

The Gift of 'God With Us'

Matthew 1:18-25

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December 19, 2021

Good morning church. It is good to see you this morning and to share God's Word with you today. We will be reading in Matthew 1:18-25 if you would like to turn there now. For those of you that do not know me, I'm Andrew Ogea, one of the pastors here. I oversee the worship and discipleship ministries here at Northshore. I'm thankful for Pastor Larry for giving me the opportunity to preach today.

How many of you are ready for Christmas? It is an exciting season. Kids are out of school. Families get together and as a church family. We get the chance to spend focused time remembering the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Around this time, we start to see gifts start to show up under the Christmas tree as well. As a child, I specifically remember having an eager expectation and desire to know what was behind the wrapping paper. Would any of you be honest to admit sneaking in a shake of a Christmas gift to try and guess what it is? I can certainly admit to doing that.

Even if you thought you knew, there was still a growing excitement for Christmas morning when what you had been anticipating would finally be revealed. I hope this year that gifts and even the anticipation of them would be a reminder of the reason for Christmas. That our anticipation of gifts would draw us nearer to the greatest gift to ever be revealed.

That is what our Christmas series is titled this year, *The Gift Revealed*. Today and next week we are going to be looking at the impact the Gift of "God with Us" had for its initial recipients. Today, we will look specifically at Joseph and some lessons from him.

I also want to answer three questions: How was the gift revealed? Why was the gift revealed? And, What should we do with the gift? Before we start, let's first understand a little more about the context of Matthew 1 before we read.

Matthew is the first book of our New Testament. The author is Matthew, a former tax collector who later became one of the 12 disciples. In the first chapter, Matthew starts off by giving a detailed ancestry record for Jesus. For a Jew, this was important because the record of your family lineage was proof of you being part of God's chosen people.

In the first 17 verses of chapter one, Matthew details 46 people, whose lifetimes put together, equal roughly 2,000 years. The list begins with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and continues to others like Ruth, King David and Solomon, and finally concludes with verse 16

Matt. 1:16 and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.

You see, it's not just a list of names. It's incredibly important. Matthew was very intentional to show that the long-awaited gift of 'God with Us' had the proper pedigree as proof that he is the messiah. After sharing his credentials, so to speak, Matthew now shares how the gift, Jesus Christ, was revealed. Let's read together, Matthew 1:18-19:

Matt. 1:18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.

Matt. 1:19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

I. The Arrival of the Gift (How Jesus Came)

Matthew first shows us how the Arrival of the Gift happened. Jesus arrived supernaturally by Holy Spirit conception in the womb of a young Jewish virgin named Mary who was engaged to Joseph. Now, at that time, Jewish marriage consisted of three stages.

The first stage was the arrangement. Customarily, the parents of a young man would choose a young woman of another family and pledges would be made for marriage. The minimum marrying age at the time was twelve for women and thirteen for men, but the average for men was around 18.

The second stage was the betrothal, which was a public acknowledgement of the engagement. After this public ceremony, there was a period of one year for the couple to become known as belonging to each other.

They were even called "husband" and "wife" but they did not yet live together. Intimate relations between the engaged couple were not tolerated, and unfaithfulness with

another person during this period was against Jewish law. The penalty was death by stoning. At this point, the only way a betrothal could be terminated was by a divorce.

After this betrothal year, the couple entered the final stage, full marriage. They would leave their families home and begin their new family together. After the third stage, the marriage was consummated.

Mary and Joseph were in the second stage of the betrothal period when it says that she was found to be pregnant. So, the gift of God With Us was revealed in a shocking way. We know from Luke's Gospel, the Lord had already sent the angel Gabriel to inform Mary of God's plan for her to carry the Messiah.

Mary then went to visit her relative Elizabeth who was carrying John the Baptist. She stayed there a few months, and after she returned to her hometown the pregnancy became known.

Can you imagine being in Mary's shoes? She had been blessed by God to carry the Messiah, but everyone else believed she had sinned against God. Now, put yourself in Joseph's shoes, seeing your wife carrying a baby from someone else.

