key task.
- He was a savior. That is what the name Jesus means. It derives from Joshua. A name which means the Lord saves. And Jesus was the one who from the very beginning was promised.
- [16 : 16] The great serpent crusher who would rescue his people from their sins. And that rescue is the great rescue that was needed then and is needed now.
- The greatest problem and need for all people in all places at all times is the forgiveness of our sin. Every human being who's ever walked this planet is by nature a sinner.
- And we desperately need salvation. We need salvation from our bondage to sin. And salvation from the consequences of our sin.
- Sin enslaves us so much so that we barely even realize it's there. Only when God works in us does he open our eyes to see the reality.
- To see the reality of our slavery to sin. Jesus came to rescue his people from that bondage. But he also came to rescue his people from the consequences of sin.
- [17 : 20] The apostle Paul in Romans writes that the wages of sin is death. And we deserve to be found guilty for our sin and to face the consequences of it.
- But there is nothing that we on our own are able to do to fix it. We desperately need a savior. And with the birth of Jesus that savior, that promised savior has now arrived.

And grasping the fact that Jesus' key purpose is to save people from sin is incredibly important. Not only because it drives the core mission of the church.

That we are by nature sinners is humanity's greatest and most pressing problem. And it is the solution to that problem that the church is to proclaim. That is the task.

To declare that Christ has come to save. So not only is understanding Jesus' purpose key to the church's message and purpose.

[18 : 23] It is also incredibly personal. Jesus came to save his people from their sins. And so that means that for you, as you respond in obedient faith, you can know the salvation that he offers.

You can know the freedom from the bondage to sin. You can know with certainty that you have been rescued from the consequences of your sin.

He came to deal once and comprehensively with our sin. And if you have trusted in him, he has saved you.

No matter what you might look back on. No matter the regrets you have. No matter the things you've done. Perhaps things many decades ago.

You can know with certainty that Jesus Christ came to rescue you. Not only from the bondage to sin, but to rescue you from the consequences of it.

[19 : 28] And we can know that with great certainty. Jesus Christ, that baby born in the midst of a seeming scandal, is the great promised one.

He is the great fulfillment of all that God promised. He was the one the prophets pointed towards to. Jesus is God with us. Jesus is God's savior.

And so this Christmas season, far from being an opportunity to plow headfirst into escapism and unreality, is the opportunity to face the reality of our plight.

And to look for the solution in the one place that we are guaranteed to find it. In God, come to earth. In the savior, Jesus Christ.

That is where we find reality. That is where we find the true purpose of his coming. With his coming, he opens wide our heavenly home and makes safe the way that leads on high and closes the path that leads to misery.

[20 : 45] What joy we can know in Jesus Christ. What joy we can know this Christmas. As we think again about God with us.

About God our savior. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the love of God. And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Be with you all. Amen. Amen.