

A Prophecy of Peace

Decisions matter - I gave my life to Christ when I was 10. In some ways, I didn't entirely know what I was doing... but I knew that I loved Jesus and that he'd changed my life, and I wanted to keep following him the rest of my life.

This morning, we're going to talk about a man named Joseph who made a decision to follow even when it meant giving up everything he'd previously hoped for and imagined. He surely didn't know what all it would mean... but he knew enough to trust.

Our scripture reading and reflection this morning comes from Matthew 1:18-25. Last week we took a closer look at Jesus' family tree in Matthew's opening verses - a text that often gets overlooked but that plays a crucial role communicating God's faithful plan of salvation through the long wait, even as the people of Israel and Judah have long been unfaithful.

We saw how God chose a family to become a people called out for a special purpose, to be blessed to be a blessing for all nations. And that people became a nation, whose greatest remembered king - King David - received a covenant promise that his throne would be established forever.

That promise proved to be problematic since many of his descendants were unfaithful and as a result God allowed them to be taken into exile. And yet, hope was not lost. After years of waiting, Matthew is able to trace the line of David through to a man named Joseph - a carpenter in Bethlehem - and a son named Jesus, who will be the awaited Messiah.

READING

Matthew 1:¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

²⁰ But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Let's Pray.

There was one looming question for me as I studied this passage this week: Why would Matthew have spent so much time tracing Joseph's roots as the heir of David if Joseph isn't actually even biologically related to Jesus?

That started as just an interesting, if not nagging, question for me to chew on, but the answers I discovered led me to a much deeper appreciation for Jesus' identity as King and Lord, and an awe and wonder at God's intricate salvation plan.

If you'll allow me this morning, I want to share that experience with you.

PROPHECY ONE

This one is a little different because it's not directly in our text, but it immediately concerns our text and WHY it's important that Joseph is NOT the biological father.

Let's put up our chart from last week to see some of the kings in Jesus' genealogy - we're looking specifically for Josiah and Jeconiah. These guys directly precede the fall to Babylon.

There's actually a king between these two that Matthew doesn't mention (Remember: I shared last week how it was common for Jewish genealogies to condense generations for ease of memorization so long as an established link could be made).

The name of this missing king is Jehoiachin, and he lives during the time of a prophet Jeremiah. In response to Jehoiachin's wicked actions, Jeremiah gives several warnings from the Lord. If you don't straighten up, you're going to regret it.

In Jeremiah 22:24, the prophet records God's displeasure with Jehoiachin so strong as to say, ²⁴ "As surely as I live," declares the Lord, "even if you, Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, were a signet ring on my right hand, I would still pull you off. ²⁵ I will deliver you into the hands of those who want to kill you, those you fear—Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and the Babylonians.

... and just a little further down in verse 30

³⁰ This is what the Lord says: "Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah."

So you know, not a glowing recommendation. Actually it's a disturbing report because God had made a special covenant with David that his throne would be established as an everlasting throne...and Jehoiachin and his descendants would be the continuation of that line. So everything is in jeopardy if Jehoiachin doesn't get his act together.

There's actually a really dramatic scene that reinforces this prophecy later in Jeremiah chapter 36 where Jeremiah has his scribe Baruch write down all the prophecies he's made about Jehoiachin and send it to the king to read in hopes that he'll repent.

The king instead has one of his royal court read it aloud while he sits there cutting off bits of the scroll every 3-4 paragraphs with a knife and throwing it into the fireplace. He then orders the arrest of Jeremiah and Baruch, but they've been taken into hiding.

When word gets out about their warrant, God tells Jeremiah to have Baruch send ANOTHER copy of the scroll, but this time to add:

Jeremiah 36:²⁹ Also tell Jehoiakim king of Judah, 'This is what the Lord says: You burned that scroll ...³⁰ Therefore this is what the Lord says about Jehoiakim king of Judah: He will have no one to sit on the throne of David; his body will be thrown out and exposed to the heat by day and the frost by night.

Now, Joseph is described as an upright man - righteous, faithful to the law - AND he's a descendant of David, with royal blood flowing through his veins. But the covenant promise issued to David has been interrupted by the curse of Jehoiachin. He has a legal claim to the throne, but biologically he and any children he has will be unfit to rule.

This is what is so amazing about Mary and Joseph - they AREN'T just a random couple from a backwoods town. That's somewhat true due to their circumstances.

But both Joseph and Mary are descended from David - Joseph through the line of successors after David's son Solomon, and the Gospel of Luke shows us how Mary came from the line of David through one of David's other sons (Nathan).

By Joseph adopting Mary's miracle boy - Jesus becomes legal heir to David's throne, and biological descendant of David free of the curse of Jehoiachin.

JESUS IS MESSIAH

And through the miraculous conception of the Holy Spirit, this Messiah is even more than a son of David. He is Son of God.

BUT - That's just the first piece to the story.

PROPHECY NUMBER TWO.

The next prophecy I want to highlight is mentioned in our text, when the angel's announcement explains:

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

The prophet spoken of is Isaiah, speaking during the reign of King Ahaz - let's put up our chart again so we can see where Ahaz was in the line of the kings of Judah.

Can I get like 4 volunteers up here...I need 3 little people and 1 really big guy (Dan?)

