

God With Us (Matthew 1:18-25)

Unless you are living under a rock, you know that we are in midst of a technological revolution. Break throughs are happening in every field at an exponential rate. One of the areas that is just getting started, and considered to be the next big shift, is virtual reality. Put on glasses and you are transported to a new world. Go anywhere you want, do anything you want, and it feels very close to real. On top of virtual reality is something called augmented reality, or mixed reality, and this is where it starts to get weird. This is virtual reality mixed with your actual environment. The lines are blurred between what's real and what's not. See your google maps arrow out on the road in front of you, pull up endless digital screens, shop furniture by placing digital versions of it in your living room. The possibilities are endless. Now, like anything, it will be a tool to be used for good or for evil. My question is not so much with what this technology will allow, but my question is with the heart that is searching for a better reality.

Virtual reality and mixed reality is a way is an attempt to alter reality. To make things better. That is the promise of technology. Advancement. More speed, More communication. More productivity. Better health. Better education, and so on. Certainly these can be good, and praise God for certain aspects of technology. But at some level, technology is not driven by a desire to glorify God—I wish that were the case—but from a desire to better one's reality. Because things are not good enough the way they are. It's the pursuit of perfection, of utopia.

What if I were to tell you that the best of all realities is already here? In fact, that announcement was made 2000 years ago. Matthew 1:23, which is a quote from Isaiah 7:14, “**Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel**” (which means, **God with us**.)” The best of all possible realities is the reality of God being with us.

Matthew could have announced Jesus any way he wanted, but he chose to point us towards this ultimate and best reality, Immanuel, God with us. This is a huge theme for Matthew, one scholar even says “*The entire [gospel of Matthew] may be regarded as an attempt on the part of Matthew to draw out the implications of what it means to say in 1:23 that in Jesus God dwells with His people.*” - Quarles

This is our focus this morning, because it's Matthew's focus. Now, Matthew is huge on the Old Testament Scriptures. 55 times in his gospel he will have a direct quote, which is more than twice the number the other gospels. 12 of these times he uses the language of “fulfilled.” And this influences the way that he writes. He's not writing as merely a historian, but writing as a theologian. He wants to say something about God, and that it has to fit the Scriptures. So in these first few chapters, Matthew is not trying to tell a story and then remembers a quote, so plugs it in. It's more like he starts with these quotes builds from there. Isaiah 7:14 is what is most important to Matthew, and the context around the quote, the birth narrative, is like the frame around the picture.

What does it mean that God is with us in Jesus? That is the question we will answer this morning. And as we do it's my hope that we are drawn to wonder and to worship. Let's pray.

Before we dive into the theological significance of this section, I'd like us to read through the narrative to get a firm basis of what's happening.

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

Betrothed for the Jews was a bit like our engagement period, although there was binding legal consequences. They were legally engaged you could say, and during that period of engagement the two were to remain chaste, and then on marriage night they would come together and seal the deal. But before they had come together, Mary is found to be pregnant. You mean before they had intercourse, she got pregnant? Woah! I mean we at Harvest know how babies are made. There's a someone new showing up here at Harvest

pregnant every week. It's a surprise as to the who, not to the how, the how is not a surprise. We know how it happens. And Joseph knows how it happens too, he's not stupid. How does he respond?

19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

This was a serious situation that Mary and Joseph found themselves in. By law whoever was guilty could be put to death. There's the sense that she is "no longer eligible to go through with the marriage with Joseph." Joseph was just to not marry her. But he was also merciful. Since he couldn't consummate the marriage, he resolved to quietly divorce her. He didn't want to bring any shame on her publicly. And then what happens?

20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). 24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, 25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

I love how God breaks in to Joseph's world right here, radically turns him around. God is in the business of turning people around. He sends an angel to comfort and guide him. Don't fear, what is in Mary is from the Holy Spirit. She did not commit adultery, she's been chosen by the most high God. The angel calls him Son of David, antennae go up, tying him into the royal line of David. It's highlighting the fact that the person in his wife's belly is not a product of scandal, He's the providence of God.

If you're Joseph, you got to be thinking, this thing can't get any weirder. I mean you go from thinking your wife cheated on you and you were about to get a divorce, to this baby is the savior of the world. He goes along with it, responds in obedience, and withholds from intercourse with Mary until the child is born, which, apart from Jesus, makes Joseph the most patient and content man in the Bible. Once the child is born, He names Him Jesus, which makes Jesus the legal son of Joseph, tying Him into his line. Jesus was adopted.

So that's the narrative context of this announcement. Now let's explore what this means.

