

The King who Saves, the King who stays

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- [0 : 0 0] There is something comforting about familiarity, isn't it? I know some of you have been away on mission or NTE. It's great to be coming back home, isn't it?
- To the comfort of your own bed, having the same breakfast each morning, maybe. Or that cup of coffee that you get from your local barista. But familiarity can also mean that we take things for granted.
- You know, we've watched on TV, haven't we, some of these programs, Escape to the Country or whatever. You know, how people pay millions for that view that they want to escape the city.
- Then after a while, though, they sort of take that view for granted, don't they? They don't wake up each morning and stand in the balcony and go, Oh, I paid a million dollars for this.
- They just forget it after a week or so. Same with donuts from Daniel's. That very first bite, it's always truly unforgettable. But then when you start to eat it every day, it soon becomes a bit ordinary, doesn't it?
- [1 : 1 0] Not to mention make you feel sick. And I guess Christmas is a bit like that sometimes, isn't it? Kids never seem to tire of it.
- But as grown-ups, we sometimes do, don't we? Because we lose excitement because it's become too familiar. But of course, the whole Christmas story becomes familiar as well.
- Every year, if we come to church, we hear it again and again, don't we? The manger, the angels, the birth in Bethlehem. The same with the Bible readings.
- Even the sermons can become the same after a while, can it? I mean, I know as a preacher because I find myself recycling some of my Christmas sermons after a few years.
- Thankfully, you haven't been in my congregation for that long, so you don't know that perhaps this might have been a repeat sermon. All of us, all of which makes us forget, I think, just how amazing the birth of Jesus is.
- [2 : 1 3] Because we hear it year in, year up. Because I think if we stand back and take a look again at the Bible story with fresh eyes, it ought to really amaze us.
- It ought to amaze us what actually did happen. And I think when Matthew wrote his Gospel, that was what he was trying to communicate to us, just how amazing the birth of Jesus is.
- If not to us, then certainly to the first century Jew, because God has fulfilled His promises to them. And the amazing thing is not just that He did, but also in the way He did it.
- And so we saw already last time, last week, how God does this in an unexpected way. Well, this week, Matthew continues to show us how the events leading up to the birth is just as amazing.
- So look with me at verse 18 where 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.

[3 : 27] Now, Joseph probably didn't know this. We read in Luke's account that Mary was told by the angel Gabriel. But this account in Matthew is from Joseph's perspective.

And although Joseph was betrothed to Mary, he wasn't married to her just yet. And so the marriage wasn't consummated. Now, if you read Deuteronomy, and some of us have been studying that book this year, there are dire consequences that await a woman if she cannot prove her virginity during her engagement.

If you read chapter 22, it actually says that she is to be stoned at the door of her father's house because she was bringing shame to her father's name.

And so this was the dilemma, I think, that Matthew was alluding to in verse 19. For Joseph, he says, her husband was faithful to the law.

He knew what grave consequences befell Mary because of this pregnancy. And yet we also read that he was trying to be gracious to her and did not want to expose her to public disgrace.

[4 : 36] And so he had in mind to divorce her quietly. You see, for Joseph, as a faithful Jew, to simply continue the marriage wasn't an option.

The legitimacy of his heir was at stake. And yet, for Joseph to be the son of David, according to the promise, that was exactly what was needed, that Joseph had to be the father of Jesus.

Of course, this dilemma is unavoidable, isn't it? Any child of a virgin conceived by the Holy Spirit would never have a human father, a natural human father, would they?

Now, fun fact, each year at around Christmas time, the number of women claiming a virgin birth, that is, that they are pregnant as a virgin, actually spikes.

In fact, last year there was a report, which I got off Google, it's got to be reliable. It says that about 1% of the U.S., women in the U.S. claim a virgin birth.

[5 : 46] That's a lot. It's one in a hundred. That's a lot of people, isn't it? Now, I don't know about you, but if anyone makes such a claim, I can't help but scoff. Why?

Because it's preposterous, isn't it? No one, as a virgin, gives birth to a baby. It's preposterous. No one does, except and unless it's an act of God.

So I think even if Mary had tried to tell Joseph, and even if Joseph loved Mary, which I'm sure he did, it's right for Joseph to be skeptical, don't you think?

And so this required an intervention by God. He had to send an angel to Joseph, and in the case of Joseph, he came in a dream. And so this is what the angel revealed to Joseph in verse 20.

He said, 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.

[6 : 48] 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. So two things were revealed to Joseph in this dream.

First, Joseph is assured that Mary's child was indeed a divine intervention from the Lord. This was a most amazing event, a once in a lifetime, in a history of this world occurrence.

And so it was okay for Joseph to take Mary to be his wife. In fact, the angel is saying he needed to. It wasn't against God's law. It was actually doing God's will to do that.

But second, just as importantly, Joseph was given a name. The baby's name is to be called Jesus. Now you have to realize that the name Jesus isn't quite as special as it is today.

