

# The Surprising Birth of Emmanuel

Thomas Robinson, *Behold Your King 2*, December 2, 2018

## **Matthew 1:18-25**

<sup>18</sup> For **Jesus Messiah**, the Genesis happened in this way. When his mother **Mary** had been **betroted** to **Joseph**, before they came together, she was **found** to be **pregnant from the Holy Spirit**. <sup>19</sup> And her husband Joseph, since he was an **upright** man and did not wish to make her a **public example**, decided to **end their betrothal privately**.

<sup>20</sup> But while he still thinking about these things, behold, an **angel of the Lord** appeared to him by a **dream**, saying, "**Joseph, son of David**, don't be **afraid** to receive Mary as your wife, for **what has been begotten in her is from the Holy Spirit**. <sup>21</sup> She will give birth to a **son**, and you shall call his name **Jesus** (Joshua), for he himself will **save his people from their sins**."

<sup>22</sup> This whole event happened in order that **what was said by the Lord through the prophet** may be **filled up**, when he says:

<sup>23</sup> "*Behold, the virgin will become pregnant and will give birth to a son, and they will call his name **Emmanuel***" – [Isaiah 7:14]

which is translated, "God with us."

<sup>24</sup> When Joseph rose from that sleep, he did as the Lord's angel instructed him: He received her as his wife, <sup>25</sup> but he didn't have marital relations with her until she gave birth to a son. And he **called his name Jesus**.

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## **Isaiah 7:1-16**

<sup>10</sup> Again Yahweh spoke to Ahaz [king of Judah, fearful of attack by Syria and Northern Israel]: <sup>11</sup> "Ask for yourself a sign from Yahweh your God – deep as Sheol or high as the heights."

<sup>12</sup> But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I won't test Yahweh."

<sup>13</sup> And Isaiah said, "Hear then, House of David! Is it too little for you to wear down the patience of men, that you now also wear down the patience of my God? <sup>14</sup> Therefore my Lord himself will give you a sign: Behold, the maiden is pregnant and will give birth to a son, and she will call his name Immanu-el. <sup>15</sup> He shall eat butter and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. <sup>16</sup> For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted.

## **Jeremiah 31:33-34**

<sup>33</sup> "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares Yahweh. "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>34</sup> And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know Yahweh,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares Yahweh. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

## **Psalms 18:49-50**

<sup>49</sup> For this I will praise you among the nations, Yahweh, and sing to your name. <sup>50</sup> Great salvation (Yeshuah) he brings to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed (*Messiah, Christos*), to David and his seed for ages.

## **Matthew 1:1**

<sup>1</sup> Book of Genesis of Jesus Messiah, Son of David, Son of Abraham.

## **Matthew 28:19-20**

<sup>19</sup> "Go therefore and make disciples/learners of all nations, plunging them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to hold on to all things that I instructed you. And behold, I myself am with you always, to the completion of the age."

## The Messiah's Coming and a Crisis of Faith

This is the first of four Sundays of Advent: Our faith in a God who intervenes, comes into human life and experience in a totally remarkable way: incarnation to resurrection. He unites the life of God with the life of God's creatures, us humans. He changes Human possibility by what he does and how he remains with us. Jesus is that event of intervention, Advent.

Messiah means "Anointed King" – the promise to David. Mt's tells Jesus' birth stressing the confrontation between the coming of God's Messiah and Herod the "King of the Jews" established on his throne not as "son of David" but by normal power, Rome, conquest, control. We've reflected on his royal genealogy, but strange. God's work, like Genesis.

Mt starts by stating the hard-to-believe as fact and problem. Mary & Joseph are betrothed. It's discovered that she's pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Pregnant? Yes. Holy Spirit? Really? Joseph is like every human believer. He knows life doesn't work that way. Can God do it? Do I believe Mary? Joseph is open, trusting, a Son of David. Angelic appearance confirms Mary's story. But also that this event has profound purpose, God's promised salvation: Joshua/Jesus.

## Filling Up God's Ancient Challenge to Faith

Mt challenges us to understand by pointing to ancient words from Isa 7:14. For moderns the much-debated prophecy of a virgin birth. Becomes a crux in debate about modern belief. It's especially challenging when thought of as a prediction of Jesus' birth now fulfilled.

But in Isaiah it is a prediction in Isaiah's time for king Ahaz. It's about assurance of God's protection for Jerusalem under attack. It gives a timeframe of birth for God's security.

Mt's word *pleroun* should be translated "fill up" not "fulfill." Mt is not working from Isaiah to Jesus but the reverse. Isaiah shows a parallel situation of God intervening in a challenging way that calls for faith. It also concerns the "House of David" and a Maiden who becomes pregnant. But more important it concerns salvation and God's presence with his people.

Ahaz can't bring himself to trust God's strange assurance: Some maiden is going to have a baby and by the time he's a few year old God's going to deal with military threats. Really?

Joseph does believe and joins in Advent. This the coming of the Anointed king of the House of David. But in a way that no one would have predicted. But the faith needed to join this story is the same kind of faith that God has challenged his people to have all through history.

## A Messiah who Saves

God's people knew that since the exile they had had kings (Maccabees) that were not Davidic. Now the powerful king was not even a real Israelite, but Rome's appointee. They were still under the power of pagan empires and longed for deliverance/salvation. Joseph is to call the baby Joshua/Gk, Iesous/Latin, Jesus, meaning Yahweh saves. The Heb word for salvation, Yeshua, is almost exactly the same as Jesus' name in the Aramaic of Israel.

What is this salvation? Mt wants us to begin to reflect deeply on that question. How do we recognize salvation. Military deliverance? Forgiveness of sin? Deliverance from death?

## A God Who is With Us

The baby of Isaiah's time is name "God-with-us." God would protect his people. Now that description is being filled up on a level that no one could really have imagined. God chooses to use his Image in the Human being, his promise of an Anointed king to intervene in human life to deal with the deepest levels of sin, brokenness, enslavement of human beings.

The Gospel unfolds the astonishing story of God from incarnation to resurrection creating a new way for his own life and Spirit to unite his creatures to himself: "*I myself am with you always!*"