1. God is with us in Jesus, as fully God

To start with, we see even in Matthew 1:1 that there is evidence of Jesus being God. The literal greek is this is the book of the genesis of Jesus Christ. Almost identical language use where, in Genesis. The book of the genesis of the heavens and the earth.

The same language is used in vs. 18, now the birth of Jesus Christ, is the genesis of Jesus Christ. This is linking Jesus to the Creator God. And as we see in Genesis the Spirit hovering over the waters as an agent in Creation, and then giving life to Adam, so we see the Spirit here giving life to the Messiah.

In v.18 Mary was found to be with a child from the Holy Spirit. In v.20 an angel confirms, that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. V.23 the birth will happen through a virgin, that is supernaturally. And then if we back up into the genealogy there is a unique way that Matthew presents Jesus. The normal pattern is so and so's name, the father of so and so, and so on. That's the formula, but when we get to vs. **16 it says, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.** Of whom Jesus was born, does two things. It distances Joseph as the originator, and it's in the passive, indicating a divine action took place.

Throughout Matthew's gospel, and all the writers of the New Testament, is an emphasis of Jesus being God. He exerts power over the created order, tells waves to be still, he walks on water, he multiplies fish and bread, heals diseases, knows things only God could know, is perfectly righteous, wisdom unparalleled, and has the power to forgive sins.

Matthew would take special notice of people calling Jesus the Son of God throughout His gospel. From the baptism of Jesus when the Holy Spirit descends upon him and God the Father says, this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, to the disciples as well as demons who will call Jesus the Son of God, to Jesus' own confession of being the Son of God.

Here's where controversy lies, and there's hardly a more controversial subject than christianity's claim that Jesus is the Son of God. This was the claim that got Jesus killed. It's the claim that gets christians killed today.

As long as Jesus is just a man, he's safe. Everyone's cool. The world loves great teachers. Great voices. Great leaders. It loves the idea of Jesus being a servant and all about social justice. The world does not love the idea of Jesus being God. People may tend to like the idea of God in general, but not God in particular in the flesh, as Jesus. People like God in general because they get to fashion him according to their liking. A god with no attributes can be everything to everyone. That's not the god of the Bible. But Hebrews tells us that Jesus is the exact representation of His being. John's gospel makes clear to us that in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and the Word became flesh. Everything that God is. Jesus is.

When God comes in Jesus, He's coming fully in Jesus. He's not fully in any other human being ever. And He's not splitting the revelation up, as if there's a revelation in Jesus, another in Buddha, and Confucious, and Muhammed, and so on—and they all combine to form the true revelation of God. No, that is not what the Bible teaches. The entirety of God's revelation is found in Jesus, once and for all.

This confronts us with the divine. God is shown to us. Jesus refuses to allow you to treat him as one more teacher. He's God. And as God He sets the rules. He's Lord. We must submit and surrender to Him. We can't just take his moral teaching and throw out his theological teaching, or his teaching about heaven and hell, sin and judgement. That's the confronting aspect of God coming in Jesus.

But there is the comforting aspect of God coming in Jesus as well. For the believer and those that He has called, God is with us. He's not against us. He's come for us. That's incredible news! That's gospel news. That's why we celebrate. The angels in Luke's gospel said, behold, I bring you good news of great joy. The eternal, transcendent, all powerful, all knowing one is on your side. The sovereign One is in your camp, he's wearing your jersey. Lebron James just joined your middle school basketball team. God is full of love, grace, compassion, mercy, and kindness, power, justice, and He is here for us. Our sovereign creator God is on our side.

2. God is with us in Jesus, as fully Man

He's born of Mary. Just like any other baby. The transcendent one came out of her body with a body of His own. The eternal God puts on flesh. I like how JI Packer articulates it, *"The Divine Son became a Jew; the Almighty appeared on earth as a helpless human baby, unable to do more than lie and stare and wriggle and make noises, needing to be fed and changed and taught to talk like any other child. And there was no disillusion or deception in this: the babyhood of the Son of God was a reality. The more you think about it the more staggering it gets. Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as is this truth of the Incarnation."* God putting on flesh is what He calls the "supreme mystery" outranking the atonement and resurrection, because those hinge on this fact.