Nowadays, in the English-speaking world, at least, you wouldn't think to name your child Jesus. Although I think in the Spanish-speaking world, people still do. But back in the day, Jesus was actually quite a common name.

[7 : 55] It's the Greek version of Joshua. And if you look at the bottom of the Bible, the meaning of the name Joshua or Jesus simply means God saves. And people would call their children by their name, by that name, because they did look to God to save them.

You know, at the time, there would be foreign aggressors, famine, disease. And so people naturally looked to God to save them. And so if you name your child Jesus, it wasn't actually that surprising.

And so this revelation to Joseph that the child's name is Jesus wasn't in itself amazing or spectacular. But that's not all the angel reveals, is it?

For he adds that it's because God will save them from their sin. And that's never happened before. Yes, there were animal sacrifices at the temple, but that was a ritual which they had repeated over and over again.

But now, God was going to save them from their sins. That's new information. That's an amazing revelation. And it ought to amaze us too, because we don't naturally think of needing to be saved from our sins, do we?

[9 : 08] We're happy to be saved from many other things. Just this week, I was thinking to myself, well, boy, I'm glad the cleaners are coming this week, because it'll save me from having to do the housework.

And don't we often hear people say, oh, I'm glad there's online shopping nowadays, because it will save me from having to go to Westfield to find a car park with the crowds. Or, I'm so glad there's Uber Eats nowadays.

It saves me having to cook, or even to go out to get takeaway. But we don't naturally say to ourselves, I'm so glad Jesus was born 2,000 years ago, because it will save me from having to die for my sins.

Do we? But that's exactly what God sent His Son, Jesus, to do, to save His people from their sins. And the only way He was going to do that is to die on the cross.

You see, we don't like thinking of being saved from our sins, because that makes the problem about us. We have to admit that the problem isn't out there with the world, with other people, but it's right here, in us.

[10 : 19] Sure, the world may be stuffed up as well with other sinful people and unjust systems, but when we ask the Lord to save us from our sins, we're actually recognizing that the problem lies with us, our sin, and our fallen character.

And as I said last week, we are by nature selfish, aren't we, and proud. And in our pride and self-centeredness, we hurt others. We lie to protect our own reputation.

We take revenge on those who hurt us. We refuse to help others when we're tired. We say unkind things to others when we should offer words of healing instead.

And most of all, we want to live independently of God, even when it's God who created us, even when He's provided for everything we have, down to the very next breath that we're about to breathe.

But no, we don't like the idea of God telling us what to do, that He is the one who determines right from wrong, especially when it shows to us that we are in the wrong.

[11 : 27] I mean, we bristle, don't we, when someone quotes the Bible and says, that's what the Bible teaches us, and therefore, we need to obey. Now, I know that there are proud and self-righteous people that say those things to put others down, but even when someone says it gently as a way of reminding us, we still react to it, don't we, when people quote the Bible back to us.

we don't like to be answerable to God, do we? But as I said last week, even when we're in the wrong, our first reaction isn't to say to God, no, no, no, God, let me try harder so that I can save myself and find favor in your eyes.

No, what we need to do is say, let me cast myself into the arms of Jesus because He's the one who will save me from my sins. Let me live a life of faith in Him, trusting in His goodness rather than my own.

And only when we've done that do we then say, well, let me then live rightly before God, not as a way to earn favor before God, but actually just as a response of thanksgiving.

So those are the two things that the angel reveals to Joseph. First, for him to take Mary as his wife, to be obedient to God, but secondly, to name Jesus and to reveal what the amazing purpose of Jesus' coming is and that is to save us from our sins.

[12 : 59] And if you look down in verse 25, that's exactly what Joseph ends up doing. But then in verses 23 and 24, Matthew also gives us one more additional thing, another revelation as it were, an interpretation, if you like, of Jesus' birth, which is both amazing and another fulfillment of God's promise.

And so this is what Matthew writes in verse 23. 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 Emmanuel, which means God with us.

Now based on our first reading in Isaiah chapter 7, we know that this prophet is Isaiah. Isaiah prophesied at the time that when the southern kingdom of Israel, Judah, was under siege from all its enemies, you know, that there were Assyrians, the Egyptians, the Syrians, even the northern kingdom of Israel was against Judah.

And compared to the mighty Assyrians and Egyptians, Judah was a minnow. And so it was natural to be afraid. It was natural to want to join a bigger alliance to protect themselves, to find a big brother who would look after them.

But it was at that time that the word came to the king, King Ahaz. And what God was saying is don't be afraid. Don't put your trust in the superpowers of the day.

[14 : 25] Instead, put your trust in God. And the Lord said that he himself will give Israel a sign. Verse 14. The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Emmanuel because that means God with us.

And so the message to Israel was actually in that name. God's promise to them in this child, in the name of this child, was that no matter how dire the circumstances were, no matter how fearsome the enemies were, everything will be okay because God, their God, was going to be with them.