She tries to explain, "But, Joseph, an angel of the Lord came to me and he said that the Holy Spirit put it there." Would you have believed her if you were in his shoes? Joseph didn't believe her. The arrival of the gift of 'God With Us' didn't make sense to him. Isn't this often the truth for us too:

God's Plans Don't Always Make Sense to Us

Many of us have heard Romans 8:28:

Rom. 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

So, we know this promise of God working for the good of those who love him, but that doesn't mean that his work will always make sense to us in the moment. Mary already had received her revelation from God, but Joseph had not. So, all this talk about God being behind all of this was something he couldn't reconcile. He didn't believe her.

But, despite not understanding God's plan, Joseph's life and his response teaches three important lessons for us when things don't make sense.

When God's Plans Don't Make Sense to Us

1. Choose Integrity Over Iniquity

Joseph had chosen integrity over iniquity. Verse 19 says,

Matt. 1:19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law.

Joseph was a young man of integrity and prioritized following God's commands long before the arrival of the gift of 'God with Us'. He knew the child was not his because he had not been unfaithful to God. You see, even as a young man, he had displayed self-control and a personal disdain of infidelity because it was against God's law.

He was faithful to his future spouse in advance and he expected the same in return. His commitment to purity is especially striking considering the fact he was probably in his late teens at this time. So for all of us, but especially young people, Joseph is a great example of honoring God with purity and integrity.

Joseph's future family was seemingly crumbling before him in the midst of these circumstances, but at least he knew that it was not a consequence of his own doing. You see, God is going to work in one of two ways with his children.

He will discipline you in your sin to lead you to repentance for your good so that you can once again be a conduit for his kingdom work, or you can be blessed with a clear conscience as he works his plan for your life. The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy describing the difference in 1 Timothy 1:18,

1 Tim. 1:18 Timothy, my son, I am giving you this command in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by recalling them you may fight the battle well,

1 Tim. 1:19 holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith.

Iniquity leads to a shipwrecked faith. Thankfully, the Apostle John shows us how to fix the boat so we can sail again. In 1 John, he says

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 2:1 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

Personally, I understand both situations: 1) seeking to understand God's plan and work in my life with a clear conscience; and 2) seeking to understand it with a cloudy, dirty conscience.

I can testify to you without a doubt, a clear conscience is always better. Because even when things don't make sense in my circumstances, I can still have strong unhindered fellowship with the Father and not experience a shipwreck regarding the faith.

When God's Plans Don't Make Sense to Us

- 1. Choose Integrity Over Iniquity**
- 2. Balance Justice With Compassion**

A second lesson we learn from Joseph is to balance justice with compassion.

Matt. 1:19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

Other translations say he was a "righteous man." New Testament scholar Craig Keener says¹,

Joseph was righteous not because he was divorcing Mary (although this did not make him unrighteous); rather, Joseph was righteous for divorcing Mary *quietly* or privately, for not bringing unnecessary shame on her.

He knew suffering already awaited her: premarital pregnancy had likely already ruined any chance of her marrying, and there was always the possibility of her being executed for this offense.

He could have also profited off of this by taking her to court. He could have seized the assets she brought to the marriage and any bridal price that he paid could have been returned to him.

But by privately divorcing her, he would forfeit this economic reimbursement, simply to minimize her dishonor.

¹Craig Keener, *Matthew*, The IVP New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL; Intervarsity Press, 1997), 62.

Sometimes God's plan, his work in your life gets confusing when someone else wrongs you, or you if you believe someone has wronged. As a result, it is difficult to see how God is working or how he can get the glory in a situation like that, but Joseph shows us how.

He would have been right according to the law and perhaps no one else would have blamed him for taking everything from her and shaming her. Instead, Joseph shows us that it not wrong to pursue being right, but it is not righteous if you forfeit compassion along the way.

