

## God with Us

### The Name

Matthew 1:18-23

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*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. *19* And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. *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) (Matthew 1:18–23).

What do you say to someone when they are suffering? What can you do when a friend is walking through a dark valley? These are really important questions. If you live long enough, you will be in a position where this question is not theoretical. A friend you love is devastated. What do you do?

If you've been around College Park for the last two to three years, you know I've tried to help you know what to do. Or maybe better said: what not to do. The worst thing you can do is try to compare your pain with theirs. It would also be very unwise to offer simplistic platitudes that try to solve challenging paradoxes in life: "The Lord must know He can trust you with this" or "Whenever God closes a door, He opens a window" or "Let go, and let God."

These statements only serve to magnify the pain in someone's life because they reinforce the sorrow of feeling like no one understands. Some of you may feel that way today. You are walking around with what feels like a hole in your heart. And the failure of people to empathize only makes it bigger.

Add a bit of Christmas "cheer" to the mix, and the month of December can be really challenging.

So what do we need and what is helpful during seasons of loss or suffering?

I've been doing some additional research on the subject of lament recently. I found this statement by Nicholas Wolterstoff, in his book *Lament for a Son*, really helpful:

If you think your task as comforter is to tell me that really, all things considered, it's not so bad, you do not sit with me in my grief but place yourself off in the distance away from me. Over there, you are of no help. What I need to hear from you is that you recognize how painful it is. I

need to hear from you that you are with me in my desperation. To comfort me, you have to come close. Come sit beside me on my mourning bench.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, you need someone to be “with you.” That’s where real comfort and real help is found. Want to help someone? Be “with” them.

## **God With Us**

Advent season is a time for us to consider and celebrate “God with Us.” We mark the birth of Jesus and the entrance of the Savior into the world. We reflect on the coming of light into darkness.

Here is how one Christmas Carol says it:

*O come, O come, Immanuel,  
and ransom captive Israel  
that mourns in lonely exile here  
until the Son of God appear.*

*O come, O Bright and Morning Star,  
and bring us comfort from afar!  
Dispel the shadows of the night  
and turn our darkness into light.*

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel  
shall come to you, O Israel.*

Advent is a season where we celebrate the comfort and hope of “God With Us,” as we look expectantly toward the future of His return. Advent rejoices in God sitting on the mourning bench with us, and it looks forward to the day when He will rescue us from every cause of morning benches.

Through the month of December, we are going to explore the various connections related to God dwelling among us. We’ll look at a number of texts and stories that may be familiar to you. I hope that you’ll see this season of Advent through a different lens. But even more, I hope that you’ll be comforted and encouraged with the spiritual significance of this season of the year.

The title of today’s message is “The Name.” There are actually three names in this passage. The most important, and the main focus of this message, is the last one. We find *son* (v. 21), *Immanuel* (v. 23), and the name *Jesus* (v. 21). Let’s look at each of them.

## **The Son**

Our text is Matthew 1:18-23, and we find the word/name “son” in verse 21: “. . . and she will bear a son.” This phrase is loaded with meaning. But you need to understand what is said prior.

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1987) Locations 165-167, Kindle Edition.

The book of Matthew seeks to prove that Jesus really was the Messiah. It was written to a Jewish audience in order to show them how Jesus was the fulfillment of what was promised in the Old Testament. That is why the book ends with Jesus saying, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me . . ." (Matthew 28:18). Those are words of power, words of a ruler, the words of a sovereign. They are the words of a king. In fact, the concept of kingdom is mentioned 51 times in the book of Matthew, twice as often as in any other gospel.<sup>2</sup>

The genealogy in verses 1-17 is meant to communicate this. The worship of the wise men in 2:1-12 is designed to validate this message. And the conflict with an earthly king, Herod, in 2:13-18 shows how Jesus is viewed as a threat. Jesus is a king. He's The King.

Matthew quickly introduces Jesus in chapter one. In verses 18-19, we find key the key details, and they are all connected to the word or name "son." The Messiah had a mother named Mary. She was betrothed to a man named Joseph, but it was the Holy Spirit who conceived the child. This is the basis for what is called the Virgin Birth, a critical doctrine of Christianity, which makes Jesus both God and human.

We learn in these verses that Joseph intended to quietly divorce Mary because of her assumed infidelity. But an angel intervenes in a dream:

*<sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> She will bear a son . . . (Matthew 1:20-21)*

Advent is a time when we celebrate the birth of Jesus. The Messiah, the second member of the triune God, became human. Jesus was born. He became Mary's son.

