



MT. ROSE REFORMED
ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

God With Us

Reverend Scott Johnson | December 14, 2025 | Matthew 1:18-25

Old Testament Reading

Our Old Testament reading is Isaiah chapter seven, Isaiah seven, verses 10 through 17. And this is the infallible, the holy, the inerrant word of God. Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, ask a sign of the Lord your God, let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. But Ahaz said, I will not ask and I will not put the Lord to the test. And he said, here then, O house of David, is it too little for you to weary men that you weary my God also? Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel. He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted. The Lord will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah, the king of Assyria.

New Testament Reading

And now let's turn to Matthew chapter 1, verses 18 through 25. This is our sermon text this morning, Matthew 1, 18 through 25. 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. And her husband, Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. 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. She will bear a son,

and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us. When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. He took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son, and he called his name Jesus. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

The Faithfulness of God in Keeping His Promises

Our theme for this Advent season, as we consider the birth of Christ, as that is given to us in the Gospel of Matthew, the theme that we are considering is the faithfulness of God, the faithfulness of God in keeping his promises. And last week, as we looked at the genealogy with which Matthew begins his gospel, we saw that even in that long list of names there, there are indications that God has been faithful to keep his promises. He kept his promises to Abraham. He kept his promises to David when he raised up the Lord Jesus Christ.

And this morning, we are giving our attention to Matthew's account, later in chapter one, the passage that we read of the conception and the birth of Jesus. And in this passage, the baby born to Mary is given two names. First, according to the commandment of the angel to Joseph, he is to be called Jesus. And secondly, he is called Emmanuel. This coming Lord's Day, we will consider the name of Jesus, but this morning we will focus on the meaning of the second name that he has given, Emmanuel. As Matthew tells us, Emmanuel in Hebrew means God with us. And so Jesus, as the fulfillment of God's promises to his people, the promise of God to be with his people, Jesus is the fulfillments of that word, that promise that God had made.

The Circumstances of Jesus' Birth

First I want to look with you at what the promise of Emmanuel meant to the people of Israel at the time that Jesus was born. And then we'll consider what the promise of Emmanuel means for you and me today as those who believe in and belong to the Lord Jesus. First of all, what did Emmanuel mean to the people of Israel?

Matthew says in verse 18, he says, Matthew says that Mary was betrothed to Joseph, and in that day, betrothal, that was an arrangement similar to what we call engagement today. And that is a man and a woman were committed to marry one another. But until, but during the betrothal,

they weren't actually married. They were not living together. They were not having marital relations with one another. But they had promised to marry one another. Now referred to a woman as being betrothed, but in fact, it was common for a girl, really, as young as 12 or even 13, to be betrothed to a husband in those days. And so Mary probably was a teenager, probably a very young teenager.

One major difference between betrothal and our engagement was that the level of commitment for a betrothed couple was considered to be on par with the commitment to marriage itself, or the marriage commitment was this betrothal was equal to that. And so if during the time of the betrothal, the man or the woman were found to be unfaithful, that was considered to be adultery. Basically, they had committed adultery. And the consequence of that was not just breaking up the betrothal, but it was in fact a divorce, even though they had not formally married or had come together as husband and wife. Nevertheless, unfaithfulness during that period was considered to be adultery, and therefore divorce was the solution.

Joseph's Internal Struggle

And so it was during this time of betrothal that Joseph discovered that Mary was pregnant. If we harmonize what the Gospel of Luke tells us about the circumstances of the birth of Christ with what Matthew tells us, it's likely that Mary was about four months pregnant by this time. And so she's starting to show that she is pregnant. And of course, Joseph noticed. And Joseph knew that he was not the father of the baby. What he didn't know, of course, was that the father of the baby was not another man, but the child had been conceived supernaturally, miraculously by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And his gospel gives us more details about this. The angel Gabriel says to Mary in Luke chapter one, verse 35, the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the most high will overshadow you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called Holy, the son of God. And so this child growing inside of Mary, unlike every other child who has ever been conceived, was not the son of a man or the child of a man, the product of a man and a woman coming together, but his conception was a supernatural conception. The Holy Spirit came over Mary in a mysterious way. We cannot fathom or begin to understand the spirits caused Jesus, the Son of God, to be conceived in the womb of Mary. And so the Son of God, at that moment of conception, took on human nature and became one of us.

