**Matthew 1:18-25 (ESV)**

**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.

**“God Amidst A Mess”**

 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. If celebrating Christmas means focusing on family, then the natural topic that also comes with it is marriage. It is hard to miss the constant attacks seeking to redefine marriage to fit the times. No less, is it a sad fact how fewer men and women find much value in marriage for one another. Worse than a TV family taking heavy hits last week over words calling a certain way of life sinful, there is a much more painful problem. It rests in how God from the beginning established marriage by His goodness. Jesus as God promised in the flesh for sinners confirmed it all saying, “But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh” Mark 10:6-9.

 What we are dealing with over marriage effects how we celebrate Christmas. It is not merely facing the Law, but finally and always what exists in in the Gospel. In other words, marriage is more than a structure. At the heart is a promise far more than what a man and a woman pledge to each other, but what comes from God. Strangely enough, after laying out the Genealogy of Jesus Christ and his family line, the first story St. Matthew takes up in his Gospel account is marriage. Joseph and Mary were engaged to each other. Back then, it was almost like being married and lasted longer than nine months to verify the purity of a lawful marriage. Of course, in order for God to bring fulfillment to His promise of the Savior. This was going to cause a little mess and it happed to fly in the face of Joseph. Yet, the Word turned his heart just as it can with any who has ears to hear the Gospel. God amidst a mess gives us the answer of Jesus.

 Mary knew right from the start that she carried the Son of God. This is what she rejoiced over later with Elizabeth at her home concerning the whole matter. However, Joseph was not so fortunate with how he took it. He did not deny the Old Testament promise of God sending a Savior. The question is just, “How could he swallow that this was happening before him with Mary?” His reaction is what any man would do being skeptical about the whole situation that simply had only one answer. He knew that in this case, Old Testament Law required divorce for such adultery. Joseph did not seek the “pound of flesh” he could have taken in seeking justice. His compassion recognized Mary and her child would face death by stoning if there was not a quite outcome. What Joseph did not see in such a broken marriage was the exception to the rule. There was one promise shining out of the darkness. God would become flesh, a human being clothed like us in all humility.

 Jesus answers the divorce caused by sin. It is bigger than marriages ending badly or living in bad marriages. Original sin is the sickness. The source goes back to Adam and Eve. This Fall was the “Great Divorce” not merely between people, but with God. This separation could never be reestablished, sought out, or mended by us. All sinners do is run in fear from God, the Law, death, and yes, even each other. Mary’s child is God in human flesh. It is a preposterous claim. It is an unrepeatable event. It opposes the rules of life. This doctrine of God becoming man is called “The incarnation.” Here is the foundation for all Christians. We confess of Jesus that, “He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary…” God comes to us, cares to dwell in our flesh, and be with us in His righteousness. Worse than our conception carrying the curse of sin, is not having the promise that One has come who is God. “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.”

 God would straighten out the mess that Joseph could not manage as man. Unlike parents who pick out a name for their child, Joseph had to attach a name to a face that was not his son. The angel told him, “…you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” Joseph was from the line of David, but that family was full of bad fruit. The sinful ways of man over the years made a mess of it. Yet, where even good kings failed to redeem Israel Joseph would not need biology to achieve triumph. This Son of David would in faith hand over his legal right of kingship to Mary’s Child by naming him Jesus. They key was not in the naming but in the fact that God had come. Plenty tried to name their kids Jesus during that time, but slapping a name on someone does not cut it. The angel defined the name “Jesus” as the one “who would save his people from their sins.” Since only God in the Old Testament ever redeemed Israel, the unborn child of Mary was God, Immanuel, facing the eternal enemies of sin and death.

 Jesus answers the unity of love God shows to save. It is deeper than a one-flesh union of a man and a woman until death. This is the promise that God becomes man. New faithfulness comes in Mary’s child. The Creator takes into Himself His creation. Jesus has both a divine and human nature. He is God and He is man. This personal union is permanent. Jesus is our substitute fulfilling the Law’s demands. He voluntarily humbled himself in order to redeem all by One sacrifice. The resurrection of Jesus is icing on the cake compared to the love of God being born of the Virgin Mary. This faithfulness from the God/man Jesus Christ tells us at the Lord’s Supper that He is Immanuel. He says, “This is my body, this is my blood given and shed for you.” Forgiveness won by Jesus is the Gospel with Baptism joining our flesh to Him who delivers. St. Paul knew this relationship, “We have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ…”

 Once God made known His place among men in meekness to save sinners, Joseph saw no harm to take Mary as His wife. It turned into an act of faith toward God and suffering out of love for another. Mary probably was in shock over the immediacy of his efforts after the dream. There was no more “considering these things” for God has spoken His Word confirming the Word become flesh. The New Testament never mentions any words spoken by Joseph. After the opening story from Matthew, he just ends up hard at work watching out for Mary and her child. The man had to bring them to Bethlehem, flee from Herod to Egypt, and finally return to Galilee. Who knows the details, but we do know one word Joseph spoke. “And he called his name Jesus.” Here was the source of service for the adopted father of God’s Son and the husband of Mary.

 Jesus answers the life we have is to trust in Him.What began as a marriage crisis had better news by the Gospel. Forgiveness far exceeds the pain caused by the problems in marriage. Jesus forgives all of us in His Church promising baptism has made us His Bride without spot or stain. This is the great exchange that has taken place with God becoming man. Luther tells us, “Down here on earth all people have the honor that God’s Son has assumed their flesh and blood. But the spiritual and eternal fruit of this birth belongs only to Christians” (Postils Vol. 5 136). Like Joseph, we are to believe in the name of Jesus. He saves His people from their sin. After Immanuel suffered, died, and rose Peter later proclaimed, “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” Acts 4:12. Two becoming one flesh is a promise for this old creation and if rejected is not very promising. Yet, God has become man joining Himself to save sinners and that makes Him the greatest promise. God amidst a mess gives us the answer of Jesus. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.