So what's happening here is that the kings of Israel and Syria are getting real ancy about the looming threat of the Assyrian empire (Dan, you're the Assyrians).

So they decide to join forces to try and protect themselves. (Can you guys do like a secret handshake or something?)

Then they look toward King Ahaz in Judah, and they're like, "Hey, you should totally come join our secret group so that we can take on those many pants Assyrians." But Ahaz is like, "No thanks, I'm good." So Israel and Syria get all mad and say, "Well, hey, if you're not for us, you're against us!" So they make plans to invade Judah and do away with King Ahaz.

Ahaz hears word of this and decides, "well, I'll just get the big guy you're afraid of!" So he makes a plan to work out a deal with Assyria for protection in exchange for serving them and worshipping their gods.

This is where Isaiah steps in. Isaiah chapter 7 shows Isaiah coming before King Ahaz and saying (and I'm paraphrasing here), "Hey, um, how about don't do that, and just trust God instead."

"Don't be afraid of them, these guys have nothing on God. He's going to take care of you, trust me on this one." In chapter 7, verse 10, Isaiah even says, "Ask God for a sign and He'll give you whatever confirmation you need" - not a thing that happens often.

Ahaz responds - "I will not ask, I won't put the Lord to the test" - which SOUNDS righteous, but he's really just saying, "I've already made up my mind."

This is where our Immanuel prophecy comes in: Isaiah 7:13-16,

¹³ Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. ¹⁵ He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, ¹⁶ for before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste. ¹⁷ The Lord will bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah—he will bring the king of Assyria."

Let's give a hand to our volunteers - you all can have a seat.

Ahaz hears this message of hope, but he didn't listen or care. Some believe this prophecy was temporary fulfilled in that historical moment - with a young maiden known to the king bearing a child and giving it such a name - this is actually reference in chapter 8. There IS a young maiden,

who gets married and has a child named Immanuel that acts as a sign that Ahaz completely ignores.

HOWEVER, the ultimate fulfillment comes through Jesus.

- Not only is Mary a young maiden - Mary is literally a virgin.
- and not only will the child be *a sign of* salvation - the child Jesus IS the salvation.

Jesus ups the ante and fulfills the prophecy in a way that no one saw coming.

SUMMARY

1. The VIRGIN BIRTH solves the dilemma of Jehoiachin's curse & David's promise.
2. The VIRGIN BIRTH gives a PERFECT fulfillment to the Immanuel prophecy.

Hopefully, you all are still tracking with me through all of this, because this is where I think this gets really important for you and me.

When Jewish readers heard ²² this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us") - they would've understood that Jesus' birth is ushering in something new...BUT it also would've clicked that this is about more than just virgin birth, this was a sign to a king meant to encourage trust.

Now David's descendant (Joseph) must choose whether or not he will actually trust the Lord.

And likewise, Jewish readers under Roman rule must ask themselves - will we submit to the Romans and just try to fly under the radar? Will we cut deals to try and secure our safety? Or will we trust God's promise of salvation?

And in the same way, you and I have to ask ourselves... who or what are we trusting for peace, safety, and salvation?

I can't really imagine what it would have been like for Joseph to take the news from the angel that night.

I doubt that ALL OF THIS occurred to him. And yet we see the descendant of these two self-serving kings wrestling with his current predicament in a very selfLESS way.

He went to bed thinking about how to best honor the law after finding out his fiancée was a pregnant with a child not his own. He was caught between wanting to be faithful to God's law and not wanting any harm to come to Mary.

There were a few possible scenarios:

1. Have her publicly humiliated and stoned to death (perfectly permissible at the time)
2. Divorce her quietly/in secret to her reputation and move on

3. Stay with her and raise the child as his own (in which case everyone would assume that they just COULD NOT wait, looked down upon much more than it is now; OR that Joseph was a bit spineless and didn't have what it took to deal with his problem.

Given the truth of the situation in the angel's visit, Joseph didn't hesitate to surrender his own will for something greater.

Joseph's life after that wasn't easy. Fatherhood isn't easy in general, but he had to raise the son of God as his adopted son. He had to protect Mary and Jesus as they fled to Egypt when Herod went on a killing spree trying to find them.

But Joseph did it all with a perfect peace, because he completely surrendered his will over to God.

CONCLUSION

I wonder this Advent season, where do you find yourself anxious and worried? What desired future are you clinging to? In what places do you find yourself trusting your own strength and cunning rather than turning to the Lord?

My prayer is that in those places we might live like Joseph - who, even though he had a righteous reputation to uphold, emptied himself of his pride so that he might be glorified as the man who raised the savior of the world.

And in so doing we might be like Jesus - Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the to the glory of God the Father. - Philippians 2:6-11

This is the true path to peace - shalom - wholeness, flourishing, and healing.

Empty yourself and trust wholly in the Lord.

This morning we get to celebrate just such a decision among us. Breona Laughlin has decided that she's ready to make her faith public through baptism - a symbol of willingly giving our life to Jesus, that we might die to self and find life in Him.

As we continue in our worship this morning, I'm going to invite the praise band back up to lead us in a time of worship through song while Breona's family and I head downstairs to get ready. Afterward, Jeff will dismiss you to come on down and join us. **Let's pray.**