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The Vocation of the Christ

Matthew 1.18-25

Series: God With Us

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The Village Church at Shell Point

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I. **“Witness”**

- A. When you are in a strange place, it’s good to have someone with you
 - 1. Someone who knows the place
 - a. Someone who can help you navigate unfamiliar territory
- B. I’ve been to China twice – both for university-related work
 - 1. The first time I went Beijing Normal University provided a couple of young women to accompany me and my colleague
 - a. To make sure we got from one place to another
 - b. To make sure we didn’t miss any meetings
 - c. To make sure we met the people we were supposed to meet
 - 2. One of those young women was a girl name Cherry
 - a. Cherry was a doctoral student in sport psychology
 - b. And her English was impeccable; she had been an English major in undergraduate school
 - c. So she not only accompanied us; she translated for us also
 - d. She was wonderful to have “with us”
- C. Turned out, Cherry was a Christian
 - 1. So we had wonderful conversations about how she came to Christ
 - a. And once she found out I was a pastor, the university sponsoring our visit rearranged our schedule so that she could take me to church on the Sunday we were in Beijing
 - 2. It was a large church; one of the official sanctioned Protestant churches in Beijing
 - a. But as it turned out, a very good church at that time
 - b. The pastor preached a very fine expository sermon from the OT
 - c. I was very impressed
- D. The second time I went to China, Jean went with me
 - 1. This time I made sure Cherry would be with us to be our translator
 - a. And we wanted to go to church again with Cherry
 - 2. Well, as it turned out, the presentation of my research paper at the conference I was attending was scheduled for Sunday morning
 - a. I wouldn’t be able to go
 - 3. But I wanted Jean to go
 - a. So we arranged our schedule with Cherry and Jean going to church

4. But we also discovered that Cherry lived way on the other side of Beijing from our hotel
 - a. And the Protestant church was about half way between the hotel and where Cherry lived
 - b. So it didn't make sense to have Cherry come all the way to the hotel
 - c. Why didn't we find a way to meet Jean at the church
5. Well, we had the hotel identify the church, write down the name and address of the church on a card
 - a. And on Sunday morning they called a taxi
 - b. Handed the card to the taxi driver, indicating that he should take Jean to church
 - c. He acted like he understood
 - d. Jean got into the cab; off they went
6. He pulled up to a church and dropped her off
 - a. She paid him; off he went
7. Then she noticed that this church had a statue of Mary outside of it
 - a. And it did not resemble the pictures of the Protestant church I had shown her
 - b. And Cherry was nowhere to be found
8. The cab driver had dropped her off at a Roman Catholic church
9. So there was Jean, in the middle of Beijing with its 20 million people, knowing not a word of Chinese
 - a. Having no clue where she was
 - b. Knowing she was not where she was supposed to be
 - c. With no cell phone to call Cherry
 - d. Lost; and no one to be with her
- E. It's important to have someone with you when you are in strange territory
 1. To put a name to it, I'll call it "Witness"
 2. The story did have a happy ending
 - a. A service was letting out
 - b. A young man – student or young professional – was coming out
 - c. He immediately recognized the terror and sense of lostness on Jean's face (she doesn't hide her feelings easily!)
 - d. And praise God, he spoke English!
 3. He knew the church she was supposed to go to
 - a. Hailed another cab
 - b. And got in the cab and went with her to the Protestant church
 - c. Where they finally met up with Cherry
- F. It's wonderful to have someone with you
 1. And terrifying when you don't
 - a. When you are in foreign territory
- G. This Advent series is called "God With Us"
 1. It is the story of the incarnation of the Son of God
 - a. When God Himself came to be with us

- b. To dwell with us
- c. To “tabernacle” with us as John puts it in the first chapter of His gospel
- 2. And in case you haven’t noticed, we are in strange territory
 - a. We are aliens in this world
 - b. This world is not our home
- 3. And the best news we can ever hear is that Jesus is “Immanuel”
 - a. Which means “God with us”

II. Text

A. **Matthew 1:18–25** (ESV) —

1. 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.
2. 19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.
3. 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.
4. 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”
5. 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:
6. 23 “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).
7. 24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife,
8. 25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

III. **Joseph’s Conundrum**

- A. The first thing we notice is that Joseph is in a tough spot
 1. He’s betrothed to the married to Mary
 - a. And in those days, an engagement was a legally binding arrangement
 - b. But an arrangement in which the marriage is not yet consummated sexually
 2. So Joseph and Mary and legally bound, engaged to be married
 - a. But are not yet living with each other
 - b. And Joseph has not “known” Mary
 - c. He has not been with her sexually
- B. The problem is that he notices that Mary’s physique is changing!
 1. She is showing
 - a. It is very evident she is pregnant