God's very presence assures them that he will protect and care for them. He will do what's right. That he will use his power to save them. Even if they don't know how God was going to do it.

Even when they didn't know how and what timing and when that would happen. And so now in the birth of this son of a virgin Mary, Matthew sees this as a sign that God is with his people.

But the amazing thing now, of course, is that God isn't simply with his people in spirit, but actually in person, in the person of this child, Jesus. But did you notice something really important as well?

[15 : 48] It's in the exact words of the angel. Look again at verse 21. The angel actually says, you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.

Notice that the angel did not say, God will save his people rather than Jesus will. And yet, what is Jesus' name? God saves.

Which means Jesus has to be God, the divine son of God. God in the person of Jesus will save his people from their sins. You see, as far as we know, the name Emmanuel was never used during Jesus' day.

Jesus did not use it of himself. I don't think we have a record of Joseph or Mary or anyone else using it. And so the only reason why we sing O come, O come, Emmanuel, which we'll sing after this at Christmas, is because of this piece of revelation from Matthew.

He sees the virgin conceive, he hears Joseph recount his dream, and the angel review, Jesus will save his people from their sins. And then after Jesus comes, of course, and teaches them, the light bulb sort of turns on, and he realizes that Jesus is God.

[17 : 09] Matthew realizes that this is exactly Isaiah's prophecy fulfilled, because God is with them. God is with us, Emmanuel. And Matthew witnesses the powerful impact of God's presence in Jesus among his people.

God being with us changes everything. Back then, but also now. God being with us as a church changes everything.

So much so that at the end of Matthew, and I've got the verses on the screen, Jesus records, Matthew records Jesus' own promise, doesn't he? And he says, Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I've commanded you, and surely I am with you.

That is God with us always to the very end of the age. When God wanted to save his people from their sins, he didn't just raise up another sinful human to be king or prophet or priest.

He didn't send an angel or even an army of angels to do the job. No, God sent his own son, Jesus, to become a human. And Jesus didn't come like a fit 30-year-old and say, I'm ready, let me die on the cross.

[18 : 28] No. He came as a frail baby to live through the entire experience of what it means to be a human. He sent his son to grow up under Roman occupation, to experience the full range of human temptation, to face rejection from his own people.

So this is God with us in the fullest sense of the word. And we all know, don't we, that the thing children crave most, especially when they're young, is the presence of people who love them.

Not just quality time, but quantity time. Sitting with them through the night when they're teething or having nightmares. Being with them to take them to their first day of school, especially when they're nervous.

Well, that is what Jesus being God with us means. except that Jesus went beyond that, didn't he? Because he just didn't sit with us in our time of need. No, he actually suffered in our place.

And having done that, as he ascended, he continues to be with us by his Holy Spirit. And so this Advent season, let's be reminded again that God is with us.

[19 : 40] And let us know that all will be right because of that. Jesus didn't just die for us only to leave us to fend for ourselves. He knows that we need God in our lives to be with us.

Now, if you're here for the first time and you desire God to be in your life, well, that gift comes only when we call upon Jesus as our Lord and Savior. And so if you want to know how you need assurance of how to do it, then please come and speak with me afterwards.

There'll be others as well up the front to pray with you. But please, come talk to us. As for the rest of us, well, the Bible's promise is that Jesus is coming back again in person.

Advent is both looking back to the first coming but also looking forward to the second coming. But before he does, we have a God who has already saved us.

And now we have a King who stays with us by his Spirit. Now, I don't know about you, but I know a lot of people who wish they could spend the night in one of the Queen's palaces.

[20 : 47] So maybe Balmoral Castle, which is the one on the right, Buckingham Palace on the left. What's that at the bottom? Windsor Castle. Not many people get to do it, of course, right?

It's only if you're royalty or dignitaries. Now, of course, as Christians, one day we'll get our own mansion in heaven. But in the meantime, what God's done, of course, is not just invite us to stay at his home, but rather he's come to our home, as it were.

Jesus, as the eternal Son of God, the King of Kings, has humbled himself and chosen to be with us to make this earth his dwelling place.

Even though when he did come, you will remember that he didn't even have a room for himself in the inn. And often, during his own life, he didn't have a place to rest his head either.

And so, we can be assured that no matter how trying our circumstances, even if our future on earth may look bleak at the moment, God is still with his people. He's with those who put their faith in Jesus.

[21 : 56] So, let's put our faith in Jesus. Let's keep putting our faith in Jesus. Let our anxiety and doubt and fear turn to joy instead. And let our hearts be filled with hope in Jesus this Christmas and for the rest of our days.

Let's pray. Father, thank you that you sent your Son, Jesus. He's our King who saves and who stays with us. Thank you for sending him to save us from our sins, which is the one thing that separates us from true life.

Help us to trust in you and to be disciples who tell others about the King who saves and who stays. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.