

Matthew

Emmanuel is Born

Focal Verses: Matthew 1:18-25

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **EVALUATE** the story of the birth of Jesus with fresh eyes, **FEEL** the presence of God in our lives, and **CONSIDER** fresh ways of sharing the Good News with others.

In Focus

For about three days Aaron rushed home right after work to prepare his message. At first, he'd sit at his desk and then on the couch, but nothing came to mind. He began to worry and wonder if he should go to his pastor and withdraw from the conference. He wanted to give it one last try before speaking with the pastor so once again he came straight home and sat on the couch with his laptop. Just as he began to worry, Aaron remembered how his father would help him get through times like this.

God is with us through good and bad times. All we need to do is let Him in," Aaron said out loud hearing his father's voice as he said the words.

Aaron knelt near the couch and began to pray. He asked God for help with a message to share with his brothers in Christ.

Once he prayed it seemed as if the message was clear and Aaron began to write with ease.

In this week's lesson, we will learn how God supplies our needs on time. Jesus' birth was the fulfillment of God's promises at the right time.

Keep In Mind

And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. (Matthew 1:21)

Lesson Text

Matthew 1:18-25

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was in this way: When His mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

19 And Joseph her husband, being a just man and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.

20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

21 And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins."

22 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,

23 "Behold, a virgin shall be with child and shall bring forth a Son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel" (which being interpreted is, "God with us").

24 Then Joseph, being raised from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife,

25 and knew her not until she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus.

The People, Places and Times

Emmanuel (or Immanuel): The name given to Christ is interpreted as "God with us" (Matthew 1:23; Isaiah 8:8, 10). The prophet Isaiah foretold of a Saviour, who would be born of a virgin and would bear this name (**Isaiah 7:14**). Symbolically, the name implies God's coming to Earth in human flesh. Literally, the meaning of "Immanuel" refers to His dwelling among us, as Jesus Christ—just as He is present today in every believer's life (**1 John 4:2**).

Joseph. A descendant of King David and the husband of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Born in Nazareth, a town in the region of Galilee, Joseph was the legal, earthly father of Jesus. He was a carpenter by trade and "a righteous man" (**Matthew 1:19**). After Mary was found to be with child, the angel of the Lord instructed Joseph to marry her, even though Jewish laws regarding her pregnancy would have justified an opposite choice. Joseph obeyed the angel's bidding. Joseph is last mentioned in the Bible when Jesus is 12 years old; he may have died before Jesus' public ministry (**Matthew 1:19–25; 13:55**).

Background

The book of Matthew is called the “Jewish Gospel” because its intended audience is Jewish. It is rooted in Old Testament prophecy related to the coming King through the lineage of King David. In the first chapter of Matthew, the author presents Jesus’ royal lineage, describing His kingly line and rightful place as heir to David’s throne. Although Mary was a descendant of David through the house of Nathan, the legal inheritance had to come through the line of Solomon—through Joseph, Jesus’ earthly father (**Luke 3:23; 4:22**). Jesus’ lineage proved that He had the right to be called the King of the Jews, the Son of David, and the Son of Abraham.

Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, which gave Him the right to be called the Son of God (**Matthew 1:18–25**). He was fully God and fully human; He was the Living Word who came down from heaven, clothed in human flesh, and dwelled among men (**John 1:1–4; Luke 1:26–35; 2:1–7**). His virgin birth fulfilled the prophetic utterances of Isaiah (**Isaiah 7:14**). The name “Jesus” is a Greek form of the Hebrew name Jehoshua, which means “the Lord saves.” The sinless and divine nature of Jesus made Him the only man capable of shedding divine blood on the Cross and becoming the final atonement for humankind’s sins.”

In Depth

1. Fathered by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18) The virgin birth of Jesus is crucial to Christianity. As the Son of God, He could not be tainted by sin.

He was born out of a woman’s womb, which made Him fully human, yet was fathered by the Holy Spirit, which made Him fully God.