Of course, Joseph had no idea of any of this, as far as he could tell. Mary had been with another man, and he assumed she had been unfaithful. And if that was all there was to this story, this would be nothing more than another sad example among an infinite number of examples of a broken promise, a betrayal. In this case, a woman who has betrothed to a husband, giving herself to another man and breaking that betrothal, being unfaithful. And that's exactly what Joseph thought had happened.

And it appears that Joseph had given this whole matter a lot of thought, a lot of consideration. What should he do about his predicament? What should he do about Mary, their betrothal? Matthew says in verse 20 that he considered these things. The wording suggests that Joseph was going through a very intense internal struggle with himself, an agonizing debate within his mind and heart. What should he do in this situation? And Joseph was torn.

For one thing, Matthew tells us in verse 19 that he was a just man. Joseph was a righteous man. He cared about the law of God. He cared about the righteousness of God. He cared about God's laws and God's morality and so on. And for that reason, he simply couldn't look the other way. He couldn't pretend that nothing was wrong when he found out what he had every reason to believe was Mary's unfaithfulness, he had to deal with it in a way that was just.

And according to the custom of betrothal, like I said, Mary would have been guilty of adultery, and the law for adultery was very, very strict. In fact, according to the Old Testament, the penalty for adultery was death, death by stoning. The Israelites could not carry out that penalty while they were under Roman rule because the Romans did not give them the freedom to execute people. But Joseph could have taken a different path. He could have pursued a divorce in a very public way, a way that would have brought much shame and disgrace upon Mary, a way that would have at the same time cleared his own name.

But here is where Joseph struggled, because we read also in verse 19 that he was unwilling to put her to shame. Joseph was just, he was righteous. But he also cared for Mary. He did not want to see her publicly disgraced. And so instead of choosing to shame Mary, to make her an example to others, he chose what was another legitimate option, and that was a quiet divorce. He would break up the betrothal, but he would do so in a way that would spare Mary the shame of public disgrace.

And so here's Joseph struggling with what had to be in his heart, a devastation, a sense of betrayal, a sense of broken trust, agonizing over what he should do, finally coming to the

decision that he will divorce her as discreetly as possible. And all of his consternation was because of what he thought was a broken promise, because he had been betrayed, because Mary had been unfaithful. And as he drifted off to sleep, after all these thoughts were running through his mind, maybe he even thought to himself how bitter it is to have trusted this person only to have her betray him in this way. Perhaps he even said to himself, I'll never trust another woman again, not after this. And he certainly wouldn't have been the first person or the last person to suffer the pain, the disappointments of being on the short end of a broken promise.

The Fulfillment of a Greater Promise

If that was what was going through Joseph's mind and the words that the angel who appeared to him in his dream, the words that the angel spoke to him would have been that much more significant and meaningful because the angel speaks to him of another promise, a far greater promise, a promise that God had made and a promise that God was about to make good on. In verse 20, Matthew says, 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.

Notice that the angel, when he addresses Joseph, he doesn't just say Joseph, but he calls Joseph son of David. He reminds Joseph that he belongs to the royal line of David, that he is a descendant of the great King David. And of course that would have brought to Joseph's mind all the promises that God had made to his people about the coming son of David, the king who would come from his line, the Messiah, the Christ, who was the hope of Israel, this great king whom God had promised, whom he would raise up to reign over his people in Jerusalem, to establish his just rule ultimately over all the earth. And God promised in the scriptures that this coming Christ would be a son of David.