As we look at our text, we need to savor the way in which this account identifies the unbelievable humanity of this story. The humanity of Jesus doesn't seem nearly as scandalous to us as I'm sure it was to the angels. Since human beings are the highest form of life on the planet, there is this subtle tendency to not feel the shock of Jesus' humanity. It is hard for us to fully understand or even appreciate the bigger picture here.

This is the time of year that we celebrate the cosmic scandal of the birth of Jesus. It was scandalous, no doubt, to the angels as God embraced the limitations of humanity.

Imagine the Sovereign Son of God having body odor, pimples, and food in His teeth. Imagine Him burping, passing gas, stubbing his toe, picking his nose, talking with food in His mouth, falling into bed exhausted, or having a woman wink at Him. The humanity of Jesus was a cosmic shock – God became man. Jesus became a son.

This also means that Jesus entered the mess and the brokenness of our world. Besides the fallen nature of the people around Him, Jesus' entire life was marked by the shadow of who people thought

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<sup>2</sup> Herbert Lockyer (ed.), *"The Gospel of Matthew."* Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986.

His father was. In John 8 the Pharisees use this reality against Jesus as they accuse Him of being born in sexual immorality. Jesus lived with whispers, half-truths, and the perception of a messy family background. Some of you know what that's like. And the humanity of Jesus is something you can take great comfort in today. There are a number of reasons why it really matters that Jesus was a son. Let me give you five:

1. **My sympathetic helper.**<sup>3</sup> Jesus knows by personal experience what it is like to be human. He knows the struggles, the pains, the temptations, and the sorrows. Jesus knows what it is like to walk in our world, and He also has the power to do something about it. <sup>18</sup>*For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. Hebrews 2:18 (ESV)*
2. **My sinless representative.** Christ's full obedience, as a man, has the potential to count for those who are not sinless. Jesus had to be man to obey in our place. <sup>19</sup>*For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. Romans 5:19 (ESV)*
3. **My sacrifice.** His humanity means that Jesus can die in our place and can absorb the penalty that is rightfully ours. Jesus' punishment serves as a sufficient appeasement of God's judgment for sin.<sup>4</sup> <sup>17</sup>*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 2:17 (ESV)*
4. **My mediator.** Our alienation from God requires the need of a mediator. Jesus, as a man, is able to mediate for us to God. <sup>5</sup>*For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 1 Timothy 2:5 (ESV)*
5. **My example to follow.** Jesus, as a man, shows us how we are to live. He provides a model before us of what real obedience and righteousness is. Our goal is to live like Jesus. And that would be silly aspiration if He wasn't a man. <sup>21</sup>*For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. 1 Peter 2:21 (ESV)*

When you wonder what God really thinks of you, remember that Jesus absorbed all your judgment. When you start to really think about God and how frightfully different He is from you, remember that it is Jesus who bridges the gap between God and you. When you are frustrated with your imperfections and your failures, remember that it is Jesus who obeyed perfectly for you. When you don't know what you should do—what is right, what is wrong, what God wants—remember that Jesus gave you a pattern to follow. And when you feel alone, abandoned, worn out, and weary, and are wishing someone really understood, remember Jesus became a man so that you would know that He understands.

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<sup>3</sup> For a more complete list, see Wayne Grudem's book *Systematic Theology* (pages 540-543).

<sup>4</sup> This is the basic definition of propitiation.

## Immanuel

The second name is found at the end of the text. Verse 22 takes us back to an Old Testament reference.

*<sup>22</sup>All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:*

*<sup>23</sup>"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). Matthew 1:22–23 (ESV)*

This was part of a prophecy that was given in the Old Testament in the book of Isaiah. It was given to King Ahaz when he failed to believe the word from the Lord that God would deliver his people. The nation of Judah was under potential attack from Syria. Instead of trusting in God, Ahaz takes gold from the temple and tries to secure the protection of Assyria. Isaiah invites Ahaz to ask for a sign from the Lord, but he refuses. Therefore, Isaiah gives him one—about a son being born who will be "God With Us."

The prophecy about a son being born is a rebuke to Ahaz regarding his faithless fear and his self-confident, foolish plans. He cannot solve his own problems. God is the one who will intervene in this national crisis and preserve his people.

The prophecy was only partially fulfilled in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. Matthew points to it as ultimately being fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. The incarnation of Jesus is connected to the coming of God to rescue His people. To make that very clear, Matthew says: "which means God with us."