2. So while Joseph hasn't been with Mary, it seems evident to him (and we would presume to Mary's family) that someone else has!
- C. Now Joseph is a righteous man
 1. He desires to righteous wife and a godly marriage
 - a. And as far as he knew, Mary fit the bill
 2. But now – this is a problem
- D. The best thing for a godly man to do in this situation, as far as he could figure, would be to divorce Mary
 1. Which he would have to do legally since an engagement was a legal arrangement
 2. He certainly had every right to do so under Jewish law
- E. At the same time, he was a kind and considerate man
 1. He figured he could go through the process quietly
 - a. Not expose Mary to the humiliation of public disgrace

IV. **The Angelic Visitation**

- A. Well, God let him stew on that for a bit
 1. Which is what God does with us from time to time
 - a. Before revealing what we ought to do, He lets us wrestle with the problem
- B. And then, in the middle of the night, in a dream, an angel shows up
 1. Not just any angel – an angel of the Lord
 2. This wasn't a cute little chubby cherub like Rubens painted
 - a. And it certainly wasn't Cupid with a bow and arrow, even though a love story is involved
 - b. Most angels actually resemble humans
 3. Except when they don't
 - a. Except they are exceptional in appearance
 - b. And the angelic appearances taking place when God incarnate shows up are extraordinary beings
 - c. You would know an angel in these circumstances
 - d. Joseph did – even in a dream
- C. **An angel is a messenger** – that's what the name means
 1. And this angel has a message for Joseph
- D. He tells Joseph that it's all right to take Mary as his wife
 1. That things are not as they appear
 2. It's true that Mary is pregnant
 - a. But not by another man
 3. The child she is carrying is from the Holy Spirit
- E. Joseph so wanted a godly wife and a righteous marriage
 1. And he will have a godly wife and a righteous marriage

V. **The Messianic Vocation**

- A. Next the angel gives the purpose for this curious set of events
 1. Mary is with child by the Holy Spirit

- a. Not because of some odd display of supernatural wizardry
 - b. But because this is a special child
 - 2. Indeed, “special” doesn’t even begin to cover it!
- B. **Matthew 1:21** (ESV) —
 - 1. 21 “She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”
- C. Names, of course, in ancient Judaism were extremely important
 - 1. They were not chosen simply because they were family names (although that was done from time to time)
 - a. And they were not chosen because they sounded good, or cool, or unique
 - 2. They were often chosen with a **Vocation** in mind
 - a. That is, the child was given a sense of divine purpose
 - b. Which was expressed in the given name
 - 3. That was certainly the case with Jesus
- D. **Jesus** is the Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew **Joshua**
 - 1. It means literally **“God Saves”**
- E. This child will be given the name Jesus because He will save His people from their sins
 - 1. What a vocation!
- F. The Jewish expectations for Messiah were high, to be sure
 - 1. They looked for a political-military king who would save them from the Romans
 - a. And in the process, heal their land from the pagan corruption precipitated by the Roman occupation
- G. But this Jesus would do far more!
 - 1. All the ills of our world
 - a. All the brokenness
 - b. All the corruption
 - c. All the dysfunction
 - d. All the sickness and disease
 - e. All the wars
 - f. All the natural disasters
 - 2. Were ultimately the result of sin
 - a. Either directly or indirectly, sin is the ruination of God’s good creation
- H. And this Jesus would save His people
 - 1. Not from the brokenness
 - 2. Not from the corruption
 - 3. Not from the dysfunction
 - 4. Not from the sickness and disease
 - 5. Not from the wars
 - 6. Not from natural disasters
- I. But He would save His people from the very cause of all these things

1. “You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins”

VI. **The Prophetic Promise**

- A. And then the angel roots this glorious divine vocation in a prophetic promise
- B. **Matthew 1:22–23** (ESV) —
 1. 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:
 2. 23 “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).
- C. Matthew is jealous to point out, whenever he can, that everything Jesus came for and did was rooted in the prophetic word
 1. The prophetic word which we know as the OT
 - a. Of course, in those days, it was simply the Bible!
 - b. The OT was the Jewish Bible
 2. And Isaiah had prophesied this very event in **Isaiah 7.14**
- D. So this child would have two names!
 1. It takes more than one name to capture the essence of what Jesus came to do
 2. He is **Jesus** – He will save His people from their sins
 3. And He is **Immanuel – God with us**
 4. The message is clear
 - a. Only God, coming in the flesh to be with us
 - b. Could possibly save us
 5. We could never save ourselves
 - a. We who are sinners by nature, could never save sinners from sin!
- E. And yet we still try
 1. We still pretend that we can manipulate our way out of our predicaments!
 - a. That by education
 - b. Or by political action
 - c. Or by technological innovation
 - d. Or by financial prosperity
 - e. Or by licentious liberties
 - f. Or by any number of idolatrous substitutes for God
 2. We still think we can pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps
 - a. And save our bacon
 3. It’s a fool’s errand
 - a. Because we sinners cannot save our sinful selves from our own sin
 - b. All we’ve got to go on is our sin!
 - c. It’s silly, isn’t it
- F. Jesus vocation was not to come as a cosmic Santa Claus
 1. He makin’ a list, checking it twice;
 2. Trying to find out whose naughty and nice!
- G. Jesus has a list, too
 1. But He doesn’t have to check it twice
 2. Because He already knows who’s naughty and who’s nice

