

19.12.22

Matthew 1:18-25

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel',

which means, 'God is with us.' When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

SERMON

Ach, I'm old now and it's been years since that night long ago, but what a night. It changed my life - changed my life! No, it made me a new person. I was re-born that night. Before then I was just Joe, the carpenter, living a quiet life here in Bethlehem. I went to the temple, said my prayers every day. I did what I was told. I tried to live a life pleasing to God. But that night, I was named earthly father of Emmanuel - God with us. That was my beginning - Joseph, The father of Emmanuel.

Let me tell you about that time...

I had met Mary the year before. The match was made and a date set for our wedding. She, too, was a good girl, upright in faith. Rarely did she leave her father's house, and if she did she covered her head and was with

family. I liked what I saw, when I got glimpses of her - those dark eyes would meet mine, and I saw something in them - a depth of character that I knew I could trust. Yes, a good wife she would make, and a good mother for the sons I hoped to have.

But then the whispering started - could it be, Mary was with child? How? Why? Was I not a worthy enough man to wait for? I upheld the law, I had not laid with her. What was I to do? That writer, Matthew, that tells my story - bhah...he makes it sound so easy. What are his words? (PICK UP SCROLL) Let's see: *Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly.* Ach, that choice to turn her away, that was the first - the first of many hard choices I would make as the new Joseph who was born that night. How could I marry her if she was pregnant with another's child? I had no choice. But I would do it quietly, spare her life, for she could be stoned for that, and no matter what, she didn't deserve that. But I had been awake for nights agonizing over that decision. Pacing the floor, praying to God, looking for another way out. And I was heartbroken, too - Mary's eyes spoke of a marriage made in heaven. I wanted her as my betrothed! All my dreams were dashed...

And then, when I had finally resolved to divorce her, when I had finally drifted off into sleep, Lord knows, I had work to do in the morning - exhausted, then...well, the LORD works in mysterious ways...how can I even put into words what happened next?

That writer of yours, Matthew, again he makes it sound - what would you say 'hum-drum'? Ach, he wasn't there, he's only trying to help you understand what happened to me that night. Like I said, I'd fallen asleep, when I saw something, like a person, but full of light - a brilliance like 7 suns! This being spoke, I heard it, heard it, I tell you! Was I dreaming? It was so much more real than a dream. That night, and all the other nights that the being of Light came and spoke to me in my sleep - the message it brought was clear - and given with such authority. And each time it came and spoke to me, I was told to do something unexpected. How could I refuse? When the angel of the Lord speaks, you listen.

But the first time I saw it - this being of light, I was terrified - afraid? No, terrified! This was no dream, I was in the presence of a messenger of God. Do not be afraid to do what I tell you, he said - do not be terrified is what Matthew should have written for you!

But first, first he called my Joseph, son of David. Now most folks around here call me Joseph bar Jacob - that's my father's name. I'm Jacob's son. This messenger of God called me Joseph, son of David. He knew just how to get to my heart. Yes, I am a son of David. I can trace my lineage all the way back, 28 generations - just take a look at what Matthew wrote about my family tree. I am part of the line of David, royal David, the great king.

But I get side tracked. That messenger, he had me now - I, Joseph, son of David, was being asked to do something, to serve the LORD. Those words

from that messenger of Light - they changed my life... they changed your life too.

Let me read to you what is written: (ON SCROLL)

The angel said: Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel',
which means, 'God is with us.'

That angel, the messenger of Light, as I think of it - that angel said - 'don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife'. What? All those plans, those sleepless nights agonizing over my decision to divorce her - I shouldn't do it? I should marry her instead? This babe that grows inside her womb, it's not from an act of unfaithfulness, of betrayal? But from the Holy Spirit? This angel tells me Mary is to have a son, a son begotten not by me, but by the Spirit of God. Let me tell you, that's more than I could swallow in one hearing.

The angel seemed to be saying that I would be the father, the earthly father, for this child, for I was to name him. That's the job of the father, to

name his child. I was to name him Yeshua. Yeshua - the one who will deliver his people. I, a common Joe, was to take Mary as my wife and take this child as my own, naming his Yeshua, the one who will save his people from their sins.

And then it began to make sense to me. The angel reminded me of that scripture we had read in synagogue, over and over through the years - the one in Isaiah that says:

‘Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel’,
which means, ‘God is with us.’

I could have laughed out loud! Did Isaiah say those words, prophesy those words hundreds of years ago, so that I, Joseph, would know? Were those words said for me, so that I would know that all of this was true, that I was somehow part of God’s plan? I’ve always said, the LORD works in mysterious ways.

Isaiah said that someday, someday, a savior would come, named Emmanuel - God is with us.

Like I said, that was when I was born again. We should celebrate that day as my birth day. I, I, was to be the father of the One to come, Emmanuel. Life has never been the same since that night. Sometimes I wonder what

would have happened if I hadn't listened to that angel. But I had to - there was a choice, yes, but that angel changed me.

How about you - do you have choices, hard choices, of what to do or what to believe, or how to act? Do you sometimes wonder if God is speaking to you? Maybe you don't have an angel appear at night, but maybe you feel a stirring in your heart, maybe there's an uneasiness that won't go away, maybe someone says something that makes you pay attention in a new way...Like I said, the LORD works in mysterious ways. And when you hear that voice - or you sense the presence of a holy being, I want you to listen. It's made all the difference. My choice made a difference for me and for you.

You see, Isaiah said 'they shall name him Emmanuel, which means 'God is with us'.'" Emmanuel, God with us. Emmanuel doesn't mean God is with me, no it means God is with us. This work of the LORD, our Holy God, is not just about me, or about you. It's about us. The LORD sent my Yeshua to save *us* - all of us, from our sins. For you, my friend, are a sinner just like the rest of us. We're in this together.

Somehow God knows - God knows what's best for us. I've learned that over the years, oh I've learned that the hard way. God knows - that thinking we can do it alone is dangerous. We need to be a part of the us, not only for our own good, but because '*us*' means we're to be a part of a community - we need it and it's our responsibility to others.

You see, "God with us" is both promise and responsibility. "God with us" means we're never alone. Never. We are never apart from God and we're never apart from each other.

The LORD is a mysterious one. You live in a dark time - just like way back when, and honestly, throughout most of history. And I got a secret for you - the darkness isn't going away. But that doesn't mean you're alone. No, even in the darkness - the darkness that you make and the darkness, the evil, that is out in the world, I want you to remember...are you listening? Listen closely to me, this whole Christmas business - it's all because God gave us Jesus, Yeshua - Emmanuel. Yeshua was, IS, God's flesh and blood. Jesus came to save us from the darkness that is in us and around us.

You need each other in the darkness. That's why you gather - here in these pews, in each others homes, maybe even listening to that uncle who grumbles on and on, or checking in on that neighbor who has nothing good to say about anyone. Together we sing, together we light candles, together we shower others with gifts, together we celebrate. We celebrate, that Light has overcome the darkness.

Emmanuel - God with us. Us. It's our promise and our responsibility. I was made new that night, that night I chose to welcome Yeshua into my life.

How about you?