Because God was Jesus’ Father, Jesus was born with the characteristics of God. Had Joseph been His sole father, Jesus would have been born with the sinful characteristics passed down from Adam. However, because God was His Father, Jesus could rightfully “claim His position as the Son of God, the Messiah and Saviour of the world, fulfilling the prophecies in Scripture.

Born fully man as well, Jesus was able to experience every aspect of human life and was touched by every human emotion yet was without sin. His life experiences helped Him develop empathy for human suffering, and He was able to give grace to the hurting through genuine love and compassion. Jesus, born fully God, was given the authority to forgive human sin and reconcile humankind to God (**Colossians 2:13–15; Hebrews 4:15–16**)

2. Faced a Dilemma (Matthew 1: 19): In Jewish customs, marriage consisted of three important steps. **First**, the families of the intended couple agreed to the marriage. **Second**, when an agreement was made, the man and woman became espoused (pledged to each other, somewhat beyond the expectations of a modern-day engagement) and publicly announced their intentions to marry. **Third**, the couple formally married and lived together as man and wife.

According to Jewish law, when Joseph discovered Mary was pregnant and the child was not his, he had every right to divorce her. Mary's condition violated marital laws and was deemed unacceptable in Jewish society, giving Jewish authorities the right to stone her to death (**Deuteronomy 22:23–24**).

Joseph's actions speak volumes about the character of Mary. No matter how bizarre her story must have sounded, there was something about her character that provoked his love and the desire to protect her reputation. Throughout their relationship, Mary must "have exhibited the characteristics of a woman who loved and worshiped the Lord, so much so that she was highly favored in the eyes of God, and God chose her to be the mother of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ (**Luke 1:26–35**).

Joseph was a righteous man, and he struggled to make the right decision. Faced with the dilemma of Mary's unexpected pregnancy, Joseph was forced to make a choice that would affect his and Mary's life. Should he divorce the woman he loved or leave her to face public humiliation? He decided to divorce Mary privately, thinking it would protect her from public disgrace. If Joseph was trying to avoid humiliation, he knew that marrying Mary would create even greater suffering. In Jewish society, Mary's condition constituted adultery and justified punishment by stoning. Marrying her would bring even greater disgrace to his family, since the baby was not biologically his.

Joseph's actions also speak volumes about his own character and upbringing. His behavior demonstrated the ability to exercise discretion and sensitivity. He was sensitive to Mary's needs and sought to do the right thing in the eyes of God by not publicly assassinating her reputation. He practiced discretion when he chose to divorce Mary privately and not make her a public spectacle. No doubt Joseph felt hurt and betrayed by the situation, yet despite his own feelings, he wanted to carry out what he thought was the best solution.

3. Forfeited a Decision (Matthew 1: 20): God did not leave the situation in Joseph's hands. Knowing Joseph's plans to divorce Mary, God intervened immediately by "sending an angel to him in a dream. The angel told Joseph not to fear and to take Mary as his wife, for the child she was carrying was of the Holy Spirit. No matter how good our intentions appear to be, when God has a plan for us and we are going in the wrong direction, He will quickly disrupt our plans and steer us in the right direction.

Joseph had an important role to play in making sure Mary's pregnancy came to fruition. Sometimes God will lead us into situations that bring hardship, embarrassment, and humiliation into our lives. However, remembering that God is sovereign will help us to understand that God chooses only the best solution, the one that will produce the best outcome in our lives. He uses all our situations to work for our good (Romans 8:28).

4. Followed God's Instructions (Matthew 1: 21) Joseph's role was crucial. He would be responsible for protecting young Jesus and raising Him in the things of God. He would play a crucial role in assisting God in bringing forth the promises He made to His people. The name "Jesus" is the Greek form of the name Joshua, which means "the Lord saves."

God desired to save His people from hopelessness and sin. Sin is innate in every human being, and only through the shed blood of Jesus could humankind be redeemed from the devastating and final consequences of sin.

