

“He is ‘God with Us’”

Matthew 2:18-25

Last week we saw that Jesus’ very name is a statement of His reason for coming to earth. “Jesus” means “God is salvation.” Jesus came “to save His people from their sins” (verse 21). Yet I think you’ll agree that a mere man is not able to solve the problem of sin. A savior from sin must be more than a man. Another name, Immanuel, describes the unique nature of the Savior, and shows us that He is more than a man. My two points today address that one-of-a-kind person that is our Savior and Lord.

First, this name Immanuel. It is said that Christmas can be condensed into three words, “God with us.” I know our focus of attention at Christmas is the birth of Jesus. But the greater, more incredible truth of this holiday is this miracle, the greatest miracle that ever took place: the invisible God, the exalted, holy God of the universe, the all-powerful Creator of the heavens and the earth. This God became a human being. God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, takes upon Himself a human body and human nature as He comes into the world as a little baby. The proper term for this miracle is incarnation. The incarnation of Jesus Christ stands at the heart of Christianity. No other religion has at its core a person who is both fully God and fully man. No other religion claims a person like Jesus Christ, “God with us.” Colossians 2:9 tells us that in Jesus lives “all the fullness of God in a body.” Understand what this means: There has never lived, nor will there ever live, another man, woman, boy, or girl like Jesus Christ. Jesus is God. He is not an ambassador for God. He is not a representative from God. He is not a teacher about God. He is God, “God with us.”

Our second point is the remarkable way “Immanuel” is conceived. Immediately we see that there’s a problem. How can “God with us” be born? The child of a man and a woman cannot be God, they can only produce another human being. To be born of a woman, “God with us” cannot have a human father. He can’t be born into this world through the natural human process. Seven hundred years before Jesus was born God had promised through the prophet Isaiah: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son” (Isaiah 7:14). A virgin will give birth to a son. But how is that going to happen? The angel told Mary how in Luke 1:35: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” Here is a conception and birth unlike any the world has ever known; and it fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14.

As we respond to the miracle of incarnation and the miracle of the virgin birth, I’m reminded of the little boy who was asked by his Dad, “Johnnie, what did you learn in Sunday School today?” Johnnie replied, “We learned all about how Moses went behind enemy lines to rescue the people of Israel from the Egyptians. Moses ordered the engineers to build a pontoon bridge. After the people crossed, he sent bombers back to blow up the bridge and the Egyptian army that was chasing them. And then...” His father interrupted, “Wait, wait, wait. Did your teacher really tell it like that?” Johnnie said, “No, but if I told you what he did say, you’d never believe it!”

There are many who celebrate Christmas each year who sing the Christmas carols and listen to the Christmas story—AND DON’T BELIEVE A WORD OF IT. “Come on! How can God become a human being? It’s simply not possible for a virgin to conceive and have a child. This story in Matthew and in Luke of Jesus’ birth is just a myth, an ‘article of faith’ that has no basis in history.” The

December 13 issue of Newsweek examines the birth accounts of Jesus in Matthew and Luke. The underlying assumption in this article is that these stories are fabricated, they're "first century inventions designed to strengthen the seemingly tenuous claim that Jesus was the Messiah." In response, we must admit that what's said here is unbelievable. It's impossible if we deny the supernatural, if we deny there is nothing beyond this world we can see and touch and measure and know with our natural senses. Nothing stated in this passage is consistent with the physical laws of nature, the laws that govern creation. Mary knew this: when the angel Gabriel announced Jesus' conception and birth to her in Luke one, Mary asked, "Isn't this impossible? I mean, I'm a virgin!" In his response, the angel said these words, "Nothing is impossible with God." Nothing! Nothing at all! Why? Because God is God. He is not bound by our natural laws and limitations. God exists and moves and works above and beyond the time and space that He created. "God with us," the joining together of the human and the divine in one person? Why not? Nothing is impossible with God. A virgin birth? Why not? God made the laws that govern His creation. He can choose to operate within those laws (which He does most of the time), and He can choose to operate outside of those laws. When He works outside those laws, what He does is called a miracle. Do we understand, can we explain how a miracle such as Immanuel or the virgin birth happens? No. If we can't understand or explain the miracle, does that mean it didn't happen? No! It is enough to affirm that "nothing is impossible with God." That's a truth to remember and celebrate in the Christmas season!

A second key point to take away from this passage is that "God with us" is the central fact of Christianity. The compelling, life-changing power of the gospel is found in the fact that God became a man, and that wholly God and wholly man, He was able to offer the perfect and acceptable sacrifice for our sins on the cross, so that we could be forgiven and saved and reconciled to God. If Jesus is not "God with us," quite frankly, Christianity is a sham. If Jesus is Mary's illegitimate child, or even if He's Mary and Joseph's child, He is not "God with us." If Jesus is not "God with us," then all He taught about Himself, and all He promised are lies. If His teachings and promises are false, the salvation He offers is a fraud. And if His salvation is a fraud, we are all fools, pathetic fools, and we're doomed. Everything God's Word teaches about Jesus Christ hinges on the truth we celebrate at Christmas – that Jesus is "God with us."

The third key point to take away from "God with us" is that in sending His Son Jesus Christ into the world, God has taken the initiative, He has acted, He has come to us. This is another fact that sets Christianity apart from human religions. In all the religions of the world, the focus is on us. It's all about what we do, it's our efforts, our works, our accomplishments that we offer up to God in an attempt to please Him, to be accepted by Him. That's not Christianity. Christianity is not about us. It's about God, the great, infinite, almighty, holy, and loving God coming to us, to be with us. Jesus has walked in our shoes, He knows our struggles and sufferings, our disappointments and failures, our setbacks and our sin. And what is Immanuel's response to us? Does He stiff-arm us and reject us, say "Yech!" and push us away? No, He embraces us and accepts us and loves us, and by His work on the cross, He saves us! In saving us He makes this commitment as we follow Him as Lord of our lives. He gets real personal here. His last words in Matthew's gospel: "And surely I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20). "God with us" is now "God with you," with you to encourage you, lead you, bless you. Not to judge you or punish you, but to love you, to provide for you, to make you into the person He's saved you and called you to be. "God with us" is "God with you" as you receive and believe in the Savior, Jesus Christ!