

Title: Call his name Jesus
Text: Matthew 1.18-25
Theme: The birth of the King
Series: Matthew #2
Prop Stmt: The King/Savior who has come, must be received by faith.

Read Text:

We are baseball fans in my family. Of course we are football, basketball, hockey and NASCAR fans as well, but we really like baseball. When the Tigers traded center fielder, Curtis Granderson a few years ago, we were crushed. Cathi literally cried. We thought of Curtis like a son. We always wanted to have him over for dinner. He just seemed that he would really enjoy that. Now, if you get traded to another team, even if it is a team as vile and repulsive as the one to which he went, (the name of which I will not mention out of respect for this pulpit), the fans will be understanding. When Curtis comes back to Comerica Park and plays, he is received warmly and for many it is a bittersweet reunion. However, if a player renounces his team and joins another or, perhaps even worse, transfers schools in order to join that school's rivals then, the abuse and scorn that is heaped upon this player is without mercy and without end. It is therefore a bit mind-boggling that this guy, Matthew writes a book about Jesus and he writes it with a Jewish audience in mind, though certainly not exclusively. Matthew, whose name was likely Matthew Levi, was the son of a man named Alphaeus. Matthew, a Jew, with training in writing as a scribe, was hired as a tax collector. He worked for Herod Antipas who was awarded the throne by Caesar. In other words, Matthew worked for the enemy who occupied Israel and took advantage of their occupation as an opportunity to get rich. As much as Rome was hated, Matthew was hated even more. Therefore, this gospel that we call Matthew is itself evidence of grace and a demonstration of the power of Christ to change lives.

While Matthew tells the story of his encounter with Christ and subsequent conversion (9.9), he does not belabor it. In fact, he does not claim authorship of this book, although it was well-known in the early church that he had written it. I am very excited to preach through this book. I feel like a dad who is taking his family on the vacation of a lifetime. I cannot wait for you to journey through this book with me because in this book we will see our Savior. And I know the joy that awaits those of you who have not yet trusted in Christ. I also know the warmth and comfort that awaits those of you who have trusted in Christ and are still learning just how incredible your King and Redeemer really is. I am convinced that as Matthew put his scribal training to use in the years that followed his actual time with Christ to write this account that Matthew's amazement of Jesus and resolve to tell the world about him only increased because of what Matthew continued to discover. Over and over in this gospel Matthew goes back to the OT, and particularly to Isaiah to show that Jesus was the one that the OT pointed to.

Cambridge astrophysicist, Brandon Carter, popularized the anthropic principle back in 1973. This "is the philosophical consideration that observations of the physical Universe must be compatible with the conscious life that observes it." In other words, this is the

observation that the earth is remarkably fine-tuned for human life. Now, an evolutionist would say, "of course it is." The only life that could evolve and survive would be a life form that is compatible with its surrounding. But several years ago now, Patrick Glynn, PhD from Harvard wrote a book entitled *God: The Evidence*, in which he explored this a bit more and laid out the facts of the phenomena around us. While gravity is a force, it has a strength that is neither too great, nor too small, but is just right. Nuclear force, the difference in mass between a proton and neutron, and other matters all work in perfect harmony for life to exist. Even the slightest change in our universe, could cause stars to explode and other consequences that would destroy life. The evidence is clear that someone went to ridiculous lengths in order to create a setting that is designed for one thing, and that is, to sustain human life. And we look at that and say, of course! God made the universe as the neighborhood for the earth and the earth as the planet for people and people in order to know him and reflect him. When you read Matthew, you realize that he is looking at the entire OT and therefore the history of the world and realizing that all of this has existed and all of these things have happened to prepare the world for this one man, the God-man Jesus Christ. All of the clues are in place. In our study of this gospel, I am praying that you will really come to know Jesus. You will never know who Jesus is, until you are willing to accept and admit to what you really are. At the same time, you will never understand who you really are, until you know who Jesus is.

