

- Sheep and cattle would not have been there if he had not brought their ancestors safely through the flood some 2500 years before.
- And Mary would not have had the protection of a righteous and loving man if he had not sent an angel from heaven to inform Joseph that the child in her womb had been conceived by the Holy Spirit.

And what is even more important, in this child God became our substitute. He took our place under the heavy burden of the law and obeyed perfectly everything that it demanded of us. He also took on our sin and paid for it fully by his innocent suffering and painful death on the cross. It was with this in mind that the Apostle Paul could write, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). All of this God enabled the Prophet Isaiah to see through the eyes of faith, and through Scripture he shares it with us in a most powerful prophecy.

My friends, we speak often of how we need to see the cross in the manger, for without the death of Jesus there's no reason to celebrate his birth. But the opposite is just as true. There could have been no Good Friday or Easter Sunday without Christmas. In other words, there could have been no cross or empty tomb without the manger. Christmas is essential to our Christian hope and joy. In Jesus the Messiah God has fulfilled the hope and fears of all the years. While we may not have all the details of that day some 2000 years ago, God has given us what we need the most. He has given us Immanuel, God with us. May we take to heart Martin Luther's confident hymn of praise:

*What harm can sin and death then do?
The true God now abides with you.
Let hell and Satan storm and rave,
Christ is your brother—you are safe (CW 53:4). Amen.*

Matthew 1:18-25 – The Hopes and Fears – 2, 41, 47, 34
12/23/18 – Pastor David M. Kuehl – St. Paul's, Muskego, WI

Someone once said that, while God has revealed all that we *need* to know in his Word, he has chosen not to tell us everything we *want* to know. In fact, the Apostle John, referring to God's revelation of himself in the Scriptures, once said, "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (Jn 20:31). For our eternal salvation, for us to belong to God and be saved for eternity, God has revealed everything we need to know.

With that in mind, think of Jesus' birth. While we do know *who* was born in Bethlehem so many years ago—Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the long-anticipated Messiah and Savior of the world—and *why* he was born—in his own words, "to seek and to save the lost" (Lk 19:10), we don't know as much about the details of that extraordinary event as we might like to know, right?

For example, when exactly was Jesus born? Precisely where in Bethlehem was his birthplace? Was it a barn, a cave, or some other kind of animal shelter? Was Joseph Mary's only attendant that night, or did he seek help from a kindhearted stranger or two? With every one of these questions we have to answer, "We don't know." And now, in our text, Matthew makes the somewhat puzzling remark, "After [Joseph] had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream."

As we today learn just what it was that Joseph was considering, and keeping in mind our general Advent theme this year, *The Hopes and Fears of All the Years*, let's join together to thank God that in his Christmas gift to the world he has given us what we need the most:

Immanuel: God with Us

- 1. This was a disturbing discovery.**
- 2. This was an amazing announcement.**
- 3. This was a powerful prophecy.**

1. To answer the question, "What was Joseph considering?" we need to look at the first verse of our text. There we read, "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."

Back then, when two people pledged themselves to be married, it was a formal affair. Before witnesses they solemnly promised to be faithful to each other, a promise that met all the legal requirements for marriage. It was their promise that made their engagement binding, and any act of unfaithfulness would be considered adultery. Matthew speaks of Joseph and Mary as being *"husband and wife."* But the marriage feast, as well as living together as a married couple, was delayed for months, perhaps even a year. It was then that the groom would furnish a house and, in formal procession, usher his bride into their new home.

Before that happened, however, Joseph made a most disturbing discovery. Mary was pregnant! And he wasn't the father! We, from our 21st century perspective, know the facts of the case. We have the benefit of Gabriel's angelic announcement to Mary: *"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (Lk 1:35).* But Joseph didn't know that. Joseph had to believe that his fiancé had cheated on him. Now she was pregnant. Can we even begin to understand how difficult it must have been for Mary to try to explain to Joseph that her child's father was the Holy Spirit? "A likely story!" would surely be Joseph's response to her pregnancy. And that was his response, too, as he judged Mary to be an adulteress and considered quietly divorcing her, so as to spare her any public disgrace.

2. But as he was considering this, an angel appeared to him in a dream and made the amazing announcement, *"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."* To be sure, the child growing in Mary's womb was not Joseph's—he knew this, as did Mary. But neither was it any other man's child. All this had come about by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And the angel continued by telling Joseph *why* this was happening: *"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."* This miraculously conceived child, the angel said, is not merely a son of David; he is great David's greater Son. He is the one of whom the Apostle Paul wrote: *"In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (Col 2:9).* He is, as we read in the book of Hebrews, *"the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (He 1:3).* He is truly and completely God. At the same time, he is truly and completely man, like us in every way, but without sin. In short, he is the Christ, the promised Messiah. He is *"Jesus,"* the Savior, who *"will save his people from their sins."*

No words can help our puny minds comprehend the wonder of Jesus' incarnation. We will never understand how something like this can be, but it is true nonetheless. In this beautiful text, God is making an amazing announcement, one that fills us with holy wonder and awe. To Joseph and Mary, to you and me, in fact, to the whole world around us God is saying: *"The baby in Bethlehem's manger is a special child, conceived and born in a special way, to do special work, 'to seek and to save the lost' (Lk 19:10).* Receive him! Adore him! Worship him! He is Jesus, sent by God to save you from your sins.

3. If we find this good news too incredible to be accepted on the basis of Mary's testimony, if we find it too difficult to believe even from the mouth of an angel, then Matthew adds further proof. He tells us that God himself had predicted this centuries before. Matthew quotes Isaiah of old and says, *"All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet, 'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel (which means, 'God with us').'"*

The New Testament reveals what God concealed in the Old. It records the fulfillment of everything God predicted and prophesied through his holy writers. Some 700 years before the events of our text, the Prophet Isaiah had foretold Jesus' miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit. This child is Immanuel, God with us, and we confess as much every time we join with Martin Luther in his explanation to the 2nd Article of the Apostles' Creed and say, *"I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord."*

Have you ever thought that through? The world and everything and everyone in it wouldn't exist if it were not for this child, who is God in the flesh. For the Bible says, *"Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (Jn 1:3).* With a list courtesy of Max Lucado, one of my favorite Christian authors, consider these thought-provoking things:

- There would have been no wood for the stable in Bethlehem if in the Garden of Eden he had not created trees.
- There would have been no manger in which to lay him if he had not given life and breath to the carpenter who fashioned it.
- The hay on which he lay grew while he was in his mother's womb because he had blessed the year with abundant sunshine and rain.