When God's Plans Don't Make Sense to Us

- 1. Choose Integrity Over Iniquity**
- 2. Balance Justice With Compassion**
- 3. Honor God Instead of Elevating Your Reputation**

A third lesson we learn from Joseph is to honor God instead of elevating your reputation. Building off the last point, if Joseph had pursued a public divorce, it would have also silenced questions about *his own* potential unrighteousness. By concealing it, doubt would certainly enter the minds of others about a potential cover up.

But, Joseph chose to honor God and show compassion instead of choosing to elevate his own reputation. He was willing to take what other people thought of him and put it in the hands of the Lord.

When God is working to accomplish his plan for your life, you will experience seasons where things just don't make sense. We can follow Joseph's example by choosing integrity over iniquity, balancing justice with compassion, and elevating what pleases God instead of worrying about the security of our reputation.

II. The Purpose of the Gift (Why Jesus Came)

The arrival of the gift of God with Us, how he came, certainly didn't make much sense at first. But, then God revealed the purpose of his gift. We learn why Jesus came. Let's read verses 20-21:

Matt. 1:20 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.

Matt. 1:21 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.”

Matt. 1:22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:

Matt. 1:23 “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

We have talked a lot about Joseph so far, but he is not the point of this passage. Jesus is. His arrival certainly caused a scandal, but God now intervenes and reassures Joseph of his plan.

God is telling Joseph, “you have been contemplating how to divorce Mary quietly. You are trying to do the right thing in a compassionate way, but I want you to go ahead and follow through with marrying her.

You don’t have to worry or fear what may come because what is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. It’s all part of my plan. That leads us to another amazing truth to cling to today:

God’s Plans Always Make Sense to Him

Even when his plan doesn’t make sense to us, it always makes perfect sense to Him. The angel calling Joseph, “son of David,” is God’s way of pointing him back to this plan all along. Joseph is part of the family tree from which God promised the messiah would come.

Yet, his plan goes even further back. Ever since the fall of mankind to sin, God has been preparing to implement his ultimate plan of salvation. David Platt shares insight on this in his commentary²:

In Genesis 3:15, God promises a seed from a woman. Specifically, He promises to raise up a seed, a singular offspring, who would crush the head of Satan. Now, in Matthew, God delivers that seed through a woman.

In Genesis, a man (Adam) is born into perfection and unhindered communion with God, but would succumb to sin. In Matthew, a man is born who would save from sin.

²David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, Christ-Centered Exposition (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2013), 25.

The angel tells Joseph, “you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” The purpose of the gift is right there in his name, Jesus, the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, meaning “the Lord saves.”

The God who creates in Genesis 1 is re-creating and redeeming in Matthew.³ He redeems through his only begotten Son. Thus, He is the Son of Man. He was born just like us.

Surely, Jesus could have come without a human parent, but He wouldn't possess the fullness of human attributes: physical, mental, and emotional. Since he was born of a human, Jesus is fully able to identify with us in every way except that he had no sin in him. The writer of Hebrews reinforces this truth in Hebrews 2:17-18

Heb. 2:17 For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.

Heb. 2:18 Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

God could have designed it for him to be born of two human parents, but it would not make him the perfect sacrifice for our sins. Since he is conceived of the Holy Spirit, He is also the Son of God, having the full nature of God and power of divinity.

Because of this, he has the full power to forgive sins and conquer death which is something man cannot do. All of this is according to his great plan, which he spoke through his prophet Isaiah. Matthew quoted Isaiah who declared 700 years before the Messiah was born:

Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

The name Jesus says what he came to do - save his people from sins. The name Immanuel indicates the actual presence of Jesus Christ with humanity, and also the result of salvation - his continual presence with us... “God With Us” in our hearts.

³Ibid.

Soren Kierkegaard, a Danish theologian from the 19th century, told the following story which illustrates the significance of the incarnation - of God With Us. Once there was a prince who was single and eager to marry a lovely maiden for his future queen.

Near the prince's palace was a large city where he often rode in his carriage to take care of various responsibilities for his father. One day he went through a rather poor section of the city.

