



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

The Scandal that Saves

December 8, 2019

Matthew 1:18-25

Clint Pressley

¹⁸Now 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. ¹⁹And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰But 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. ²¹She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²²All 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). ²⁴When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

(Pastor prays)

Every religion that ever existed seeks one thing and one thing only: God with us. Adam and Eve had that in the Garden but lost it because of sin. And ever since the first man and woman sinned, we have ached for that truth, that feeling: God with us. How much better would life be if God were with us? Emmanuel. How much better if I weren't sinful and you weren't sinful, and the world weren't fallen, and people didn't kill, and cancer didn't exist and hate didn't cover us? But it does. It exists because sin exists. So, we groan in the darkness of empty promises and shattered families, wishing that God were with us. And as we stagger and stumble through life, we come upon this story of God with us in Matthew that isn't like the more popular story in Luke. The story in Luke is grand and sweeping. Mary sings the

Magnificent, shepherds watch their flocks by night and angels burst forth with “Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth.” But in Matthew’s account, there’s no peace, only scandal and hesitation and pain. You see Luke gives us Mary, but Matthew has us looking back at Joseph to feel his pain and see his hesitation and to think about the scandal of Jesus. Let’s read through it again slower.

¹⁸Now 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. ¹⁹And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰But 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. ²¹She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²²All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

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Jesus was a scandal then and He is a scandal now. The infant would become a man, live perfectly and then die on the cross only to be brought back from the dead, and the scandal of His birth is a foreshadowing of the scandal of His death and resurrection. Remember what Paul would say about that, about the cross: “The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.”

And that’s what I have come to talk to you about today, the power of God found in Jesus.

Today we celebrate Jesus, the God-man who takes away the darkness that plagues us and the sin that separates us. Today we celebrate Jesus, whose very name means “God Saves.” Jesus Christ. Although born in a common way in a nowhere town to a young non-descript couple, He stands completely alone in who He is and what He can do. And I’d like to use this passage to point out the glory of the unique son of God, Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is God with Us.

Jesus comes to us like no other

Let me show you what I mean. Take a look at two verses, verses 18 and 20. 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.* 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.*

This event is utterly and completely unique among all mankind. There has never been another child to enter the world like this one. There are other remarkable births in the Bible. John the Baptist was filled with the Spirit in his mother’s womb and Isaac was set aside before he was born to an aging Abraham and geriatric Sara. But there has never been a child conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of a virgin. Just the phrase “virgin mother” is a shocking word pair. It’s a natural impossibility but a supernatural reality.

Let’s slow down here and say that this doctrine, the incarnation, it’s foundational to the Christian faith. If Jesus were not born of a virgin, He’s like every other man. And if He is like every other man, He can’t save us and there is no Gospel. In addition, part of the purpose of the virgin birth is to remind us that salvation doesn’t come from man, but from God. And when you read the Gospel of Matthew, you see Jesus do all manner of miracles to let us know God is with us. Emmanuel. He is with the sick to heal, with the demon-possessed to liberate, with the poor in spirit to bless them, with the anxious to calm them. He is with the rich to call them, with the wayward to warn them, and with the lepers to cleanse them and with the diseased to cure them. He is with the hungry to feed them and with the lost to seek them. He comes to be with sinners to save them. His birth points us to His death on the cross for sinners. He comes like no other.

Jesus saves like no other

Jesus doesn’t save by giving us rules to follow or a life to emulate. It’s not leading by example. From the beginning of Matthew in Chapter 1:1, we are told His name is Jesus Christ. In verse 18, Jesus Christ. He is all man, Jesus, and all God, Christ. He was born of a woman, fully human. And conceived by the Holy Spirit, fully God. Verse 21 says He is the only one who can save His people from their sins.

Let's think about those two things—fully human and fully God— and why this had to be. To truly be our substitution and genuinely save us, He had to be fully human. The first Adam took us into sin, the last Adam saves us from our sin. And as “fully man” He possesses the full range of human characteristics.

He is like us physically. Matthew 8 tells of when He is tired and needs sleep. In Matthew 4 He got hungry. On the cross He felt pain. He had to be human to identify with us.

He was fully human mentally. Luke 2 says He increased in wisdom and He made plans.

He was like us emotionally. He got angry at the temple and wept at Lazarus' grave. He was burdened in Gethsemane and He loved the rich young ruler.

He was like us outwardly. Matthew 13 tells about when He was in His hometown teaching in the synagogue and people were like, “Who does he think he is? His father is the carpenter, he has no beauty or majesty. There is nothing in his appearance that we would desire him.”

He is like us socially. In John 8, Jesus debates the Jewish leaders. They hinted that He was an illegitimate child. Whatever bad reputation you think you have, He carried it. Jesus became fully human to fully identify with us as our representative. And when you believe in Jesus as your substitute, you are believing in His perfect life lived for you and atoning death to pay for your sin.

He was not only fully human; He was fully God. That means He has authority. If you were going to just read Matthew, you would find:

He has the authority over disease. He healed those with leprosy, gave sight to the blind and made the lame to walk. All the miracles were there to point to His authority.

He has authority over the natural world. He rebukes the storm in Matthew 8 and pulls a gold coin from a fish's mouth. When He was on the cross, there was darkness and earthquakes and the dead got up and walked.

Jesus has the authority to forgive sin. In Matthew 9, before Jesus healed the paraplegic, He first forgave his sin. Only God can do that.

He has the authority over death. In Matthew 9 He touched the hand of the little dead girl and she got up. In John 11, He was standing in front of Lazarus's tomb and called him out to show us. And on the cross, He laid down his life. John 10:18 says, ¹⁸*No one takes it from me, but I lay*

it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.” Death is our last enemy, but it is defeated by the God-man at the cross.

And all of this is the complete and infallible plan of God. Isn't that what verses 22-23 tell us? All of this took place to fulfill the plan conceived in the mind of God, written down hundreds of years before and carried out as the ultimate display of God's love for His people. And in a world that is plagued with Godlessness and pain and discouragement, we have been given real hope. That is Jesus, God is with us. Here is the Gospel. If the cross of Christ is the cornerstone of the Gospel, then the birth of Christ is the keystone. God is the Holy creator. He created man in His image, but that image was disfigured by sin. Christ, the God-man, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, lived perfectly as our representative and died as a substitution for sinners. But He was raised from the dead and stands today as the only way that God will be with us. Emmanuel. Be with us. Jesus Christ is God with us.

(Pastor prays)