

## **Marvel at Jesus and Live for His Glory**

Matthew 1:18-25

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Welcome to VBS 2025 - *Wonder Junction, Marvel at Jesus and Live for His Glory*. This morning, the sermon will cover Session One of VBS- *The Wonder of His Birth* from Matthew 1:18-25. When you come back this evening, it will be a regular VBS format, and we will cover Session Two.

While this marks the kickoff of VBS, my message also connects to Pastor Dean's message on the Trinity from last Sunday, because we will be studying the incarnation of Jesus, who is the second person of the Trinity. This whole week, we will be studying the person of Jesus and marveling at the person and work of Christ on our behalf. Remember, we will have sessions for children, youth, and adults, so I hope you all will attend VBS this week. I will pray, and then we will get to work on Matthew 1:18-25 and marvel at the birth of Jesus.

When you initially read vv. 18-25, you might believe it is a sweet sentimental story, but when you dig into it, what you discover is that it is a messy, real-life story, but one that it is also infused with hope.

We need to hear and read messy stories like this from the Bible, and especially from the life of our Savior. Friends, Jesus didn't enter a perfect world and live in a perfect family with no problems. Jesus stepped into the brokenness and messiness of our lives, and that's very good news for those of us who know all too well that life is broken and messy.

The beauty of this story is that in the messiness and brokenness, God displayed His powerful glory to give hope to His people. Here is the main point: *We should marvel at the incarnation of the Son of God. Just consider what Jesus did: He left heaven and entered the messiness and brokenness of our lives to purchase grace and hope for us. He purchased our salvation.* Without Jesus doing this, we have no hope of being saved. I have three points to guide us as we work through the text.

### **I. Hope of our salvation is grounded in the incarnation of Jesus (v. 18)**

In v. 18, we learn about the birth of Jesus. When we consider His birth, we are beginning to dig into *the doctrine of the incarnation*. The word *incarnation* means "*to put on flesh*" or "*to put on meat*." This means that Jesus, the eternal Son of God, came to earth and put on flesh. However, it wasn't like he just put human flesh over His divine being like you would put on clothes or a jacket or something like that. No, the great and amazing mystery is that He became truly and fully human while at the same time remaining truly and fully God.

Verse 18 does not explain all of the doctrine of the incarnation, but it is a key verse for understanding the foundation of the doctrine. You see, the incarnation began when Jesus became human and entered our world through a divine conception in the womb of a virgin girl. Let's look at v. 18 again:

*The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way: After his mother, Mary had been engaged to Joseph, it was discovered before they came together that she was pregnant from the Holy Spirit.*

Friends, the virgin birth is a very important doctrine. Yet, Matthew does not give us an apologetic for proving the virgin birth. What Matthew does is make the connection between vv. 18 and 23 to Isaiah 7:14. Isaiah 7:14 says:

*Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel.*

This prophecy in Isaiah was given to King Ahaz in the late eighth century BC. Here's the thing, Ahaz wasn't a good king, he was a wicked king. When he ruled, Judah desperately needed deliverance from their enemies. God offered to give Ahaz a sign that He would deliver His people. However, Ahaz pretended to be a super spiritual king and refused to ask God for a sign. Despite his sin, God gave Ahaz the sign anyway, and it was the sign of the virgin

giving birth of a child who would be called *Immanuel*. The Holy Spirit helps Matthew make the connection between Isaiah 7:14 and Jesus' birth so that he understood that God has incarnated Himself in the person of Jesus.

We are like Ahaz, aren't we? We needed saving from our sin so we won't spend eternity in hell. We may pretend we don't need saving but the bottom line is that we do. We needed deliverance from the enemy of death. And like Ahaz, we didn't ask for a sign or salvation, but while we were still dead in our sins, God sent Jesus, who was born of a virgin, to save us.

So, the Spirit helps Matthew make that connection. However, the Holy Spirit does not give Matthew details about how the incarnation of Jesus works. He simply says Mary became pregnant *by the Holy Spirit*. Ultimately, we are to accept the mystery of the incarnation of Christ by faith.

