

“Who is Jesus?” 3: He is God Himself
Matthew 1.18-25
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Intro

What are you looking forward to during this Christmas season?

- If you're like me, you may be looking forward to just taking a break, especially in the midst of this pandemic, just having a moment to catch our breath.
- Maybe some of us are looking forward to spending time with family and family traditions
- Others of us are looking forward to catch up on all of the movies and shows that we missed out on

While none of these things are bad, my concern is that we're gonna treat Christmas like many other holidays where we really only care that it gives us a couple days off of work or school and gives us some time to relax and chill. I mean, I'm sure many of us will go through the motions of Christmas, maybe a Christmas Eve virtual service or a reading through the birth stories of Jesus.

But I'm concerned, especially in light of the crazy year that we just had, that many of us will be tempted to leave it at that and just be content with going through the all too familiar motions of Christmas, and being satisfied with having a few days to decompress.

And again, while decompressing and resting is sorely needed, there's something much more significant about Christmas, something better to celebrate than just the extra sleep, family traditions, and bumming.

We're gonna dig into that significance as we look at Matthew 1:18-25 where we'll go through Jesus' birth story and see why he is worth celebrating and following. That's why the One Thing for today is: **Celebrate and obey the God who has come for us.**

The One Thing: ***Celebrate and obey the God who has come for us***

Matthew 1:18-25,

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

As we look at this passage, the first thing we will see is that we are to Celebrate and Adore Jesus our God

Celebrate and Adore Jesus Our God

Last week, as Pastor John preached about how Jesus was rejected by many, he also pointed out to us how Jesus, the true light, was God. We saw that in John chapter 1.

John 1:1, 14, “1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

- Word = God => became flesh and dwelt among us
- Word = Jesus, the only Son from the Father

We see this also in Philippians chapter 2.

Philippians 2:5-9, “5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”

- Jesus = God => born in the likeness of men

These two passages show us that Jesus is God, that he is the second person of the Trinity: the Son of God, the Word.

It is this Jesus that the author wants us to celebrate and adore as we read this passage, and **he gives us three reasons to do so.**

1. Jesus came to save us

We see this in v.21 where the angel tells Joseph,

“You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” (v.21)

What’s helpful to understand this verse better is some background information about Jesus’ name.

Greek (In English)	Hebrew (In English)
Iesous (Jesus)	Yeshua (Joshua)

- “YHWH is salvation”, “YHWH saves”

Jesus was not an uncommon name at the time; people gave their sons this name to display their hope and their faith that YHWH would one day help them and save them.

Especially in this season of COVID, many of us have been confronted with our need for help; our own need for saving. Whether it’s been a desire to be saved from this pandemic, or saved from the financial difficulties that came with it, or saved from the disruption and isolation that it’s caused; many of us have felt like, “God, please save us from this.” In fact, one aspect of the pandemic that has been particularly hard for people is that for the first time, many of us are feeling helpless, like we can’t do anything to fix the problem at hand.

And that is frustrating and difficult, especially for those of us who are really capable and self sufficient and are used to being able to solve the problems in our way with hard work, talent, or money, and getting things done.

Others of us might have felt this need for help and for salvation in other ways: bad family situations, bad financial situations, bad romantic situations.

What’s interesting is that as the Jewish people were hoping and waiting on God to save them from their situation, namely the captivity and oppression under the Roman government, we see here that Jesus came to save them, not from the Romans, but that he came to save them from their sins.

Jesus came to save them, not from their situation, but from their sin. Sin = the things that we do or fail to do that are counted as wrong before God, either in action or in motivation, that results in us being separated from God and worthy of his punishment.

That would've been unexpected for the Jewish people at the time as the problem that was right in front of them was the one of Roman government. The salvation that they wanted from God was from their situation. Similarly for us, I think we often are more concerned with the problems and difficulties that are right in front of us.

And what happens is that we fail to see that the problem of sin and its consequences actually outweigh all of the other problems that we have. Yet consider this, all other problems are temporary and will only affect you for this life; sin impacts us for this life and the next; for now and for all eternity.

Many of our problems can be solved on a human level; yet with sin it is only God who can save us from them.

It severs us from the God of the universe who created you and knows exactly what you were created to do, who you were created to be, and what you need. It makes you guilty before God, the perfect judge.

Sin - the root of all other problems, worse than all other problems, and yet Jesus came to save us from it. Yay!

Psalm 130:7-8, "7 O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. 8 And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities."

When you look back on 2020, or even think back to this week, what is it that you feel guilty about? What is it that you know you did wrong? That you should've done better or differently? Perhaps it's how you were unfaithful with the time and opportunities you've had, perhaps it's how you could've and should've done better in some of the relationships you have (how we've wronged family or friends), or maybe it's in how you failed to do what you said you would when it came to your relationship with God.

In this season, let us celebrate that indeed, there is redemption with the LORD as Jesus came into this world to save us from our sin.

Let us celebrate that God saves us from a problem that we could never ever solve on our own.