As you can imagine, this text (1.18-25) receives a great deal of attention but, it is often disconnected with what follows. This passage is 1 of 5 fulfillment passages that tells us of God, who became man, and what happened around his birth into this world. (1.22; 2.5, 15, 17, 23) This event, and all of its detail, was meticulously planned by God from the beginning of time. The evidence of this is seen in these references that Matthew makes back to the OT in order to show that the events that happened then were pointing to, or foreshadowing, or a picture of another event that was going to happen, namely the coming of the King to the world. This is part of the reason why I absolutely love to preach the Bible to you. We not only live in a world that, for the most part, has no real sense of purpose, nor sense of connection with anything that is truly meaningful. But history is like a stream, that not only carries us along in time, but it is carrying us with a goal in mind. This is why we, as a church are so passionate about the entire Bible. This is why we study the Bible, starting with the beginning of a book and going to the end of that book. There is a flow. There is a destination that you get to see. And when you see it, it not only awakens your soul to the amazing providences of God, but you get to see that history itself has a purpose. History is not, as it is often taught, simply a random collection of events. Oh no! These events have a message. These events are all part of one story. But, here is the tension and it is a big one. Most people would rather live meaningless lives, chasing empty dreams, instead of acknowledging and accepting the story. Why is that? If you accept the story, that means that you have to surrender to the One who planned, wrote, and is carrying out the story. We see this clearly even in this text. These events are part of a message that forces the hearer to make a decision. And these verses have all of these little nuances and subtleties in them that highlight this message. It really is fascinating. Here is the message that we are going to see: The King/Savior must be embraced by faith. What I have just said, is highly offensive and therefore, extremely controversial. The offense and controversy is not new. Every person

in the history of the world who has been a genuine follower of God has been offensive to the world around him and controversial. The message is controversial because God designed, from eternity past, an exclusive plan by which, and only by which, any person can be rescued from sin. This is not only spoken of here in this text, but it is illustrated in the life of Joseph.

1. **This is a mess!!** (18-19)

There are a couple of cultural matters that you need to be familiar with that will be helpful in understanding what is going on here. Most marriages in those days were arranged by the parents. As such, men often married younger women. The betrothal was very unlike an engagement. Our engagements tend to be romantic events where the guy now has to hire an event coordinator to stage an elaborate evening that leads up to this moment when he finally asks her to marry him. Then, the wedding date is established, and then the couple spends the next 18 months fighting about every detail that you can possibly imagine as everybody in the world is telling them what their wedding is supposed to look like. As you probably know, I have a lot to say about that whole deal, but will resist the urge since it really isn't germane to the text. But, if you ask me about it sometime I will happily share it with you. In fact, I may share that with you whether or not you ask me about it. At any rate, that may be an engagement, but that is not a betrothal. A betrothal is when the man, along with his parents, perhaps just his dad approach the father of the girl and they negotiate for the girl. In a good situation the dad makes sure that the man is a good man, and that the man can provide for his daughter. Then the man pays the father a bride price. After all, the father is losing a worker in his home and should be compensated for that. This arrangement is formally recorded in the public records and the couple is married. She may or may not know anything about it. Girls are completely at the mercy of their fathers. This custom is still followed in many countries, particularly in Muslim cultures, though certainly not exclusive to them.

A man and woman are betrothed. They are married, although they are not yet living with and experiencing the benefits of marriage. Today, you can break off an engagement. You cannot call of a betrothal. You are married. The only way to be separated is to be divorced. So, imagine the scandal when it is discovered that Mary is pregnant while Joseph and Mary are betrothed and they have not yet consummated the marriage. At least that is what he is saying and obviously what she is saying as well. It is not just a scandal about Mary, it is a scandal about Joseph. And now, the pressure, the family pressure, the cultural expectation, the embarrassment, the wagging heads, the beady eyes, the condemning looks create a pressure that is next to impossible to face. In the eyes of the community, Mary has brought shame upon Joseph and on his family and Joseph is expected to act in order to restore dignity to his family's name. The honor has been desecrated. The bloodline of the kings has been shamed. What will Joseph do?

I knew a married couple from that region of the world. In the early days of their marriage, she had been unfaithful to him and they were trying to work through the debris that was left. One of the complicating factors was this issue of family honor. In order to restore honor, he was expected, by his family to murder the man who had been unfaithful with

his wife. The pressure that this husband was under was intense. These were the laws of his family and culture. These were the truths that defined them and held their people together for hundreds of years. It was pressed deeply into him that he must do this, and now, as a follower of Christ, the Scripture calls for him to respond radically different. What would he do? This is the dilemma that Joseph is in. Shame, honor, family, culture, all demanded that he follow the law. What is he going to do? Joseph is a just man. He is a righteous man. That does not mean that he is perfect, it simply means that he is a man of good character, one who seeks to abide by the law. But he is in a mess. How can he express compassion without shaming his family? How can law and love be satisfied? Joseph “resolved to divorce her quietly.” I doubt that it would satisfy everyone, but it was the course of action that he determined to do. God had other plans.