What Matthew does is to teach us that Jesus' birth was miraculous. Matthew sees that God is fulfilling His promise to His people. He sees Scripture's fulfillment. Bottom line: *Matthew teaches us to trust in the authority of God's word even when we do not understand all the details and how everything occurred.*

Looking again at v. 18, he writes,

*The birth of Jesus came about this way.*

The Greek word for *birth* is the word *genesis*. By using this particular word, Matthew draws our attention to the fact that Jesus' birth is something extraordinary. *The Spirit "genesis-ed" Jesus.*<sup>1</sup>

Listen, the Holy Spirit did not create the eternal Son of God. That is not what it means. What this text teaches us is that the Spirit took the eternal, pre-existent Son of God and formed Him or knit Him together in Mary's womb. Luke's Gospel writes it this way in Luke 1:35,

*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.*

It was the *beginning* of the Incarnate Son of God. The Eternal Son of God took on human flesh in Mary's womb. His heart began to beat; veins were formed; blood began to flow; lungs were formed; bones began to grow; a brain formed with little gray cells, and the body had nerves. He grew all of the things as a baby in the womb, and yet He was truly God.

Friends, we ought to be in awe of the incarnation of God into human flesh. We ought to marvel at the wonder of the incarnation of Christ because Jesus, the King, left His throne in Heaven and stepped into this broken world and became fully and truly human in order to save us.

He came to pay our debt of sin and break sin's power over us on the cross. To do that, Jesus had to be truly God and truly human. Jesus had to live a fully human life by faith in God and He had to live a sinless life.

In other words, Jesus was not obedient to God in all things because He was God. He was obedient to God because He lived His life by faith in God. He lived the life of faith that we should have lived. He lived the life by faith in God that we wouldn't and couldn't live. He did all of this in our place and for our sins. The Creator died in the place of those who sinned against Him.

Now, listen to me, Jesus' *fully divine and fully human* death on the cross was the perfect substitute. His fully sinless human nature meant that He was qualified to die in our place. His fully divine nature meant that His sacrifice was powerful enough to pay for the sins of God's people for all time and eternity.

Friends, the incarnation means hope in our messy world! In Christ, God stepped into our messy world to save us. The miracle of the incarnation means He can save those whom you would never believe could be saved. Just as Jesus broke into our world to save us, He can break into their world to save them. *Friends, the only hope we have for salvation is grounded in the incarnation of the Son of God.*

## **II. Hope of transformation is grounded in the incarnation. (vv. 18-23)**

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas O'Donnell, *Preaching the Word series: Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*, 42.

In vv. 18-23, we not only find the explanation of Jesus' birth, but we also learn about Joseph's role in Jesus' life. We do not have a lot of information about Joseph, but this text is one of the few that teaches us about the man who would adopt Jesus as his son.

We should not believe that just because God chose Joseph and Mary to raise Jesus, their life was easy, because it was not. The incarnation of the eternal Son of God immediately made life messy and difficult for them. So, submitting to God's plan made life harder for them.

Obedience to God was costly, but it was also transformative. Even the promise of Jesus' birth to Mary and Joseph began to complicate their lives. However, what we see in this text is how the promise of Jesus' birth transformed Joseph's life.

In v. 18, we learn that Joseph was engaged to Mary. We need to understand what engagement meant in first-century Judaism. A better word for their engagement is *betrothal*.

In first-century Judaism, betrothal was a year-long process. In essence, it was a binding contract to be married. So, for all practical purposes, the couple was married, although they did not live together, nor had they consummated the marriage. Because betrothal was a binding contract, ending this kind of engagement required a divorce.

At some point during the engagement, Joseph discovered that Mary was pregnant. She either told him, or someone noticed, because she was beginning to show. This was a really bad development because it meant one of two things. Either Mary had been unfaithful to Joseph, or Joseph and Mary had been unfaithful to God. No matter what they decided to do, there was going to be a lot of blame and shame to go around. The small-town Jewish grapevine was going to be ripe with gossip.

Joseph's response teaches us something about the kind of man he was. It shows us the kind of man God had chosen to raise His son. His response provides us with some principles to imitate. So, let's work through these verses.

Verse 19 tells us what Joseph decided to do when he learned that Mary was pregnant:

*And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame,  
resolved to divorce her quietly.*

What we learn is that he wanted to protect Mary as much as possible. He didn't want to publicly shame her. He was a righteous and compassionate man. So, as he considered the situation, he decided it would be best if they very quietly and discreetly divorced.

Friends, he could have shamed her publicly. He had every right to bring her sin to light. He could have declared it to the whole village and publicly humiliated her for her perceived sin. If he did it this way, he would exonerate himself and put all the blame on her. After all, his reputation and whole future were at stake.