John Wesley would write of this mystery, *"Our God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man."*

We need to be clear at this point, as many cults and false religions diverge at this point. Though Jesus always existed with the Father, He did not always exist in human flesh. The birth of Jesus was not the beginning of Jesus as a person, it was the beginning of Jesus in human form. Or as Dr. Akin says, *“it’s theological precise to say there was a time when Jesus did not exist, but never a time when the Son did not exist.”*

And as a man, He was fully man. He wasn’t a spirit or a ghost or some hybrid version. He was fully man. Jesus got tired. He slept. He was hungry. He was thirsty. He cried. He suffered. He grew spiritually, mentally, socially, and learned information. And I like how one commentator adds, *“he worked as a carpenter, had friends he loved, gave encouraging compliments, loved children, celebrated holidays, went to parties, loved his mom, prayed, worshiped, and obeyed God the Father. Everything that it means to be man, Jesus was.”*

Phil 2:5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

Hebrews 2:17 Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Jesus is a man. In that sense, He’s just like us. He understands. He’s been through what your going through. There is comfort in Him being divine, and there’s comfort in Him being human. Your struggles today he is aware of. I remember when Lazarus died, because of his love for Lazarus and others that were around, Jesus wept. He entered all the way into their suffering.

God is with us in Jesus as fully God and fully man, and lastly we see that:

3. God is with us in Jesus, as Savior

Matthew 1:21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

4000 years before Jesus, Adam and Eve enjoyed the blessing of God without filter. They experience pure delight in His presence, His reign, and His gifts. It was paradise. But they disobey God and their sin thrusts them into the wilderness and paradise becomes only a memory. Sin enters the equation, and humanity from that point on hangs under the righteous, eternal judgement of God. God’s presence was stripped.

However, while God was judging them, God was also in the process of saving them. He gives a prophecy, in Gen. 3:15, talking to the Satan, **15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”**

There will come a Savior from the line of Eve that will crush Satan and undue all the effects of the curse--thereby bringing us back into God’s presence.

In fact, as you follow the storyline of Israel, God’s presence among them was the climax—the supreme blessing. But their sin keeps getting in the way. God’s presence with them was conditional upon their obedience—which they were terrible at. Over and over and over again get caught up in idolatry, the rebel from God’s law, they trust in other countries, they forget about God.

Instead of receiving blessing, they were receiving judgment. Exile. Slavery. Suffering. They needed a Savior. Someone to rescue them from their peril. In 700 BC another clue is given to this Savior, Isaiah speaks into their darkness 7:14 that this one individual will be Immanuel, God with us, and He will be born of a virgin.

To be the savior, this individual must be both God and man. Fully Both. It's like captain planet, if any of you remember. They come together and say, "when our powers combine, captain planet, and out he comes." When you get fully God together with fully man, you get a Savior.

Humanity needed something greater than man to help us—we needed God. But humanity also needed something like us to help us—we needed a man to help us. In Jesus we have both—He is the God-man. Only He can and only He is sufficient to save as that person. A few ways to see this...

Jesus is our righteous representative, who re present humanity before God, where Adam failed the law, Jesus has fulfilled the law. We are declared worthy according to His worthiness.

Jesus is our sufficient substitute, who bore the wrath of God, paying the just penalty for our sins.

Jesus is our rescuer, who disarmed the power of Satan and freed us from our enslavement to the enemy.

Jesus is our reconciliation, bringing peace between us and God through His blood.

Jesus is our re-creator, who gives us new life. As He spoke creation into existence, so He is in the business of remaking humanity. We are new creations in Christ, and as new creations, born of His Spirit, we are adopted into His family. The new humanity is one family with God as Father. This you could say is the climax of the saving work of Christ. To satisfy God as judge is great, to be rescued from Satan is great, but to have God as Father is greater. John Calvin sums up the incarnation this way, *The Son of God became the Son of Man in order that the sons of man might become sons of God -John Calvin*

The new creation doesn't stop with us, as Jesus first created the heavens and the earth, He will do so again, He's made us new and He's making the whole cosmos new. That's where we as a family are headed for eternity.

God is with us in Jesus as our Savior. How incredible? You would have thought that if the Eternal One took on flesh, he would have come in great power and majesty, come to Rome, not to Bethlehem, come in a castle, not in a manger, and certainly come to be served, rather than to serve. And yet it's the reverse, He came to serve. The infinite, Creator God, came to serve and not be served, and to give His life as a ransom.

Or as the Philliipians passage we read earlier would continue, **8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.**

It was humble enough to take on humanity, but in that humanity to experience the most horrific humiliation.

9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Your creator has carried a cross for you, and He now lives and reigns for you. Believe in Him this morning. Where your sin abounds, His grace abounds all the more. Give Him your sin and be reconciled, have God's presence.

This is our God and He is with us. Matthew in fact brackets His entire book in this theme, **Matthew 28:20 as He's sending His disciples out, tells them, "I will be with you always, to the end of the age."**

God in Jesus is with us as fully God, as fully man, and as our Savior. And He will always be with us. We have the best of all possible realities. Come what may with technology and virtual reality, but nothing will ever get as good as this. Let's pray.