The second reason we have to celebrate and adore Jesus is that he is God with us.

2. Jesus is God with us

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us)” (v.23)

Because Jesus is God, as he is born and living on earth, he is literally “God with us”. This is huge because before

Sin separated us from God

Isaiah 59:1-2, “Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.”

- But as Jesus saves us from our sin and so that we don't have to be separated from God.
- It used to be that you had to go to the temple to be near the presence of God

But now:

God is now near to us

This God who came to save us is not distant, but rather he is near, that wherever Jesus was walking around is where God was with them. Now if this was just limited to wherever Jesus was physically, it would be quite sad for us because Jesus is not physically walking around us as a human right now; however, this idea that God is now with us in Jesus is introduced here in the beginning of Matthew and is expanded and reinforced again at the end of Matthew, in Matthew chapter 28.

Matthew 28:18-20, "18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.""

- As Jesus commands his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations, he promises that he will be with them. That God is with us always.

In our rebellious, sinful nature, some of us may not consider nearness with God something that is good. (example, going home for too long...). Or more likely, we may not know or be aware of the benefits of his presence:

- Psalm 16:11, "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."
- Exodus 33:14, "And he said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.""
- Zephaniah 3:17, "The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing."

Now, we can experience joy, rest, and the might of the LORD wherever no matter where we are because in Christ, God is with us.

- When we enter difficult spaces, it is a comfort to know that God is with us. Maybe you're the only Christian in your workplace, or your classroom, or your family. Yet we can have confidence that we are not in those spaces alone, but that God is with you.
- In the midst of challenging circumstances, when you feel overwhelmed, when you cannot possibly handle situations on your own, you can know that God is with you.
- When God tells us to leave our comfort zone or go into unfamiliar territory, we can have confidence that he is with us as we go!

He is not distant, but near to us, wherever we are.

What's all the more exciting is that this is just a foretaste of what we will experience for eternity:

Revelation 21:1-4, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.""

The last reason to celebrate is that the God who came to save us from our sin and the God who is with us now and forever, is **Jesus (who) relates to us.**

3. Jesus relates to us

“When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.” (v.24-25)

What you have to understand as we look at this verse is that unlike us, Jesus did not begin his existence at conception. Jesus is God and has always existed.

Revelation 22:13, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

John 8:58, “Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.””

That’s why like we saw earlier in John 1 it says that in the Beginning was the Word and the Word dwelt among us. That’s why in the Philippians 2 passage it says that Jesus took the form of a servant and was born in human likeness.

Though Jesus always existed, here we see that he puts on his human nature and is born like the rest of us.

Why is this significant?

Hebrews 2:16-18, “16 For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. 17 Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”

This passage tells us that Jesus became like us in every respect, so that he could be a merciful and faithful high priest - a mediator between us and God the Father. That because he himself has experienced temptation, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

A few years ago, there was a show called Fit to Fat to Fit, where you would have these super fit, muscular trainers, most of them who had been fit all of their lives gain 50, 60, 70 lbs (or 20-30 kilos) so that they could relate to the challenges that their clients were facing.

One such trainer was Drew Manning, who put on more than 70 pounds to be able to understand what some of his clients were going through.



- “Manning says he didn’t realize the effects of his weight gain would be more than physical. It altered his relationships and his self-confidence. Returning to the gym after the Fit2Fat portion of his journey made him nervous. The fact that he had to do push-ups on his knees was almost humiliating. “The biggest thing [I learned] is that it’s not just about the physical. It’s not just about the meal plan and the workouts and those things. The key is the mental and the emotional issues. I realized those issues are real.””
 - <https://www.cnn.com/2012/06/05/health/drew-manning-fit2fat2fit-lessons/index.html>

It was through being in a similar state as his clients that Drew was able to experience and gain a greater understanding of what they went through. Though he was originally strong and in shape, he purposefully went through the process of gaining weight to become a more compassionate and more effective physical trainer.

Consider this, before Jesus became human, he had never experienced hunger, weakness, tiredness, poverty, or temptation. Yet as he was born as a human baby, he would experience all those things and more.

This holds particular significance to us in the age of COVID-19. Perhaps now, more than ever we have all come face to face with the frailty of mankind. This pandemic has really grabbed us by the shoulders and violently woke us up from our slumber to confront us with the reality that we humans don’t have as much control over life as we thought, that we are much more vulnerable and weak than we thought, that death is not as far away as we thought.

And yet it is to those realities that Jesus subjects himself so that he might all the more relate to us and be a merciful and faithful God. And that should be such an encouragement to us, a reason to celebrate and adore him.

Jesus knows what it is to be weak and susceptible to illness.

Jesus knows what it’s like to be tired and weary.

Jesus knows what it’s like to have loved ones pass away.

Jesus knows what it’s like to be bombarded with temptations day after day.

Hebrews 4:14-16, “14 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Not only in Jesus do we have a God who saves us from our sin, a God who is close to us and ever present, but we have a God who is compassionate, who relates to us, who sympathizes with us in our weakness, and yet who is without sin. He is truly fit to be our substitute, our mediator, and our king.

