

Matthew 1:18-25

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[0 : 00] And open your Bibles up to Matthew chapter 1. What if God was one of us?

Just a slob. Like one of us. Like a stranger on the bus. What if God was one of us? It's actually a really important question.

What if God was one of us? Let's think about that. Do you know just what the angel says to Joseph? And she says to me, Do not fear.

Do not fear. To take Mary as your wife. For what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. What if God was one of us?

It's inconceivable, isn't it? But the angel says, no, what is conceived in her is by the Holy Spirit. And you will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us.

[1 : 26] What if God was one of us? Matthew's account is different. What we've got here in these verses this morning is Matthew's take on things.

And Matthew tells the story from Joseph's perspective. Luke tells the story from Mary's perspective. And what I want to try and do this morning is for us to put ourselves in Joseph's shoes.

I noticed three things about Joseph. First of all, predicament that he faced. And then secondly, the privilege of his given. And then thirdly, the price of his paid.

So first of all, the predicament that he faced. Matthew's account is different. There's no contradiction. But there's no stable.

There's no shepherds. There's no angel choirs. There are wise men in Matthew's account, but they don't turn up to chapter two. When Jesus is a toddler and he's no longer a newborn.

[2 : 27] Sorry to spoil the manger scene that you've got in your house, but the reality is he was probably a toddler. There may not have been three. There may have been three up with four, we know.

However, they didn't turn up until Jesus was a toddler. But what we've got in Matthew's account is this announcement of Jesus' birth. And right in the starting here it says from a scandal.

It's the scandal of a teenage pregnancy. David, verse 18. The birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way when his mother, Mary, had been betrothed Joseph before they came together, that's before they sexual relations, and it's a new child.

And that probably doesn't shock us. But back in the day, that was a real scandal. I don't know how Mary wrote the news to Joseph. She didn't have the technology to text him.

That would be the coward's way out, wouldn't it? She didn't sit him down. Well, she might have sat him down and given him a stiff drink and said, Joseph, I've got some news for you. Guess what?

[3 : 30] I'm pregnant. We don't exactly know how it happened. But we can imagine the shock and the scandal of this. For Joseph, what is he going to do?

Under Sharia law, she'd be stung as an adulterous. Even, remember, in the Gospels in John chapter 8, that woman that is dragged before Jesus at the religious police state, she's being caught in the act of adultery.

They want to stone her, but Jesus intervenes. In our culture at the time, it was a scandalous thing. Joseph and Mary, they're promised to each other probably as children.

That's the way marriage happens. It was arranged. And in teenage years later on, they would be betrothed. It's a more serious thing than engagement. But they wouldn't have lived together.

They would have lived in their respective family homes until the actual wedding. The wedding would have taken a week or so. And once the ceremony had happened, then the marriage would have been consolidated.

[4 : 37] And so here are this teenage couple, Joseph and Mary. Age-o, and pregnant. And the bottom must have fallen out of his words.

Look at verse 19. We're told there, aren't we, that her husband, Joseph, being a just man, and unwilling to put her sheep, resolved to divorce it quietly.

He is the original holy Jew, isn't he? He is the holy man who wants to do the right thing. Joseph being a righteous man. I don't mean that in a disparaging way.

We should admire him. He's a holy man. He's a righteous man. He doesn't want to disgrace her publicly. But not only is he a righteous man who wants to do his right, he's a compassionate man. and so he doesn't want her to put her to public sheep. You and I can imagine how confused the hurting life's possibly being. But there's nothing cruel, there's nothing vindictive about him.

[5 : 43] He's got no intention of making her a public example. See, if Joseph wasn't that kind of man, what would he have done? He'd have demanded a DNA test, if that was the way.

He was on the tally. He'd have made Mary sit a lie detector test for the entertainment to the audience. But look what happens in his 20s. But as he considered this, I'd love to know how long he considered it.

Who knows how long Joseph sat there, trying to figure it out, trying to process the news. But then you see what happens. A messenger from God shows up, an angel from the Lord, reveals to him in a dream.

Hey, Joseph, guess what Mary's actually telling the truth? And the angel of the Lord appears and says, Joseph, son of David, don't fear to take Mary as your wife, for what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

And the cynics look at this passage and they say some young guy gets his girlfriend into trouble and they accidentally invent Christianity with the story of a virgin birth.

[6 : 53] And that's what many people may think today if they think about it at all. Whoever heard of a virgin birth? Where did that idea come from? Well, that idea comes from the Old Testament, doesn't it?

