

## December 24, 2013 – Christmas Eve Service “Be Amazed”

Matthew 1:18-25

**18** This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. **19** Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.

**20** As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. **21** And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

**22** All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet:

**23** "Look! The virgin will conceive a child!

She will give birth to a son,  
and they will call him Immanuel,  
which means 'God is with us.'"

**24** When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. **25** But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.

I love this story: A grade school class was putting on a Christmas play which included the story of Mary and Joseph coming to the inn. In that class was one little boy who wanted very much to be Joseph. But when the parts were handed out, his biggest rival was given that part, and he was assigned to be the inn keeper instead. He was really bitter about this.

So during all the rehearsals he kept plotting in his mind what he might do the night of performance to get even with his rival who was Joseph. Finally, the night of the performance, Mary and Joseph came walking across the stage. They knocked on the door of the inn, and the inn-keeper opened the door and asked them gruffly what they wanted.

Joseph answered, "We'd like to have a room for the night." Suddenly the inn-keeper threw the door open wide and said, "Great, come on in and I'll give you the best room in the house."

For a few seconds poor little Joseph didn't know what to do, and a long silence ensued. Finally though, thinking quickly on his feet, Joseph looked in past the inn-keeper, first to the left and then to the right and said, "No wife of mine is going to stay in a dump like this. Come on, Mary, let's go to the barn." And once again the play was back on course.

When you set up your nativity set for the Christmas season, one of the figures that is often not noticed, or is put off to one side, is Joseph.

Joseph is not featured in many Christmas songs either. But I believe that Joseph, in many ways, is the unsung hero of the Christmas story. Just as surely as God chose Mary to be the mother of the Messiah, He also chose Joseph. God the Father in heaven chose Joseph to be a stepfather, or father figure on earth, for Jesus! Tonight we are going to look at something amazing that happened to an ordinary guy named Joseph.

## **Introduction**

Have you ever been amazed? This would be something so fantastic that you couldn't even believe that it was real. The dictionary defines the word "amazing" as: causing amazement, great wonder, or surprise. We might use the word amazing to describe anything from a good meal to some of the new technology of today. We stand back and say, "That was amazing."

### **1. God is the God of *amazing*.**

- Verse 18: Mary was pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Talk about amazing! But it had to happen this way. For this would point to Jesus being both fully human and fully divine—the incarnation. The Son of God coming to earth to walk among human beings He created.
- Verse 19: Joseph discovers his fiancée, Mary, is pregnant and knows that he is not the father. According to Jewish law, he had the right to break the engagement. He wanted to mix justice with mercy so he makes the decision to quietly end their engagement to save Mary from public disgrace. He did not seem to be buying the whole "supernatural conception" idea. At least he was struggling with it, pondering a life without his dear Mary. He may have been doing the right thing according to custom, but God had other plans.
- Verses 20-21: The Angel of the Lord came to him too. The angel tells Joseph not to be afraid. God is doing something amazing through Mary. She will have a child who will save people from their sins.
- Verses 22-23: They will call Him Immanuel—God with us. He came to bring God's presence to humanity. He would show us what the Father is like, die for our sins, be raised from the dead, and ascend to heaven to sit at the right hand of the God the Father.
- Verses 24-25: Joseph, in faith, did as the angel commanded. Despite what society might think and do, he took Mary as his wife. As amazing as a virgin being pregnant through the Holy Spirit was, Joseph trusted God and obeyed. Joseph could have walked away if he wanted. But to his credit, he stood by Mary and Jesus and, despite the shame, loved that Boy.

- This is what makes a real Christmas, to do what Joseph did. In a very real sense, it was the theology of Joseph which made possible the first Christmas. If Joseph had not cooperated with God's action in human history, the birth of Jesus would have been quite different. The witness of Joseph calls us to cooperate with God's work in today's world. It calls us to respond to God's action among us. Joseph teaches to trust God and obey even when what you face seems amazing, even impossible.
- He came to bring God's presence to humanity. This is the meaning of Christmas – God is with us. It is what Christmas is about. God is with us. The great people of faith have always claimed that promise.

Just think of it:

-- Moses caught between the Pharaoh and the deep Red Sea in a seemingly hopeless situation believed that God was with him and he went forward and trusted God to open a way and He did!

-- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego went into the fiery furnace into a seemingly hopeless situation and they trusted God to be with them and He was!

-- Little David stood before Goliath. What chance could a small boy with a slingshot have against this giant of a warrior? But David believed that God was with him and it made all the difference!

Matthew doesn't want Joseph or any of us to get stuck in the dream. Matthew wants to bring us back down to earth, back to our waking reality, by invoking the name of Immanuel. Because if the Jesus, whose name was given to Joseph in a dream, is to do us any good, he'd better meet us and be with us in all those times when dreams end and when the crushing weight of a miserable world comes crashing down around our shoulders again. If He is Immanuel, then we realize He is with us wherever we are, whatever our situation is. He is God with us, the God of the impossible, He makes the impossible possible. Some of us need that tonight; a miracle from God to make the seemingly impossible possible

## **2. We are to announce the *amazing* news that Christ has come and He will come again.**

- The angel came to Joseph and announced the coming of the Savior. Through His death and resurrection, He made it possible for a restored relationship with God. Don't ever stop being shocked with wonder and amazed by the power of this story. God became flesh.
- His first coming was to provide salvation for those who place their faith and trust in Christ. John 10:10 says, *"I have come that they [you] might have life, and have it to the full."*

- In Jesus' second coming, He will return to earth as a fulfillment of His promise: "*At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory*" (Matthew 24:30).

- The amazing news is that Jesus came to earth the first time to bring salvation. He will return again to live eternally with those who place their faith and trust in Him.

**3. We must reach out to others so that all may know the *amazing* reality that our God is Immanuel (God with us).**

- He is in us, so others will only see Jesus as you open your heart to them.
- We must be the hands and feet of Christ in our world.
- Through the power of the Spirit, we must serve others. By following the example of Christ, we show others the reality that God is with us.
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that we are to be "the living incarnation of Christ on earth." That is, Christ's representatives on earth.

**Conclusion**

Jesus came to earth 2,000 years ago and someday will come again. As Christ-followers we are to proclaim the *amazing* truth that Christ came to earth to be the Savior and will come again to reign as King.