That is worth remembering and pondering this Christmas.

That is why we should celebrate and adore Jesus this Christmas.

That is why we should worship him, delight in him, thank him, and praise him this Christmas.

But that’s not all, as we continue on to our second and last point, we see that we’re not only to celebrate and adore him, but that we’re also to **trust and obey Jesus our God.**

Trust and Obey Jesus Our God

To see this, we have to go back to the passage and get a picture of what’s going on in this story. When we re-read these verses, we see that **Mary and Joseph are in a tough situation.**

Mary and Joseph are in a tough situation

“When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.” (v.18-19)

- The situation is full of potential shame and rejection.
- It says that “Mary had been betrothed to Joseph.” Now, being betrothed was similar to being engaged these days, but a little more serious. For those who were betrothed, they weren’t considered fully married, especially in the sense that the woman was usually still at her family’s house, waiting for the man to take her to their new home, and in that the couple was not be engaging in sexual relations with another. Yet on the other hand, being betrothed was like being married in that you could only separate from one another by a legal divorce, and if the man died during this time of betrothal, the woman would be considered a widow. So, kinda like engagement, but also more serious.
- And it is as they are betrothed, that Mary is found to be pregnant, which would’ve put them in a difficult situation because it meant that:
 - Either Mary and Joseph were having sex, which they weren’t supposed to be having yet
 - Or if Mary didn’t have sex with Joseph, it meant that Mary had sex with someone else
- And so Joseph, described here as a just man, knowing that he didn’t sleep with her and assuming that she slept with someone else, decides to divorce her quietly rather than publicly. (Divorcing quietly probably meant doing so in the presence of just 2-3 witnesses, rather than making it a public event.)

A miraculous intervention

“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. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”” (v.20-21)

- The angel basically tells Joseph to not divorce Mary, but instead to take her as his wife.
- Might I remind you, this meant pretty certain shame and rejection from the people around them.

A costly obedience

“When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.” (v.24-25)

- Joseph wakes up from his dream and obeys what God told him through the angel, despite all of the consequences that would come.

Some of us are so used to this story that we often miss the weight of what’s happening here. Both for Mary and Joseph, their obedience to what God was doing in their life was costly. People were going to judge them, reject them, and think poorly of them all because they decided to obey God. And to be fair, what’s going on wouldn’t make sense to everyone, unless they also knew who God was and what he was doing.

Also, we have to recognize that if what the angel said wasn’t true or if his dream wasn’t real, then Joseph it wouldn’t have been worth it for him to take on these costly consequences. He would be subjecting himself to hardship, shame, and rejection for no good reason.

But! In this case, his costly obedience is worth it only because what the angel said is true - that Mary conceived through the Holy Spirit, and Jesus was going to be born as a human to save us from sin, to be with us, and to relate to us!

And it’s like that for us. For many of us, you may have found it particularly difficult to stay faithful and obedient to God in the midst of all that is going on.

Maybe you're a student and you committed not to cheat during these online classes and now it just seems like you're stuck with the costly consequence of facing the increased difficulty of those classes.
Maybe you felt led to serve in our church, but now it feels like you're lagging behind your peers when it comes to career.

Maybe you're working and you've committed to work with integrity rather than cut corners, but it seems to be costing you promotions or bigger returns.

Maybe you chose to use your money to serve others, but now find yourself behind thinking how much money you would have had if you had saved it for yourself.

Whatever situation it is, many of us may find ourselves facing the costly consequences of obeying God or being faithful to him, and yet as we remember the God we are to celebrate and adore, we are reminded that it is worth it.

Trusting and obeying God goes hand in hand with Celebrating and Adoring him because worship rings shallow when you don't obey. Jesus alludes to this when he asks

Luke 6:46, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?"

The Jesus that we see that is praiseworthy and that we should celebrate is also the Jesus that we are to trust and obey.

The One Thing: Celebrate and obey the God who has come for us

We see in this passage that Jesus is worthy of our celebration and adoration as well as our trust and obedience.

This God who came for us - the mighty God who humbled himself to be born into a weak, helpless baby body so that he could relate with, the one who came to save us from our sin did so by dying for us.

Life Application

1. Repent for your disobedience and sin
2. Ask Jesus for help to obey
3. Set aside time to celebrate Jesus this Christmas season

Closing

God wants us to turn to and celebrate what we really need during this season: God himself. Everything else is a flimsy bandaid on a death wound. Yet in a world of flimsy bandaids, the birth of Jesus stands out as a life giving, soul stirring reason to celebrate.

In this season, we remember and celebrate that God came down to earth, to be born as a helpless baby so that he could know and relate to the pain and brokenness that you face, that he could save you from all of the sin in your life, and so that you could be with him forever and ever. We remember his love for us, demonstrated in how he saved us from our sins, by dying on a cross, so that you could live and have real life. We remember his worthiness, his power, and his presence that encourages us to obey, even and especially when it is costly.