2. **Here is the truth.** (20-23)

In v.18, Matthew says that Mary was found to be with child from (by means of) the Holy Spirit. Of course, at the moment, Joseph does not know this. So, God tells him. God, through the angel (presumably Gabriel, Luke 1.26) tells Joseph what is going on with Mary and when he does this, he tells Joseph something that has never, ever happened before. What he hears go against everything that he knows about how these things happen. And it goes against what anyone has heard as well. The statement by the angel has 3 promises and 2 commands that are linked to the promises.

a. **The promises**

- i. That which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

When the angel addresses Joseph, he calls him, “son of David.” Wow! Here is an angel from God who reminds Joseph of his lineage. And of course, that means that God has not forgotten his promise to David, that from his line will come a king who will live and reign forever and ever, though obviously, the sons of David had fallen on hard times. This is all that we are told of this encounter. Joseph could, obviously have been so overwhelmed by the appearance of the angel that at the moment he was not thinking of all of the implications of what the angel was saying, but every word mattered. The line of David, the line of the kings has not been broken. I also think that this is extremely significant for another reason. This book begins with a list of the kings. One of those kings, one of those sons of David, was Ahaz, who was the king of Judah around 730BC. God sent his word to Ahaz, but it was not through an angel, it was through the prophet Isaiah. Ahaz was in a mess. He was being threatened by the Northern Kingdom of Israel who was in an alliance with Syria, and they had sworn themselves to destroy Ahaz and Judah. Ahaz is trying to figure out what to do, when God tells Ahaz to trust God. Ahaz refuses. As a son of David, he disgraces David, he disgraces the line of the kings, he is colossal failure. Now, 730 years later, a similar scene is played out with another son of David. Only this son of David, Joseph, does not look like a son of David. He is a poor man, who generates no notice. And yet, he illustrates another truth that is woven throughout the Bible. God’s plan does not depend upon powerful people to do God favors. God works through humble people who will simply believe him. As we are going

to see, this son of David does what that son of David, Ahaz does not. God told Ahaz that a virgin would conceive and bear a son and that before the boy was old enough to know right from wrong that Judah's enemies would be soundly defeated. The virgin that this original promise from Isaiah 7 referred to was, I believe a young woman whom Isaiah married, and who conceived and gave birth to a son, that is recorded in Isaiah 8. This would be a sign from God to Ahaz designed to call Ahaz to trust in God. Ahaz refused to believe God. But, Joseph takes a different path, even though the promise from God is not that a girl who is a virgin now will conceive, by means of getting married and being intimate with her husband, but that promise then pointed to a greater promise, and one that is even more amazing. This virgin, Joseph's betrothed is already pregnant. Which means that event during Isaiah's day took place in order to point to this event that involves Joseph and Mary. That is exactly what Matthew records in 22-23. This is one of those, "you've got to be kidding me" moments. All of that then, and everything before and after happened to bring the world, including Joseph and Mary to this very moment.

Now, I have not given much attention to the actual statement, regarding her conception being from the Holy Spirit. I should point out, that although we often refer to this as the virgin birth, that is technically incorrect. This is the virgin conception. At this point, that is all that the angel says. He does not explain that this is the means that God designed so that Christ could be the God-man. By means of the Holy Spirit, Christ's conception would have God as his father and Mary as his mother, and Joseph, and the kings as his legal line on earth. As the infinite God, holy and righteous in every way, he was able to pay the eternal payment for our sin. As a man, he was able to be credited with the sins of humans, because he was a human who could now represent us. It was an ingenious plan of God that man had never thought of. Now, to Joseph it was revealed, although God did not tell him all of that.

ii. She will bear a son

The second promise is that Mary will bear a son. That means that Joseph would have a son who would be a son of David. Having a son means that a legal heir to the throne would be born. This is particularly acute since those who sat on Judah's throne were imposters. But, this is not just a son.

