

“Jesus The Emmanuel”

Matthew 1:18-25

ADVENT 4

December 23, 2018

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Today is the Fourth Sunday of Advent
the last Sunday is this season of preparation
for celebrating the first advent or coming of Jesus
in the form of the babe of Bethlehem
and for anticipating the second advent or coming
of Jesus in glory and in judgement.

For those in our secular culture who celebrate
the holiday and not the holy day of Christmas
today is the penultimate shopping day.

As for many congregations and faithful worshipers
like ourselves, today can be effectively regarded
as “Christmas Sunday”.

While the church’s liturgical purists lemoan
this reality replete with the premature reading of
Matthew’s telling of the book of the Messiah
and the singing of Christmas Carols such as
“Joy to the World”, our too soon celebration
has much to commend it.

In my decades of experience as your pastor,
I can make the anecdotal observation that
the worshipping community that gathers on
this Fourth Sunday of Advent is composed
mostly of our faithful weekly attenders.
Whereas on Christmas Eve our worshipping
community swells in numbers because of
the many more visitors and infrequently
attending members show up while a lot of
our regulars are themselves visiting elsewhere.

This does pose a major problem because our
support ministry teams of greeters, ushers,
and sound technicians are short-staffed

Fortunately, this year we have enough people

to staff these needed ministries.
Think of the impression our Christmas Eve services
make on our worshipping guests who are left
to fend for themselves-
there is no one to greet them
and guide them to a seat,
no one to provide them with a bulletin
or to give them inside information such as
the location of restrooms or quiet spots for children.
No wonder many visitors fail to return
to worship with us after Christmas.

I hope that I have not bruised the feelings of
those who have volunteered for Christmas Eve
support ministries and those who plan
to worship at our wonderful and joyful
services thanks to Scott Breiner's amazing
musical leadership in our warmly lit
and beautifully decorated sanctuary tomorrow evening.

Believe me, your presence and support
is deeply appreciated.

I can't think of a better place to be on Christmas Eve.
However, my realistic two-day look ahead
is not intended to blow off some pent-up
pastoral frustration but to serve all of us
as a reminder on this so-called "Christmas
Sunday" that today's reading of Matthew's
birth of the Messiah-like the genealogy
that comes before it and the rest of the
entire gospel that follows it- is intended
to help us better to see where Jesus comes from
and what he has been born to do.

Matthew's brief birth story actually is a
continuation of last week's reading-
the genealogy or genesis of Jesus
which shows us how Jesus gets included
in Joseph's "son of David" lineage.
The title verse of Matthew's Gospel and

first verse of the following genealogy (1:2-17), explicitly states that Jesus is both the “Son of David” and the “son of Abraham”
Matthew leaves the “son of Abraham” title and its Gentile connections and connotations until the arrival of the magic in chapter two and concentrates just on Jesus as “son of David”
In so doing, Matthew sets the stage for Jesus preparation and embarkation of his early ministry around the region of Galilee
The title “son of David” will be ascribed to Jesus by outsiders when they come to recognize him as a possible Messiah because of the miraculous healings he has performed, but the term is never used by Jesus himself or his close disciples.

By the time the gospels were written in the last third of the first century, it was well established by the followers of Jesus that he was the Son of God, not only after his resurrection from the dead but also during his earthly ministry.

While Mark’s Gospel at the outset declares Jesus divine sonship at the time of his baptism by John, Matthew introduces Jesus sonship by means of the confession by Peter at Caesars Philippi at the midpoint of his Gospel.

At that time Jesus will bless Peter for his confession and declare that it does not come from human insight but a revelation from “my Father in heaven” (16:17).

This same sonship is inferred in Matthew’s birth narrative of Jesus, our text this day. Jesus is truly “Son of David” as the genealogy shows, a sonship which Matthew will spell out through the person of Joseph

Like Peter in his confession later in Matthew's gospel, Joseph will learn that Mary's unexpected child will be 'the Emmanuel' or "God with us" through another divine revelation, in Joseph's case, a dream through which he receives the message "from an angel of the Lord" (1:20).