In Advent we celebrate that God came near. Ahaz missed the opportunity to trust God for his salvation and deliverance. This moment in history, God is coming to His people. Jesus not only became a human, but He was God – fully God.

Now you need to know that throughout the Bible the concept of God dwelling with His people is a frequent and a very important theme. We see it in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:8), in the Exodus (Exodus 14:19), at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 24:17), in the set-up of the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34), and in the temple (1 Kings 8:10-11). And it is ultimately in the beauty of heaven that God dwells among His people forever:

<sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. (Revelation 21:3)

The apostle John even starts his gospel account by saying, "The Word [Jesus] became flesh and dwelt among us . . ." (John 1:14). Jesus was "God with us," and by His life and death He made it possible for God to be with us forever.

Why does it matter that Jesus is God with us?

It matters because it was God who initiated our rescue. God so loved the world that He **gave** His only son . . . (John 3:16). Mankind was in a hopeless position. I'll explain why in the next point. But here we need to take note of the graciousness of God. He comes to our rescue.

This also means that God **enters** the mess of our humanity. It is not only remarkable that Jesus becomes a human being, but that God-in-flesh deals with the challenges of humanity. In the manger is the Son of God. And hanging on the cross, as He bears the weight of sin, is God.

It is hard to overestimate the importance of Jesus' deity in our lives. He is not only a human who understands. He is the Son of God who is more powerful than anything you and I can imagine. He's the Sovereign King of the Universe, the Creator, and a Mighty Warrior. He is powerful, perfect, and pleasing. There is nothing too difficult for Him to do. Nothing surprises Him, nothing hinders Him, and nothing can stop Him. The demons tremble at His name, the devil is no match for Him, and death is nothing to Him. He is God!

For some of you, that is a really important thought, because you need to be reminded that God is able to deliver you. You may be coming into the holiday season with all kinds of burdens and struggles. You may be battling anxiety, depression, and loneliness. And here is a statement about God being with us. You may feel like no one is willing to sit with you on your "mourning bench." But the entrance of the Son of God into the world is meant to send a clear message about God's willingness to rescue people.

Advent is the time where we remember what it means for God to be with us.

## **Jesus**

Let's now go back to verse 21. I wanted to leave this verse for the end because it is the main point of the sermon. For that matter, this name is the main point of this season of Advent and Christmas.

<sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21)

The name Jesus means "Jehovah (God) saves." God is in the business of saving people; it is the joy of His heart! But there is a huge problem standing in the way. Greater than the threat of anything else is the problem of our sin.

The Bible tells us some important and sobering truths about our sinfulness:

<sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)

<sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death . . . (Romans 6:23)

Man's most basic problem is his separation from God, and it is only, *only* through Jesus that we can be forgiven, cleansed, and brought to the heart of God.

But there is only one way that God does His saving work, because there is only one God-man. There is no other way for us to be right with God, because there is no one like Jesus.

The Bible proclaims this truth loudly and clearly:

<sup>12</sup>And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

So, as we approach the celebration of the birth of the One who we call Jesus, can I plead with you to carefully consider the fact that Jesus is the only one who is able to save us from our sins? Our need is so great, the consequences are so overwhelming, and our power is so limited that God is our only hope. The story of salvation is God helping us.

Here we learn about the mission of God behind this miraculous birth! This child will be the long-awaited Messiah, the chosen one, the anointed one, the Christ. God will use this baby to save His people from the transgressions that separate them from God.

God is going to save His people once again. But this time He will not save them just from the looming power of an evil empire or the conquest of a foreign power. This time God's mission is to save His people from the real foe in life. Underneath all conflict, beneath all wars, at the core of all crimes and injustices, and the cause of all death is the ultimate enemy: sin. It destroys, separates, tarnishes, kills, and damns. But the son named Jesus will change all of that. His name means "Jehovah saves." And His birth announces that God's mission of deliverance has come to earth.

He is called a son. He is called Immanuel. He is called Jesus. Why not turn from running your own life and make Him your King? This is the heart of this season and the difference between heaven and hell.

If you don't know Him personally, invite Him today to be your King. Let Him conquer your sin. Let Him bring you back to God.

Son, Immanuel, and Jesus are all names that send a glorious message. God is making a way to deal with the most pressing threat on our lives. The birth of this child announces the glorious news that God is **with** us! And this clear message, through these names, is that real hope comes from God's help.

Real hope comes from God's help. Because God with Us—Immanuel—became a Son whose name was Jesus, and He is the only one who can save people from their sins.

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