iii. He will save his people from their sins

This son of David, will do what neither David, nor any king since could do. Instead of saving the people from their enemies, this king would save them from themselves. He was going to save them from their sins. And right here, the stage is set. Do you want a king? To follow a king, means that he is the king and you are not. Do you want a king who will save you from your sin? That means that you cannot save yourself. That means that you cannot contribute to your rescue. You are the one who needs to be rescued. You are the one who is so deep, that you cannot get out. You will never understand Jesus, until you first understand that. Amongst these promises are two commands.

b. The commands

i. Do not fear to take Mary as your wife

The angel's use of these words "do not fear" point out that Joseph was going to pay a price if he went through with his plans to complete the marriage to Mary. This was not a situation of his choosing, but now, he has a decision to make. Now, it was not, whether or not he would stand with Mary, but whether or not he would take God at his Word. If he responded in faith to God's word, it would be seen in his completing the marriage. He would quite possibly be shunned and shamed along with Mary. Perhaps that is why the biblical account presents Joseph and Mary as being so alone during the birth of Christ. There are no family members around. Joseph and Mary had not sinned, but they would be treated as if they had. There is always a price to pay for believing God.

ii. Call his name Jesus

There are two aspects to this command. The first is that Joseph is commanded to name the child. For Joseph to do this would be for him, crossing a point of no return. If he names the child, then he is taking legal responsibility for this child. He is going to raise this child as his own. He is saying that this child is mine. The second part of the command has to do with the name itself. The name Jesus is like the name Joshua. They both mean that Yahweh is salvation. If Joseph calls the baby "Jesus", then Joseph believes that this child is the Redeemer. Savior, Jesus, would not be his only title. As Isaiah had predicted, "*they shall call his name Immanuel which means God with us.*" So, this is how it God had planned it. This is how God could be with us. This is how God could save us. This is how God could redeem us. This is how God could rescue us. He was sending a king who would save us from our sin.

Without a Savior, there are really only two options that you have. 1) Live as if there are no laws, no boundaries and no consequences. Give up and give in. Who cares? Many cultures have tried that, and they end up going out of existence. Many people have tried that and they destroy themselves. You can pretend that there are no laws, but they are in place by God. For example, sexual immorality is not only a sin against God, but it is a sin against your own body and against society. There is so much hatred and disgust at STD's because they function like laws. And many people hate them and want to live with no laws. But, it never works. But, what is the alternative? 2) Live under laws that are designed to control the behavior that is destructive to a culture. They do not work either. Laws only have control through the power of force or shame. Laws cannot change a heart. And many of you know that. You know that painfully. You have made promise after promise to yourself, and have tried to keep laws in order to correct behavior so that you could be a good Christian, and find that the same desires are still there, if not stronger. And what is worse is that over and over we find out that those who have the power to enforce the laws are often the ones who are breaking the laws. When people in a law-driven, shame-based culture (often religious subculture) discover hypocrisy in a leader, the result is often extreme shunning, or extreme anger. Shame is powerful. It may, through fear control some behavior, but shame is not strong enough to change a heart. Since law cannot change a heart, what does a person do, who cannot keep the law? There

are many, very devout people in this world who are miserable, because they are never good enough. All of our laws cannot save us. We need a savior. He has come.

3. **Who are you going to believe?** (24-25¹)

Jesus forces people to take sides. Who are you going to believe? What is Joseph going to do? To believe the angel would be to go against his family, his culture, and the way that his people have practiced the faith. While armies were marching, and seemingly important political decisions were being discussed that would affect empires, God's attention is on one poor man whose crisis was the occasion for the entrance of the Christ.

Joseph believed God's Word. He took Mary and took Jesus as his own. As we will see, it cost him. It always does. But it is always worth it. There is not much that is said about Joseph. After the trip to the temple when Jesus was 12, Joseph is not in any of the accounts. But, his belief in God's Word, and his belief in Christ was used by God to bring us a Savior. He has come and He is coming again.

¹ Roman Catholicism has erroneously taught a doctrine called the perpetual virginity of Mary. V. 25 exposes that false doctrine. It is not true that Mary was a virgin her entire life. She and Joseph happily enjoyed intimacy as a husband and wife and had 4 other sons and at least 2 daughters, as we will see in chapters 12 and 13.