And so by calling Joseph a son of David, he was bringing into Joseph's mind that great promise of God. And so Joseph, he goes to sleep that night, believing that he has been the victim of a broken promise. But when he wakes up, he knows that the opposite is actually the case. He is about to be witness or he's about to witness the fulfillment of a far greater promise, a promise kept God's promise to his people, Israel, to send them the Christ and wonder of wonders that promise would be fulfilled in the child who is now growing in the womb of his betrothed, Mary.

Matthew says in verses 22 and 23, all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us. As we heard from the Old Testament reading, this prophecy is from Isaiah, from the book of Isaiah. And Isaiah declared these words to King Ahaz of Judah as Ahaz and Judah were on the brink of almost certain disaster at the hands of two enemy nations. One was Syria and the other was the northern kingdom of Israel. And in declaring the word of the Lord to Ahaz, Isaiah said that God was going to deliver Judah from these enemies. And the sign of that deliverance, according to Isaiah, would be that a virgin would conceive and call her son Immanuel. And according to the prophecy, while Immanuel was still a young boy, the kingdoms of Syria and Israel would be vanquished. Verse 16 in Isaiah chapter seven, for before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted.

So a promise of deliverance from the enemies of Judah for King Ahaz. Now it's very difficult to say exactly how or even if this prophecy found immediate fulfillment in the days of Isaiah, but we can say this at least. The first thing that the name Emmanuel meant for the people of Israel was salvation, deliverance. The sign of Emmanuel was tied to Isaiah's prophecy to King Ahaz that Judah was about to be saved from her enemies. And with that in mind then, when Matthew says that Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Emmanuel, it meant that God was about to bring salvation to his people.

God with Us: Restoration of Fellowship

And so there is that level of meaning for the name Emmanuel, but there is a deeper level of meaning in this name as well, and that is, it is God's promise to be with his people, because that is what the name means, God with us, God with us. Now, there's a sense in which God is with all people, always, at all times, in all places, because of who God is, because of what he is. He is omnipresent. There is no place in all creation where God is absent. There is nowhere you can go in all the world, in all the universe, where you are outside of God's presence. And not only that, but God is fully present in every point of his creation, even in the tiniest imaginable spot of creation, there God is in the fullness of his deity. So although heaven and earth cannot contain the fullness of God, yet he is fully present at every point in his creation. Jeremiah 23, 24 says, can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him, declares the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth, declares the Lord.

So as far as the truth of God's omnipresence is concerned, he is everywhere, and therefore he is present with everyone. But the promise that God made to his people Israel was greater than that. It was greater that he would simply be with them because he is God. But he would be with them in a special way. His presence would be with them for their blessing, for their good. He would be with them to love them, to show his favor to them, to guide them, to be their God, to give them that communion and fellowship with him for which he created us.

And so the promise of God to be with his people Israel, this was a promise of grace, of mercy, because it meant that God would overcome the consequences of man's sin. If we go back to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, you'll remember that the curse for sin was to be banished from the presence of God, to be banished from the Garden of Eden in which God dwelt. The blessedness, the greatness of the Garden of Eden was not just that it was this amazing place with all of these trees that produced all of this wonderful, delicious fruit to eat. The supreme blessing of life in the garden before the fall was that God was there. It was his dwelling place. And so in the garden, Adam and Eve, before their fall, they had a free, a natural communion with the God who created them, the God who gave them life.

And accordingly, the death that God threatened to bring to Adam and Eve if they sinned against him was not only physical death, but it was fundamentally spiritual death. Spiritual death, which consisted of being banished from the loving, life-giving presence of God. And so after Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, they were expelled from the garden. They were cast out from the presence of God, and that was their spiritual death. They were banished from the gracious, life-giving presence of the Lord who created them. And that is the condition in which we are born. That is where we are by nature, apart from grace. We are outside of God's presence. We are banished from his gracious presence. And so we are physically alive, but spiritually we are dead because we are cut off from God. We're no longer able to enjoy that perfect communion and fellowship with him as our God. And so by nature, even as we live in this world, we are dead, spiritually dead, dead in sins, dead in trespasses, cut off from the presence of God.

