

**The Story of Christmas
Through the Eyes of Matthew
Matthew 1:18-25**

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Introduction: This morning, we begin thinking in earnest about Christmas. To complete our year-long emphasis on the word “Story” I am prepared to preach The Story of Christmas as given in each of the four Gospels over the next four Sundays. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all give us a little bit different version. This is not contradictory, understand, but complementary. Some like Luke, give us a lot of detail; others, like Mark, do not give us much. Today, we start with Matthew.

Text: ¹⁸The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way: After His mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, it was discovered before they came together that she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹So her husband Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly.

²⁰But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is by the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will give birth to a son, and you are to name Him Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.”

²²Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

²³See, the virgin will become pregnant
and give birth to a son,
and they will name Him Immanuel,

which is translated “God is with us.”

²⁴When Joseph got up from sleeping, he did as the Lord’s angel had commanded him. He married her ²⁵but did not know her intimately until she gave birth to a son. And he named Him Jesus.

If we are not careful, we will look at the traditional nativity scene and see only a baby. But in that manger, is truth—the kind of truth that has the power to change lives. This Christmas, I want once again to get you to look deep into the manger and see the truth. As we look at the Christmas story through the eyes of Matthew, we learn that...

1. God cares for people. (1:21)

Philippians 2:6-7 “ . . . who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” (New American Standard Bible)

We must understand that this mission to save people from their sins is the whole purpose of Jesus' coming. Throughout the New Testament, over and over again this is the expressed reason of His coming. In addition to these two Scriptures there is

- John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.
- To Zacchaeus in Luke 19:9-10 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; ¹⁰ for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."
- To the disciples in Mark 10:45, Jesus said, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."
- And from the lips of Paul in 1 Timothy 1:15, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."

As we look at the manger, we see not a baby, but we see the one who cared for us so much that He came to save us from our sins. Even His name, Jesus, means "Yahweh (God) saves!"

(Illustration): Author and pastor Leith Anderson writes: Several years ago I was visiting Manila and was taken, of all places, to the Manila garbage dump and saw something beyond belief. Tens of thousands of people make their homes on that dump site. They've constructed shacks out of the things other people have thrown away. And they send their children out early every morning to scavenge for food out of other people's garbage, so they can have family meals. People have been born and grown up there on the garbage dump. They have had their families, their children, their shacks, their garbage to eat, finished out their lives, and died there without ever going anywhere else, even in the city of Manila. It is an astonishing thing.

But Americans also live on the garbage dump. They are missionaries, Christians who have chosen to leave their own country and communicate the love of Jesus Christ to people who otherwise would never hear it. That is amazing to me. People would leave what we have to go and live on a garbage dump. Amazing, but not as amazing as the journey from heaven to earth.

Indeed, that is the journey that Jesus made. Why? Because He cares for us and wanted to redeem us from our sins.

2. God keeps His promises. (1:22)

There is a second truth that we see in this manger. We see this truth in verse 22. We see that God is the God who always keeps His promises. A Messiah was promised in the Old Testament. From Malachi to Jesus, four hundred years had passed. Many a generation had come and gone without seeing the prophecy realized. Maybe some had come to believe that Messiah would not come. But He did. As Paul said in Galatians 4:4, "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman." At the right, Jesus came.

Sometimes it might not look like God is a keeper of His Word, but when I look at the manger, I am reminded that God always keeps His promises.

You say well that's just one story. No, it's the ongoing story. To Noah, "I will never flood the earth again." To Abraham, "I'll make you the father of many nations. To Moses, "I AM will be with you."

To Mary and Joseph, To Zacharias and Elizabeth... Then perhaps best of all Jesus prophesying His own death. But better than that, His prophesy of resurrection in three days. See, it's a pattern. And He has promised his return.

What has He promised to you personally?

1. His Presence
2. His Power
3. To answer our prayer
4. Salvation
5. Heaven
6. Return
7. The list is infinite.

And He will keep them all.

3. God is a constant presence with me. (1:23)

The third thing that we see as we look in the manger is that Jesus is the one who has come as "God with us." This presence continues with us through the third person of the Trinity—the Holy Spirit. As you know perhaps already, that word literally means "the one called to walk alongside of us." If indeed God is a constant presence with us than we should acknowledge at least three spiritual truths.

- God desires a Personal relationship with us.
- God declares His Power in our lives.
- God demands a Position of Authority in our lives.

4. God calls each of us personally. (1:24)

The final truth that we see in the manger is that God calls each of us personally. Joseph did as the Lord commanded him. He took Mary as his wife, he kept her a virgin until she had given birth, and he named that son Jesus. Later when an angel told him to take the family to Egypt, Joseph responded in obedience. The Christmas story is more than just a scene of a front lawn, it is a story of God calling each of us personally just as He called Joseph. Joseph responded without hesitation, without question, without revision, and with devotion. Do you need to respond personally to God today?

Author Max Lucado compares Joseph's dilemma of obedience to sitting in a tree. He writes: "Joseph was perched firmly on his branch in the tree. It was thick, reliable, and perfect for sitting....That is, until he was told to go out on a limb. As he sat securely on his branch, he looked up at the limb God wanted him to climb. He'd never seen one so thin!....But God had told him to do it!"

Is God telling you to go out on a limb? Learn from Joseph. You may have some hard decisions and hard days, but it will be worth it.

As Lucado concludes, “You can bet it won’t be easy. Limb-climbing has never been easy. Ask Joseph. Or, better yet, ask Jesus. He knows better than anyone the cost of hanging on a tree.”¹

¹ Max Lucado, *God Came Near*, pp. 39-42.