From the book of Isaiah, there's a promise tucked away there. I remember reading about a guy who came from a wealthy family and his father had promised him a new car.

If he did one of his exams. The other man spent weeks and weeks looking at cars, going around to different dealerships and eventually he found the car that was perfect for him. The exams took place and then the big day came and the results came out.

He did very well and his father gave him a gift-wrapped Bible. Much to his disappointment. No shaggy car on the drive. The other man was so angry about this that he felt his father had deceived him.

He felt his father had lied to him. He threw away the Bible and stormed on the house. Apparently he and his father never spoke again. Years later after his father died the son was going for his father's stuff and emptying the house and he came across that Bible that his father had given him.

[8 : 14] And there inside the Bible was the check folded up, dated on the very day his results had come out, to the exact amount of the car that he promised to give him.

Tucked away inside the Bible, if only he trusted his father, if only he believed the promise and his father, he would have got that.

And whatever Christmas is about, it is about God keeping a promise. It is about God keeping a promise that he made 750 years before the event. It's tucked away, folded away, in the prophet Isaiah.

I will tell you, I've got the patience for me to go into the original context of that prophecy, but it's there in Isaiah 7, 14. behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and you shall call him Emmanuel, which means God with us.

It's such an unlikely story. But God promised that that was the way that he was going to come to the world. Not in clouds, not with a great show of power, but through the womb of the virgin.

[9 : 24] he came in the same way that you and I came into this world. There's nothing in the usual mother birth. He was born in the same way that you and I were.

It was his conception that was the miraculous thing. Behold, a virgin shall conceive. One skeptic challenged Christian, and the skeptic said, if I told you that a child would be born without a human father, would you believe me?

Yes, that Christian. If he grew up to live as Jesus lived. There's no human being, is there, who's ever walked this earth and lived as Jesus lived.

There's no human being who's lived on this earth who said the things that Jesus said. You accomplished what he accomplished. That's very a thought this Christmas to Joseph. That message from Mary almost wrecked his life.

He could have walked away heartbroken and in turmoil. In Matthew 1 he's disappointed, he's scared, all at once. But God is going to do something massive in his life.

[10:33] The predicament he faced, put yourself in his shoes or his self was. Secondly, the great privilege he was given what the angels say in verse 20. They said, 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. She will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus. I went by so used to this story, aren't we?

There aren't too many Jesuses around in our culture today. But it is a bit of a letdown when you look at it. It's not a very trendy name. The name Jesus is just the Greek version of the Hebrew name Joshua.

That was as common in Israel as John is here. Or David is in Wales. Or Bruce is in Australia. You shall call him Bruce. It's got that kind of ring. And there were thousands of them around. It's nothing unusual on the name. You see, if you really want your child to stand out from the pack, you don't give him a name like Jesus.

[11:47] You need to consult the hipster baby generator. Look at it. It's online. I did it last night.

And so I got my name in and this is what it came up with. It came up with Scout Benson B. Lee. Or if I remember where's the other one?

I did another one. The other one's better. But you can go on that and if you slip your name in it'll give you a baby hipster name. Walter Fennel Cedar Lee.

It's got a ring to it. But you didn't do that. He didn't have a choice of what name to give his child. The name of the baby was already chosen.

Give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins. He will do what it says on the table.

[12:46] What does the name Jesus actually mean? It means God to the rescue. And he's going to do that. Call him Jesus because he will save his people from their sins because God himself is going to come with you.

How can God be with you and I if we're still in our sins? You see whenever God shows up in the Old Testament it's always a very scary thing.

When God draws near people are terrified. Even when an angel comes, a messenger from God, a servant of God, they fall to the ground. The angel has to say, do not fear, do not fear.

So if you read the Bible, when God appeared to Job in the Old Testament, and God spoke with Job in the Old Testament, he came in a tornado, a cyclone.

That's one of the scary things imaginable. Or a raging fire. So when God appeared to Abraham, he appeared like a smoking furnace through the air.

[13:55] That's a scary thing. When God led his people through the wilderness in the days of Moses, he appeared to them as a pillar of fire. When they camped for the night, they set up a tabernacle, the glory of God, the glory of God rested in that place, and no one dared to enter it, because they were afraid.

And so here is God now coming, and you will call his name Jesus, yes, why Jesus, because you need a saviour when God comes. And when God comes in Jesus, he doesn't come as a pillar of fire, he doesn't come as a raging tornado, he comes as a little tiny baby.