And so at the very heart of all the promises that God made to Israel, the very heart of every promise, every covenant promise that God made to his people was that he would dwell among them. He would restore that communion with them that Adam and Eve enjoyed before they sinned against God and were cast out from his presence. And God would be with his people both in this life and in the life to come. That was God's promise. And so when Matthew says that Jesus was to be called Emmanuel in order to fulfill, verse 22, to fulfill what the Lord had spoken

by the prophet, that not only meant that God was about to accomplish a salvation for his people, but that salvation would consist in this, a restoration of the communion that they once had with God, that we once had with God before we sinned, and that was lost in the fall.

And so God would be with his people forever. And all then that was meant by Emmanuel, that God would be present with them. This was all to be fulfilled in this child who was growing in the womb of Mary. And so the promise of Emmanuel meant nothing less than the very undoing of the curse of sin, the full reconciliation between man and God, the restoration of that fellowship that God created us to enjoy with him forever.

Emmanuel for Us Today

And that's also the first thing that the promise of Emmanuel means for you and me today. It means, first of all, that God has brought us to himself in his son, Jesus Christ. And so if you belong to Christ by faith, you have been given the incomparable blessing of being brought into the loving, gracious presence of God, the God who created you, the God who gives you life. And that truly is the secret to finding true contentment, true joy, true peace as a Christian. It's not simply desiring and enjoying and seeking the gifts that God gives us or the blessings that God gives us, but it is seeking your greatest blessing, your greatest treasure, your life in that fellowship and knowing God himself. It is God himself that gives himself to us. And as you seek him, you will find your greatest joy and contentment.

At this time of year, we are very concerned about getting just the right gifts for our friends and family members. And for someone you love, there is no greater gift that you can give to them than yourself. Your presence, your time and attention, your love and concern, to be fully present and engaged in the life of someone you love, that really is the best gift that you can give them. Now, don't take that as a strategy for gift-giving this Christmas. Husbands, don't tell your wife on Christmas morning, honey, I'm your gift this Christmas. That may not go over so well, but when you consider it, giving a gift is really just a way of giving a little bit of yourself. When we give a gift to someone we love, a gift that is costly in terms of the sacrifice that we made to give that gift, we're giving ourselves in that gift.

And with that in mind, the incarnation of the Son of God is truly, truly God's giving Himself to us. There was no greater sacrifice than God made, that He could have made, than the gift of His Son. And in the person of his son, Jesus, God himself has come to us to be with us as our God

and Savior forever and ever. And so Jesus is our Emmanuel. He is God with us. He is present with us for our eternal blessing, for our eternal good. But he is only with those who come to him in faith. Only as you come to Jesus as your Savior from sin and death, only as you submit to him as your Lord is he Emmanuel, God with you.

In fact, there is another side to the promise of Emmanuel, and that is judgment. When Isaiah declared the words of the Lord to King Ahaz, that the sign that the Lord would give him was Emmanuel, it was on the one hand a sign of salvation that God would overcome the enemies of Judah, but at the same time, because Ahaz and the house of David did not believe in the word of the Lord, that very same sign would be a sign of their destruction. Isaiah says in verse 17, chapter seven, the Lord will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah, the king of Assyria. This was not a promise of deliverance. This was the opposite. This was a warning of future destruction. If Ahaz and the house of David did not believe the word of God, if they did not accept the sign of Emmanuel, and in the same way, for those who fail to receive Jesus Christ as the son of God, for those who fail to come to him, who do not believe that God has come to us in the person of Jesus, the very coming of God in his son Jesus will be the occasion for their condemnation.