There is no real evidence that Joseph fully understood what the angel meant when he said that Jesus would save the people from their sin. Joseph may have believed that Jesus would be a king who would one day lead with a fearless army of Jewish soldiers, pounding down the doors of oppressive enemies. Unknown to Joseph, Jesus would not come as a mighty, typically imagined warrior but as a humble man, going about His Father's business, forgiving people of their sins—and then, He would be handed over to the enemy and crucified on a cross. For it is at the Cross, where our Lord Jesus Christ shed His precious blood, that we are given total victory over sin and death. The Cross represents the final atonement for humankind's fallen state, and Jesus, taking on the sins of humankind, endured the Cross for our sake. Anyone who believes, repents, and accepts Him as Lord and Saviour is forgiven of sin, reconciled back to God, and given the gift of eternal life (Colossians 1:20–22; 2:14–15; Hebrews 12:2).

5. Fulfilled Prophecy (Matthew 1: 22–23) God's Word was being manifested in the lives of His people (v. 22). It had been a long-awaited prophecy, and now the people were finally experiencing the truth of God's Word. The Word of God is true and never returns to Him without accomplishing its intended purpose. God speaks through human beings and uses us to fulfill His promises; however, our obedience or disobedience to God's Word cannot thwart the will of almighty God. When God sets in motion the fulfillment of a promise, it is fulfilled regardless of people's dim understanding of the outcome (Isaiah 55:11).

The word “Immanuel” means “God with us” (Matthew 1:23). The prophet Isaiah predicted God would live among the people (Isaiah 7:14). Jesus, being God in human flesh, would dwell among the people and live a simple life. He would work as a carpenter like His earthly father Joseph and not perform public ministry until the appropriate time. God still dwells among His people in the form of the Holy Spirit. He lives in the hearts of believers. God is an ever-present help and, as He promised, will never leave or forsake us. He is always with us (Joshua 1:5; Psalm 46:1; Hebrews 13:5).

6. Fulfilled Promise (Matthew 1: 24–25) Joseph believed God’s messenger and immediately obeyed the spoken word (v. 24). He forfeited his decision to divorce Mary and took her as his wife. Joseph probably faced opposition from his family, but despite their disapproval, he obeyed God’s command. There will be times in our lives when God will tell us to make a decision that appears to others as wrong or unpopular. Our goal is to please God and not one another. As we follow God’s instructions, the Lord can fulfill His purpose for our lives. God knows our future, and to trust God means to follow His instructions for us.

Joseph revered the Lord and respected his wife, and, unlike what would have occurred under normal circumstances, their marriage was not consummated until after the birth of Jesus (v. 25). God gives us the strength to deal with every unusual, difficult situation. He provides sufficient grace to enable us to obey His commands no matter what difficulties we might face. Joseph followed the commandment of God and named the child “Jesus.”

Liberating Lesson

For many people who live in poverty, hopelessness is a way of life and survival becomes the primary need. Greedy landlords make unfulfilled promises to them about fixing the plumbing and heating or removing rodents from the buildings they own, only to allow these same conditions to continue to exist for years and years. When people’s lives are full of broken promises, it is hard for them to accept the possibility of things getting better. How many times have you expected something to happen in your life and later found out it was not going to happen? How did you respond? How many times have you made commitments and promises and not followed through? Think about a situation in your life in which you made a promise to someone and did not keep it. What kept you from fulfilling your promise?

Application for Activation

“God is a God of truth, and He honors His commitments to His people. Think about commitments you’ve made to your spouse, children, ministry, school, and work that you have not fulfilled. Then, write them down, pray, and ask God to help you fulfill your promises. If you feel you have not broken any promises, ask God to show you what you have not done that He has asked you to do; then do it. Share your results with the class next week.”

Closing Prayer

Week of 31 March 24

Daily Bible Readings



Monday – Isaiah 42-44

Tuesday – Isaiah 45-48

Wednesday – Isaiah 49-53

Thursday – Isaiah 54-58

Friday – Isaiah 59-63

Saturday – Isaiah 64-66

Sunday – Jeremiah 1-3