And he lives the life of the mission of it. He dies a death that we deserve to die. And he takes our guilt, our sins, so that us and God can become friends.

God with us, God who made us, made the universe, who keeps it going, with us in Christ.

Why? Because Jesus came to rescue us from our sins. If you're familiar with the plays in the ancient world, and there's a reason you should be, often at the end of a play in the ancient world, that kind of stage would be littered with bodies.

[15:19] And then one of the ancient gods would make an appearance to bring some kind of resolution to the tragedy. Kind of fairly spanned and ending. Whether it was a Greek tragedy or Roman day.

But one of the Roman writers, Horace, gives some interesting advice to any would-be dramatists in the ancient world. This morning says, Horace says, do not bring a god on stage unless the problem

is one that deserves a god to solve it.

Of course, we're a million miles away, aren't we? The god is the Greek pantheon or the Roman pantheon. We're not talking about some superstitious nonsense. We're talking about the real god, the only god, the only true and living god.

So why did the real, only true and living god come on stage? Why did god feel it necessary to come into this world? It must be that there's a serious problem that needs to accept everything.

And we know what it is. The problem is we hear it so often it seems just like a cliché when he says in verse 21 that you shall call his name Jesus but he will save his people from their sins.

[16:34] And you and I need our sin down with this morning. Sin is the root cause of all our problems. It's the cause of all the pain and the brokenness and the hurt that we experience in our world today.

You've got lots of different names to describe bad behaviour in our culture. There's the word vice that's acceptable one of my vices. I'm probably all willing to admit some personal vices.

But what is a vice? A vice is something personal to you. It's something that hurts you. We're talking about crimes. It's an enormous thing.

We'll think of a crime against humanity. When one of those monsters is brought to trial and there's a crime against society. So vice is a personal thing and it hurts you.

And crime is something against society and it hurts society. But sin, sin is against God. God. That's why it's so serious. There's nothing more to you're nice about it.

[17:45] It is a sin against the God who made us and his rebellion. It shows a broken relationship. And that's what's called wrong in our world.

That we're estranged from the God who made us. The God who's put your best interests apart and yet he himself has come into this world fix that.

Think about it. If a man kicks a cat. If a man kicks a cat. Is that a good thing?

No, that's a plan for it's a thing. And if he keeps on kicking a cat, that's something you want to report into the RSPCA. Because cruelty levels is not on.

a man kicks his wife down the stairs or he kicks his own mum out in the street. We take that very seriously, don't we?

[18:48] A man abuses his child or his grandchild. That is beyond the pain. Because he's crossed the line, he's betrayed the trust.

He's broken a relationship that really matters. And when we sin, that is what we do against God. Sin is against God, and that is why God himself had to come and put that right and fix that.

That is why Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and all of the Virgin Mary, because every other human being is born in sin. But he, Jesus, that is descended upon sin to set us free for its power.

In the Middle Ages, Anselm, wrote a very famous book called Why Did God Became That? And he argues that salvation had to be achieved by God because no one else could do it.

Yet the debt was owed by man. So only man could pay it. And that is what he says. He uses the explanation of the virgin birth.

[20:01] Here's the meaning of Christmas. The debt was so great that while man alone owed it, only God could pay it. So that the same person must be both man and God.

Thus it was necessary for God to take manhood into the unity of this person. So that he who in his own nature ought to pay and could not should be the person who could.

Jesus God was. Jesus is God to the rescue. And that's why what happened so long ago, 2,000 years ago, really is the defining moment of the human race.

Because you might think, how can any of this have anything to do with me because it happened so long ago and it happened so far away? it is because of who Jesus is.

That it is God himself with us. It's God himself to the rescue. And so Joseph is given the privilege of being right there when that happens.

[21:11] It's interesting, you don't hear very much about him to you. I remember, I think I told you this, I was asked to do a series of videos for Bible Mesh, which is a website.

And it's anything I hope you can do well for you. You would put up in this five star hotel and one of my videos was to give a seven minute video on Joseph, the father of Jesus. It's very difficult to find seven minutes with the material.

Commentators say Jesus may well have died quite soon after. Jesus was born, that's why he was still a child. But he doesn't say anything in the New Testament. Joseph is the ultimate strong sign of

time.

He just does what he's told. He just does what he's told. My third point is the price that he picked up. Verse 24 and 25. But Joseph won't from sleep.