He happened to glance into the eyes of a beautiful maiden. On a few occasions afterward, he would return to that section of the city hoping to see the young woman, and as it turns out, he finally had the chance to meet her. But he had a problem: How should he proceed to marry the woman?

Of course, he had the authority to order the girl to the palace and propose marriage. But even a prince wanted the girl to want to marry him. Maybe he could go to the woman's house in this royal dress. Or, perhaps he could masquerade as a peasant and try to gain her interest. Then, after he proposed, he could pull off his "mask."

Finally, a real solution presented itself: He would give up his kingly role and move into her neighborhood. There he would take up a vocation, say, a carpenter. During his work in the day and during his time off in the evening, he would get acquainted with the people, begin to share their interests and concerns, and begin to talk their language.

In due time, perhaps he would make her acquaintance in a natural way. And, should she love him, he would ask her to marry her. This the prince did. And when the maiden did come to love him, he told her who he really was.⁴

You see, through the birth of Jesus, we see God interacting with humanity in a similar way. He wishes to join our lives with his in a living, everlasting relationship. This is the most incredible news you will ever hear. God With Us. The plan didn't make sense to Joseph at first, but it makes perfect sense to God.

III. Receiving the Gift (What Must We Do)

But, what must we do? Well, we must respond in a similar way as Joseph. We must receive the gift. Look in verse 24-25,

⁴James E. Hightower, Jr., *Illustrating the Gospel of Matthew*. (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1982), 8-9.

Matt. 1:24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.

Matt. 1:25 But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Can you imagine the relief after waking up from the dream. He now knows that Mary has been faithful to him. And more, importantly, he has heard God's plan. Through Joseph's example, we learn our final truth for today.

We Can Trust God's Plans

Joseph certainly did. He didn't wait around. He believed God and immediately responded in faith. Instead of divorcing Mary quietly, he went ahead with a formal ceremony of marriage and took Mary into his home.

He was not afraid. He shared her shame as his own. He joined Mary despite knowing people would gossip and slander, and that they would have to endure the stigma of fornication. But, he trusted God's Plan.

Mary eventually gave birth to a son, and Joseph continued in faith and obedience by giving him the name Jesus. By naming him, Joseph officially adopted him as his own into the house of David. Jesus is now the rightful member of the House of David. Son of David, Son of Man, Son of God.

In this way, Joseph is an illustration of what Jesus ultimately came to accomplish for us - Adoption into the family of God. Think about that, Joseph adopted Jesus as his son, and simultaneously, it is through faith in his own adopted Son, Jesus, that he himself is adopted as a son into God's family. Galatians 3:26-29 says,

Gal. 3:26 So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

Gal. 2:28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Gal. 3:29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

For some of you today, you sit here with members of God's family, but you are not a member yourself because you haven't trusted God's plan of salvation for your life. Perhaps you are here trying to make sense of your life's circumstances. Did you know God has a plan for your life? He desires to save you and have a relationship with you.

How is that possible? Receive his gift of salvation by placing faith in Jesus Christ. He is the gift of "God with Us" and if you believe in him, you can have his promise of eternal life.

The rest of you who already believe in the gift of Christ Jesus, maybe you are struggling to trust God's plans during this season of life. For whatever reason, maybe things just don't make sense right now. Could it be that you needed to be reminded today that God's plans for your life always make sense to him?

You can trust him even when things don't make sense. So, be encouraged. Jesus Christ, God With Us, made his dwelling in your heart when you first believed. He hasn't left your heart! This is a scripture I have relied on when I've had circumstances that cause me to have a clouded of God's plan for me.

Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Romans 5:2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

Faith in Jesus is what makes us right with God giving us peace with him. But it is also faith in God by which we continue to stand. Jesus Christ is the greatest gift ever revealed to the world. He is Immanuel 'God With Us.' Remember that.

But also hold fast to the promise of his presence ever abiding in our hearts. We can always trust his plan for our lives even if things don't make sense at the moment.