Yet, he did not want to do that. He was willing to bear as much of the shame as he could by divorcing her quietly. In this way, *her life* would not be completely destroyed. He could quietly move on with his life, and she could pick up the pieces and move forward as best as possible.

Yet, look in vv. 20-23, and notice what happened that completely changed Joseph:

*But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." <sup>22</sup> Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet:*

*<sup>23</sup> See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel, which is translated "God is with us."*

In these verses, we learn that Joseph was thinking intensely about the situation. We can't say with certainty what he was doing, but we can safely assume he was taking this situation to the Lord in prayer. He was troubled and mulling it over in his heart.

Then the Lord God breaks through in a dream that night. The Lord explains to him that Mary had not been unfaithful to him and was, in fact, pregnant by God's divine plan to save His people from their sin. Bottom line: God wanted Joseph to take Mary as his wife and adopt Jesus to be his son, and this was what he did.

Next, notice how the Lord addressed Joseph. He called him "*Joseph, son of David.*" Here is the significance of that title for Joseph. He was, in fact, in the line of King David. The problem was that over hundreds of years King David's bloodline had been lost. No one was following the Davidic line of kingship. So, no one cared that Joseph was in David's family line, except God.

By adopting Jesus as his son, Joseph brought Jesus officially and legally into King David's family line. Jesus' adoption was as good as a physical birth to qualify Him as in the line of King David. That is what adoption did then, and it is what it does even in modern times.

Friends, I know we have many people here who have adopted kids or who have been adopted. If you have been through adoption at any level, it is amazing to know that our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, was adopted. Our Lord is so compassionate that He provides families for those who have no family.

If you are adopted, then you should consider the special grace that God has given you to place you in your family. Jesus, Himself has a special identification with you because of your adoption.

You see, adoption is not a punishment. Adoption does not mean you are not wanted. Adoption does not mean you were forgotten. Adoption is a special gift of grace. Adoption is a gift of grace that Jesus experienced. If you have adopted, then you follow in the steps of Joseph.

If you have been adopted, then you follow in the steps of Jesus. If you have been adopted, here is what you need to know. Those who have brought you into your family chose you specifically and especially as their own child.

Next, let's consider more of Joseph's transformation. Initially, Joseph was going to take the path that seemed to bring the least amount of suffering for Mary and himself. Now, after the Lord comes to him, he makes the hard decision to marry her and adopt Jesus as his son. *Friends, the incarnation of Jesus into his life transformed him, and his obedience to God was costly.*

Before we leave this second point, I want to draw out four applications regarding Jesus' incarnation and our transformation.

**1) The incarnation of Jesus is hope for our transformation.** Do you ever look at people around you and wonder if they can really change? You may even look at your own life and wonder if you can change.

When Jesus breaks into our lives, He takes the messiness of our lives and redeems it. He transforms our lives into something beautiful. We are like Joseph, when Jesus comes into our lives we begin to change. We begin to order our lives around Jesus and His church. *So, the first application question is: How has the incarnation of Christ broken into your life and transformed you?*

**2) The power of the incarnation humbles us.** Think about it this way. When the Lord spoke to Joseph, he had to humble himself in order to obey God, and as a result, he decided to take Mary as his wife and adopt Jesus. This required a great deal of humility but his lesson in humility didn't end there. He had to continue to humble himself before God and obey all that God commanded him to do.

Consider this: Although he was going to take Mary as his wife and adopt Jesus, he was not going to name Jesus. He was not given that authority. This authority was God's alone. God told him what to name the baby – Jesus.

Here's the deal: In first-century Judaism, the father named the children. To give the name means to be in a position of authority, and Joseph was not in that position, and he knew it. In essence, Joseph humbled himself before God and submitted to the rule of Jesus true Father – God.

Friends, the incarnation of the Son of God into flesh is a massive lesson in humility. Not only did Joseph humble himself before God but Jesus humbled Himself too.

The Apostle Paul tells us in Philippians 2 that Jesus humbled Himself and came into our world by taking the form of a servant. Then Paul tells us that we should have the same mind of humility as Christ. Listen to Philippians 2:3-8,

*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

Just as Jesus humbled Himself and became a servant, likewise, we are to follow in His steps. In other words, the incarnation should humble us. In humility, we take the initiative to serve others. In humility, we take the initiative to put others first. In humility, we take the initiative to give of ourselves to others. In humility, we give others the benefit of the doubt when there is confusion or offense. In humility, we take the initiative to forgive others. This is how the incarnation humbles us. *Has the incarnation of Jesus humbled you?*

**3) The power of the incarnation brings us into Jesus' mission.** Verse 21 tells us that the child's name would be *Jesus*. *Jesus* is the Greek name for the Hebrew name, *Joshua*, which means *The Lord Saves*. Friends, Jesus' name declares His mission.

