

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Matthew tells us in the Gospel that *“the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way,”* but he’s not really so interested in Jesus’ actual birth. At the end of this narrative, we hear how Joseph *“received Mary his wife,” “but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.”* There it is; that’s Matthew’s interest. It’s not so much Jesus’ birth, but His conception that is in view today. You want to hear about Jesus’ birth, come to Zion on Christmas Eve. Then you’ll hear all about Mary and Joseph’s travels to Bethlehem, and the crowded conditions, about Jesus being laid in a manger, the appearance of angels, and the visit of the shepherds. But before a birth there must be a conception and a pregnancy—and that’s what we have in view in our text today.

The account begins by introducing us to Mary and Joseph, although we had just heard a couple verses earlier about *“Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.”*

So Joseph is the husband of Mary, or as we have it a couple verses later: Jesus’ *“mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph.”* This is more than our modern engagements that can be called off with no legal entanglements. Mary and Joseph were actually married, although the marriage had not yet been consummated, and to break it off would have required Joseph to issue a certificate of divorce.

It’s in this interim time that Joseph had found out that Mary was with child. And he knew the baby wasn’t his—Mary and Joseph had not yet come together, our text says. You see, Joseph knew how all this worked. Oh, he may not have known all of the biological mechanisms that make it work, but he knew it took a man coming together with a woman to make a pregnancy; so if Mary is pregnant, it must be some other man’s baby. Joseph didn’t have the benefit of a gospel writer, you see, telling him that the child was by the Holy Spirit.

You can almost hear the hurt in Joseph. His wife had been unfaithful to him—so he thought. Therefore, we hear how Joseph purposed to divorce Mary. Still, Joseph was a just man—he wasn’t out for revenge. He’d just do it quietly.

But, of course, we know that’s not what happened. For although Joseph was a righteous man according to the law and had every right to divorce an unfaithful Mary, he was especially a righteous man according to the faith given him by God.

*“Joseph, son of David”* ... an angel spoke to him in a dream. That address surely perked up his ears. Again, Joseph didn’t have the benefit of just reading Jesus’ genealogy, as Matthew’s readers would have had. The angel called him *“son of David,”* a Messianic term. Therefore, He listened closely to God’s word

spoken by the angel: “*don’t be afraid to receive Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.*”

By listening to the angel, righteous Joseph learned and believed that, in fact, Mary had not been unfaithful at all, that the baby that she was carrying was not conceived by another man, that that which was conceived in her womb was of God, of the Holy Spirit. Believing Joseph learned and believed that the Son to be born through her would be the world’s Savior from sin, and His name should reflect this—you will call His name Jesus (it means, “the Lord saves). You will call His name Jesus because He will save His people from their sins. Yes, Joseph was a righteous man—He learned and believed that not his son but the son of Mary was the long-promised, the long-awaited Immanuel—God with us. And from Mary, he came to understand that this son was the “*Son of the Most High*” given “*the throne of His father David*” to reign as Christ “*over the house of Jacob forever*” (Luke 1:32-33).

Yes, God in His own Son effected a presence that would truly save mankind. That’s what God did in the womb of this virgin. In the fullness of time, God sent His own Son, and by the power of the Holy Spirit hovering over this maid, caused God Himself to be conceived in her womb, and God Himself to be born of her and to receive flesh by her. You see, God came down from heaven to be with us in a very specific way. He didn’t come down from heaven and simply appear to be human. He didn’t come down from heaven and adopt some human body, conceived in the natural way, to inhabit. No, God came down from heaven in the person of the Son to become one with us, to take on our frail human nature, while at the same time remaining God in His fullness.

For God knew that that was what it was going to take to undo the corruption of our sin. The Son of God was going to have to be made man so that He Himself could save mankind. God Himself had to become man so that mankind’s sin could be punished. God Himself had to become man so that in Him mankind could become righteous. God Himself had to become man so that God could remain both just and the one who justifies mankind in this God-man. You are forgiven and you are saved and you have life because you have faith in the man conceived miraculously in the womb of Mary by the Holy Spirit, because you have faith in the God-with-us man, Jesus Christ, Immanuel.

What a wondrous mystery this is, this incarnation, that God could take on our flesh in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ! What wondrous grace this is that by His incarnation, by His agony and death, by His glorious resurrection, our fallen flesh has been restored—that we, who once were separated from God by our sin, by the work of Immanuel, God with us, now have paradise opened back up to us. And we will walk with God again.

But it's even better than that, for we don't have to wait for some unknown time in the future! By the wonders of Christ's ongoing mysteries for His church, He comes to us now and is with us now—He says, *"I will never leave you or forsake you"* (Heb. 13:5). And again, *"Lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age"* (Matt. 28:20). By the mysteries of God, He is with us, and we are with Him. Indeed, we Christians are in Him, the Holy Spirit incorporating us into Him, into His body, by the waters of Holy Baptism (1 Cor. 12:13). In this holy Sacrament, we die with God and are raised again to life in Him (Rom. 6:3-5). As St. Paul says, *"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me"* (Gal. 2:20). So that not only are we with God but God is still with us in Christ, the Immanuel. He is with us as we gather, two and three, in His name to hear His word. And He is with us especially as He comes to us in the Holy Sacrament of His Body and Blood today, saving us still, forgiving our sins.

So, rejoice! God has not left you alone. Behold a virgin conceived your Savior in her womb, Jesus, Immanuel, God with us. He came to bear your sins; He comes still to forgive them. He Himself came to be your Savior, and He will come again in glory to take you be with Himself in heaven.

Therefore, rejoice, O Church, for Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.