Even though Joseph never utters a single word in either Matthew or Luke's birth stories, Joseph by his actions is portrayed as a person of great faith and obedience.

He will need both when he discovers that his betrothed or espoused wife-to-be is pregnant with a child that he knows is not his.

Without getting bogged down in complex detail as to Mary's state of sexual purity and Joseph's perceived righteousness in his desire not to publicly expose and shame Mary but to privately release her from her marital obligations to him, the how of Jesus' sonship will be dealt with by an 'angel of the Lord's' nocturnal dream appearance to encourage Joseph to go forward with his marital intentions toward Mary and to enlighten Joseph as to her obnoxious pregnancy to which the angel simply states "the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit" (1:20).

As an aside, I have always thought that Joseph had a lot of faith to take Mary as his wife but also to believe that her pregnancy was the result of one Holy Spirit.

For Matthew, the creative action of the Holy Spirit virtually makes Jesus the child or son of God.

What will make Jesus a true descendant of the royal Davidic line and the fulfillment

of the promise of God to David through
Nathan the prophet:

“I shall raise up your son after you...
I shall be his father, and he will
be my son,”

is what the angel instructs Joseph
to do next- to name Jesus.

This instruction will accomplish two
important tasks- marrying Mary and
adopting her child as his legal son
and naming him.

For Matthew this is emphatically God’s will,
since these two steps in the legal paternity
are dictated by the angel and carried out
by Joseph who “did as the angel of the
Lord commanded him” (1:24).

With the first command “Do not be afraid
to take Mary as your wife” (1:19),
Joseph, assumes legal responsibility for
both the mother and the child to be born,

The second and more important step is
“you are to name him Jesus” (1:21).

By naming the child, Joseph acknowledges
him as his son.

Joseph, by exercising the father’s right
to name the child acknowledges Jesus
and thus becomes his legal father.

Through this legal action, Davidic
descendancy is transferred not through
natural paternity but through legal adoption

By becoming the “son” of Joseph,
Jesus virtually becomes a ‘son of David’

With much less detail Matthew explains
his other identity as Jesus the Emmanuel.

The angel tells Joseph that Mary’s
soon-to-be born child is a boy and
that his name must be Jesus,

“She will bear a son and you are
to name his Jesus, for he will
save his people from their sins” (1:21).

As most Hebrew biblical names have meaning,
Jesus name mean literally “the Lord saves”.

Throughout our Fall selections from the
Narrative Lectionary’s selections from
the Hebrew Scripture or Old Testament,
the Lord God has saved and delivered his
people from a flood, from slavery and
bondage in Egypt and destruction at the
Red Sea, from hunger and thirst in the
wilderness, and from exile in Babylon.

But the angel declares God’s agenda.

Jesus will not save his people from
physical enemies like the Roman oppressions;
he “will save his people from their sins.”

The birth of Jesus begins the unfolding of
God’s salvation and it also fulfill scripture.

The precise wording of Matthew is instructive:

“All this took place to fulfill what
has been spoken by the Lord through
the prophet: ‘Look, the virgin shall
conceive and bear a son, and they
shall name him Emmanuel.”

The birth of Jesus shows that God is with us

Three times, in the Gospel of Matthew

we will hear that God is with us:

In the beginning-today’s text;

at its midpoint-Jesus’s promise of

“where two or more come together in my name,
there I am with them” (18:20);

and at the end- “I am with you always
to the end of time” (28:20).

Beloved people of God,

this ‘Christmas Sunday’ and season,
may the Spirit work in us to receive

what God began to accomplish in the birth of Jesus.
May we also submit our plans and emotions
to God as Joseph did.
May we give our bodies and selves
to God as Mary did.
May we truly know that God is with us
to bless us and guide us
in every season of life.
God is even with us in Jesus.
May we have the faith, trust, love
and obedience to receive-
Jesus the Emmanuel.

Amen