Jesus' incarnation into the lives of Joseph and Mary brought them into His mission to preach the gospel so that sinners will be saved. Their transformation meant they were now part of God's plan to save sinners.

This is what Jesus does when He comes into our lives. He does not save us and leave our lives untouched by His mission. His mission becomes the identifying mission of our lives. We may be moms, dads, and grandparents and have jobs and careers, but there is a redemptive thread of Jesus' mission that runs through the tapestry of our lives. Like Jesus, we live to see others come to faith in Him. *Is that your mission in life today?*

**4) Jesus' incarnation means God is with us in our suffering.** Think about it this way. The incarnation of Christ into the lives of Joseph and Mary was not easy. As the narrative unfolds, we see that it brought much suffering into their lives.

Their obedience was going to be costly. It was going to bring more suffering than simply tarnishing their reputation. Their life was going to be messy and complicated.

Think about it: By marrying Mary, people would assume that Joseph got her pregnant during their engagement. Their marriage was going to cost him his reputation. Both Joseph and Mary would remain objects of gossip and shame all of their lives. They would live with that stigma.

His obedience eventually meant the family would have to flee to Egypt to protect Jesus. Joseph's obedience eventually meant that children would die in Bethlehem because of Jesus' birth. Bottom line: Joseph's obedience to God meant he and Mary were starting their marriage out in a very difficult way.

Yet, they were not alone in their suffering *because of Immanuel – God was with them*. Likewise, the promise of Immanuel means—*God is with us even in our suffering*.

Friends, when Jesus comes into your life, it does not mean life will get easier. Christianity does not mean that all of a sudden you have no more pain and no more suffering. Oftentimes, when you commit your life to Christ, life gets much harder. But the promise of *Immanuel* is that God is with us in our suffering. He does not leave us or forsake us.

The incarnation of the Son of God into human flesh means that God has stepped into our human dilemma of suffering. He is not an aloof, distant god who only watches but does not understand our suffering.

God came in Christ and suffered. In Christ, our Creator suffered even more than we will ever suffer. He was the sinless Son of God who resisted sin to the point of shedding His blood. He was mocked and shamed His whole life. He was an outsider to everyone. He was despised and rejected by His own people. He was a man of sorrow because of our sin, and yet on the cross, He paid our debt of sin.

The incarnation means God intimately understands our pain and suffering. He knows our pain, and He shares our hurt. He wants to help us carry the burden and pain of our suffering if we will give it to him.

Bottom line: The hope of the incarnation is hope for our transformation into the image of our Savior, who never leaves us to forsake us.

### **III. Hope of our obedience is grounded in the incarnation of Jesus.**

Finally, vv. 24-25 teaches us how the incarnation of Jesus moves us to obedience.

*When Joseph woke up, he did as the Lord's angel had commanded him. He married her <sup>25</sup> but did not have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son. And he named him Jesus.*

Here we see the beginning of Joseph's costly obedience. The Lord has spoken to Joseph, and now costly obedience follows. First, he married Mary. This was his first step of costly obedience to the Lord.

Second, we learn that he did not have sexual relations with her until after she gave birth to Jesus. So, not only were they starting their marriage out under great suspicion and shame, but now Joseph and Mary could not consummate the marriage until later. This was a stressful way to begin their marriage. They were finally officially married, but they had to wait to consummate the marriage.

This is what the incarnation of Jesus does. Jesus changes us. Jesus works in our lives in such a way that no matter what the cost is, we are willing to take up our cross daily and follow Him wherever He leads us.

The amazing truth is that because of the incarnation Jesus can now give us Himself in the messiness of this broken world. He gives us Himself when we are faced with costly obedience. He gives us Himself for our transformation into His image and because of the incarnation Jesus was able to give Himself for our salvation.

When you consider the mystery of incarnation of the Son of God, the very God Himself, into human flesh and blood, and believe it, it is stunning. All we can do is marvel at God's amazing plan to come in Christ and save us.