3. He knows everyone is on the naughty list!
- H. Save One – Jesus only
 1. Only One from heaven
 - a. Altogether righteous
 - b. Coming in the flesh
 - c. To be with us
 - d. Can save us from our naughtiness, from our sin
 2. And that’s Jesus’ vocation
 - a. And that’s the prophetic promise
 - b. Isaiah’s promise

VII. **Responding to Immanuel**

- A. How did Joseph respond?
- B. **Matthew 1:24–25** (ESV) —
 1. 24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him:
 2. he took his wife, 25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son.
 3. And he called his name Jesus.
- C. Joseph did exactly what the angel told him to do
 1. He believed the messenger and the message
 - a. And obeyed the messenger and the message
- D. It’s interesting to contrast that response the circumstances surrounding the original prophecy by Isaiah
- E. Isaiah prophesied during the reign of Ahaz
 1. An unbelieving, wicked king of Judah
 2. And his prophecy, as most prophecies are, meant for both a near-term and long-term fulfillment
 3. What came to pass in the birth of Jesus was the long-term fulfillment
 - a. But it’s interesting to contrast the circumstances in the original context
- F. Two neighboring kings – Pekah, king of the northern kingdom of Israel, and Rezin, king of Syria, had conspired to attack the southern kingdom of Judah
 1. They marched toward Jerusalem with the intention of taking over the land
 - a. And installing a puppet king in Jerusalem
 - b. And dividing the land between the two of them
 2. So Ahaz was in a tough spot – and he knew it (**Isaiah 7.1-2**)
- G. But God is gracious
 1. And even though Ahaz is not a believer, God gave him a sign
 2. He said, “Don’t be afraid. The plan of Pekah and Rezin will fail” (**Isaiah 7.4,7**)
 3. But first, God, through Isaiah, warned Ahaz
 - a. “If you do not stand firm, you will not stand at all” (**Isaiah 7.9**)
 4. And then, God told Ahaz to ask God for a sign (**Isaiah 7.10**)
 - a. God would then give him a sign and assure him of deliverance
- H. But Ahaz, the unbeliever, wanted nothing to do with Isaiah or of God’s sign

1. He didn't believe God would deliver him
 2. He figured out a better plan
 - a. He would deliver Judah through his own clever manipulation of the geopolitical landscape
 3. He would appeal to the other great power in the region – Assyria
- I. Now he didn't want Isaiah to know about his plan
1. So he piously pretended to counter Isaiah's offer with a religious-sounding argument
 2. He said, "I won't ask for a sign. I will not put the Lord to the test" (**Isaiah 7.12**)
- J. Sounds good, doesn't it?
1. Surely, we're not to put the Lord to the test
 2. But in this case, God had already promised to give a sign
 - a. This wasn't putting God to the test
 - b. This was putting Ahaz to the test!
- K. And so, whether Ahaz wanted a sign or not, this is what God, through Isaiah, said:
1. **Isaiah 7:14** (ESV) —
 - a. 14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.
 2. He goes on to say that before the child would know right from wrong, the two northern kings would be destroyed (**Isaiah 7.16**)
 - a. And then God told Ahaz God would bring the king of Assyria (**Isaiah 7.17**)
 3. But when the king of Assyria would show up, he would be too much for Ahaz to handle
 - a. Assyria would be like a plague of flies, like bees swarming, like a river raging over the land (**Isaiah 7.18-19; 8.4, 7-8**)
 - b. In other words, "Be careful what you wish for, Ahaz. Your solution will eat you alive."
- L. God, you see, had offered Ahaz a gentle deliverance
1. But Ahaz wanted a military conqueror
 - a. He wanted Assyria
 - b. But Assyria would turn on him
- M. And then, God says something very interesting:
1. **Isaiah 8:7-8** (ESV) —
 - a. 7 therefore, behold, the Lord is bringing up against them the waters of the River, mighty and many, the king of Assyria and all his glory.
 - b. And it will rise over all its channels and go over all its banks, 8 and it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass on, reaching even to the neck, and its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land,
 - c. **O Immanuel.**"
 2. That's strange! "O Immanuel"

- a. What's God saying?
- N. God has offered a benevolent, merciful, gracious sign
 - 1. The virgin with child
 - 2. Immanuel – God with us
- O. But if you will not have this gracious, merciful Immanuel – God with us
 - 1. You will still have God with us
 - 2. You will still have Immanuel
 - a. But you will have Him for judgment
 - b. And not for salvation
- P. Your choice is, what will you do with Immanuel?
 - 1. Will you believe the sign, as Joseph did?
 - a. Adopt Jesus into your family?
 - b. Jesus, who would save His people from their sins?
 - 2. Or will you reject the sign, as Ahaz did
 - a. And find Immanuel, God with us, to be a devastating presence
 - 3. For you cannot escape Immanuel