He did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. He took his wife. But he knew it not until she had given birth to a son. He called his name Jesus. There's no frills to it, is there?

[22 : 17] Verses 24 and 25. There's no nativity cuteness. There's no Christmas color gloss. There's no warm fuzzies. There's no feel-good filter. So I joined Instagram this year.

And Instagram is full of the last few days of people putting lovely photographs of their family. people on. You can see a beautiful shot of the world crosses on there. Perfect focus.

Fuzzy around the edge. It's lovely. People love to do that Christmas. But there's no filter in Matthew's gospel. This is the real deal.

Matthew's brutally honest with us. And he's brutally honest with you about what it means to be a follower of Jesus. And he's telling you and I in his little verses that it's going to cost me.

It's going to cost me. And you better count the cost. You can imagine what's going to happen next time. There is always a price to pay. Joseph in verses 24 and 24 is surrendering his reputation.

[23 : 24] Joseph will be misunderstood for the rest of his life. He will become the grunt of village gossip. The temples will start wagging. People are going to talk.

People will say well he must be the father otherwise why would go ahead with the wedding? Or perhaps they will say well Jesus isn't the father. It's what the Talmud said.

The Talmud was written after the New Testament and it articulates what was being said around the traps. That Jesus was the illegitimate son of a Roman soldier.

That's the kind of thing people were saying about. You get hints of that. Echoes in the New Testament say John 8 the religious leaders say to Jesus we're not illegitimate. God is our father.

Who is your father Jesus? John 8 1. There's lots of echoes of that in the New Testament. Things that people were saying about Joseph and Mary and baby Jesus and that is hard to live with.

[24 : 24] One Puritan preacher used to say to his congregation what is worse to be felled by a lion or to be stung to death by bees. What do you think?

I'd rather know you don't. But at least if you're felled by a lion it's pretty swift isn't it? Pretty insane.

But to live the whole of your life with the people gossiping behind your back to sacrifice your reputation and that is the reason why maybe some of you are more Christians yet.

You've not yet decided to follow Jesus because your reputation is so precious for you. And you care far too much what people think of you.

And to identify as a Christian in your office or amongst your friends or in your school you're far too embarrassed to come out as a Christian.

I want to say to you to get over it. count the cost. Joseph did as the Lord's angel commanded him.

He believed God's word. He trusted that ancient promise folded away inside the Bible and he received Mary's child as his own Lord and Savior.

[25 : 40] I don't know if he'd done that. He had to change his mind about Jesus. He'd done that. It's all repentance. It's only a change of mind.

I want a change of mind that will transform your life. if you recognize what Jesus is that in this baby in the manger God himself has come to visit us with his salvation.

There's a lovely story of a Persian king as I told you before. of Shah Abbas. Shah Abbas is a walk unrecognized around the city. He died unrecognized by his people.

He used to love to do that. He'd get rid of all the trappings of royalty and the splendid robes of entourage of redeems of servants, just so that he could mix with his subjects. One cold night was going around, and as he went on the city, which is cold, actually went into the city, walls to retreat from the chill. That's where the city's heating system was.

He started a conversation with the city's stoker, who stoked the fire, who was working away in a sweaty, grimy place. And it never occurred to the stoker that this was actually the shah.

[26 : 54] But he just went back and again and again, and they became friends. The stoker used to invite him back to his family home, of simple meals together. And then one day the shah reveals his true identity to the amazement of his friend.

And he said to his friend, look, I will give you anything you want. What do you have said? Here's the shah of Persia, one of the richest men on the planet. I'll give you anything you want.

What do you want? This is what the stoker said. Shah, may you give to others fake and fortune. I don't want that for you. All I ask is that you never take away your greatest gift, which is the friendship that you've given me.

That is the greatest gift of all, isn't it, this Christmas, that God is with us. And God doesn't speak to you this morning through an angel.

I don't think even my mother would say I'm an angel. And God isn't speaking to you through a dream. I hope that for you. But he does speak to you through his word that is more certain than any dream.

[28 : 08] And he promises in his word to be your friend, to never leave you, to never forsake you, and to be with you every moment to the end of time and beyond.

Because that is what Emmanuel means, is that God with us. And when you believe that, when you take God and his word, you trust him with your life, will you accept what Jesus has done for you to put you right with God?

Will you accept the offer of forgiveness that he knows that to you in his name, Jesus Christ? Amen.