

God with Us

Thomas Robinson, December 26, 2010

Matthew 1:18-25

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.

¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

²⁰ 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. ²¹ She will bear a son, and **you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.**”

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear **a son**,
and they shall call his name **Immanuel**” (which means, **God with us**).

²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name **Jesus**.

Isaiah 7:10-16

¹⁰ Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, ¹¹ “Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.”

¹² But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.”

¹³ And he said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign.

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

¹⁵ He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶ For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted.”

Matthew 28:16-20

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them,

“**All authority** in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

¹⁹ Go therefore and make **disciples of all nations**,

baptizing them in the name of the **Father** and of the **Son** and of the **Holy Spirit**,

²⁰ **teaching** them to observe all that **I have commanded you**.

And behold, **I am with you always, to the end of the age.**”

John 1:14, 16-18

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ... ¹⁶ And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.

From Christmas to New Year's

The great reality of what happened in Jesus' birth is what makes sense of all that our faith is about as we go into a new year. We are saved, our lives shaped by Jesus' death and resurrection – the heart of God's love. Jesus did not die as a nice/good person mistreated and misunderstood. Many such. Nor as a great teacher like Socrates.

Incarnation – a hard word – makes all the difference. The death of God – paradoxical, powerful, transforming, defining, self-giving Love. It changes how we hear his words and learn from his example. As Matthew introduces Jesus, he starts us here. God with us.

Scandal and Name of Jesus

"With child of the Holy Spirit" – "just man," "divorce." In few words Mt. encapsulates the disruption and challenge of Jesus' birth. Joseph could withdraw – fear. Like Mary he had to be open to having his own life marked in ways he could not control. He believes, acts.

He doesn't get to name this child. Not under human control. Disruptive, challenging. The name is common – Joshua, Yehoshua, Yeshua, "Yahweh saves," name Moses gave to Hoshua (Num 13:16). Fills the meaning. Yahweh = "He" will save his people. Deals with sin, the deepest brokenness of humanity – shown in all the problems, violence, injustice, etc. In Jesus, Joseph is called to share in what God is doing – the great act of salvation.

Immanuel – Prophecy Filled Up

Matthew takes us deeper into the meaning by citing Isaiah 7. Not a prediction that people were waiting to be "fulfilled." The text of Isaiah had a natural meaning in its own time. Rather the reality of Jesus' birth, the scandal of a virgin conceiving, provided a link back to the language of Isaiah. Jesus' reality filled up the meaning of the name "Immanuel." God has been with his people in the past, but now that truth is present in a new way.

This is what the Gospel is about – the reality of Jesus. You'll never understand a Gospel like Matthew's unless you deal with this: from the Sermon on the Mt. to the Resurrection.

Face to Face with God

The Gospels keep the paradox of incarnation: Jesus is us. Jesus is God. They knew the man. They came to realize he was God's very presence. They were all Jews, strict monotheists. It was profoundly difficult for them to grasp this reality. But they lived and died for it.

Other religions have a great teacher who gives a way to live. Moral life is the key. Christian faith says no. The human situation is more dire. Morality won't save. Good teaching is not enough. God must intervene. As God, what he does for us transforms who we are. We are sinners, but he gives his righteousness and life and makes us children of God.

With Us – God!

On Sinai God appeared in thunder, fire, trumpets, earthquake – as needed. Only in Jesus can the face of God be seen. The complex oneness of God who makes us for relationship, love.

He is God and Lord, creator, judge. He serves but is not our servant. He transforms, loves, challenges, changes us, saves us. We want to control, but he will not be controlled.

He wants to be with us, not at a distance. Into the adventure. Into our true identity.