That's exactly what the Lord says in John 3, 18. He says, whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only son of God. And so Jesus, as Emmanuel, as God with us, He is salvation for those who trust in Him, who submit to Him, who come to Him in faith. But for those who reject Him in unbelief, for those who continue to walk in sin, His coming will bring about their eternal condemnation and ruin. Can you say, I have believed in the Son of God. I have entrusted myself by faith to Him. Can you say that truly He is my Emmanuel, God with me? If you can't say that today, if you have not turned away from your sin, if you have not turned by faith to the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, through His word, God is calling you today. Christ is calling you today to come to Him, to come to Him for forgiveness, come to Him for salvation, come to Jesus for eternal life, that you may be restored to that communion, that fellowship with God for which God created you and which is eternal life.

The Sympathy of God

And so Emmanuel means, first of all, for us that in his son, Jesus Christ, God has brought us to himself forever and ever. The second thing that Emmanuel means for you and me is this, is that God sympathizes with us. because Jesus is God incarnate, because he is in that full sense, God with us, in the person of Christ, we can say then, in Christ, God himself, as he came incarnate to us, God himself has experienced the trials, the afflictions that you and I struggle with in this life. But the son of God, because of the incarnation, he knows what it means to be human. He knows what it means to know suffering and sorrow and pain.

God is no distant God who sits far off in the heavens and looks down on all the sorrow and grief of this world. And he can't identify because he has only known the joy, the bliss of heaven. But in his son, Jesus Christ, God has entered into our world. He has entered into our world of suffering and loss. As many of you know, the holiday season can be very difficult because you are reminded again, perhaps for some of you, it's especially hard because you are reminded of the loss of a loved one, someone who was there for so many Thanksgiving dinners, someone who was there on so many Christmas mornings, and now he's no longer there. Is the pain of the loss of a loved one, is that especially hard for you at Christmas time this year? Well, know that the Lord Jesus Christ, He who is true God, he himself has known the grief, the sorrow of losing a loved one.

Are you suffering physical pain because of sickness or injury or surgery? Jesus suffered physical pain and anguish. Are you grieved over the unbelief of those whom you love in your family who have not responded in faith to the gospel, who are outside of Christ, who are perishing in their sins? Jesus grieved over the unbelief of his own people. And God has come down to us in Christ Jesus. And as the God-man, he has known suffering. He has known suffering like no other human being has known suffering. And so he can be to us the God of all comfort. And so because He can be the God of all comfort because He is Immanuel, God with us.

The Eternal Presence of God

And finally, the third thing that the Immanuel promise means for you and me is this, is that God promises to be with you not only in this life, but for all eternity. The Gospel of Matthew, we read of this promise of Immanuel in the first chapter. We also read of it in the very last chapter, in the very last words. As the resurrected Christ before his ascension into heaven, as he's speaking to his disciples, he says in chapter 28, verse 20, and behold, I am with you always to the end of

the age. And so even at birth, he was Emmanuel. Before his ascension, he was Emmanuel, and he promises to be Emmanuel, God with us forever and ever.

And in the book of Revelation, there is a glorious picture of this truth, that God will be with his people for all eternity. Revelation 21, verse three, and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God. This is the true hope of Christmas. This is why as Christians, celebrate the birth of Jesus. The incarnation is an occasion for hope to increase our hope because of the promise that God is with us. He is with us always. He will be with us forevermore.

It seems like Christmas always comes so quickly, doesn't it? Every year around Thanksgiving, we all marvel at the fact that Christmas is already upon us. It's right around the corner. And it's a yearly reminder of just how short our lives are in this world. Where did the last year go? Where did the 12 months, they flew away, they flew by. The Bible says, and our own experience confirms it, that the typical lifespan for us is 70 or 80 years. But in Christ, you have something so much greater than even a full 80 or 90 or 100 years of life in this world. You have the promise of being in the presence of God, the loving presence, the gracious presence of God forever and ever.

And you can be sure of that promise. God was faithful to fulfill his promises to his people when he sent his son into the world. He was the fulfillment of every promise that God has made to His people. And if He was faithful then to keep His promises, He will be faithful to you. All the promises that He makes to you, He will make good on. He will be with you now in this life and forevermore for your good and for your blessedness for all eternity. Let's pray.