

Romans 1:1 Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God— 2 the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures 3 regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, 4 and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. 5 Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake. 6 And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

7 To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people:

Matthew 1: 18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. 19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:

23 "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25 But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

480 O come, O come Emmanuel

634 The angel Gabriel from heaven came

265 Hark the glad sound, the Saviour comes

631 Tell out my soul

God our redeemer, who prepared the Blessed Virgin Mary to be the mother of your Son:

grant that, as she looked for his coming as our saviour, so we may be ready to greet him when he comes again as our judge; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

22nd December 2013

Immanuel – God with us

Moulsford

Isaiah 7: 10 – 16 Romans 1:1 - 7 **Matthew 1:18 - 25**

Introduction

World seems out of control

Certainly out of God's control: financial situation, Afghanistan, rogue states like Syria or North Korea, continuing poverty, global warming....

So even as we celebrate the birth of Jesus, 2000 years ago, we might find friends asking us: *But what difference has the coming of Jesus really made ?*

Such doubts are not new:

When Matthew collecting material for Gospel, Jews were asking the same question: *We are still under Roman tyranny, what difference has the coming of Jesus really made ?*

So Matthew's chief concern to show that Jesus was indeed the Messiah for if that is true, then He makes all the difference in the world.

1. Jesus is the Messiah because, as promised, He is the Son of David

not just a descendant of David – after all Joseph is a *Son of David* but someone *like* David

the Messiah would complete what David had begun

David had freed his people from fear & oppression so would the Messiah destroyed the enemies of God's people so would the Messiah

ruled with justice and compassion so would the Messiah

David had ushered in a kingdom of peace so would the Messiah

2. Jesus is the Messiah because He is the Son of God

5 times Matt shows that Jesus not just the Son of David born at the right time but conceived by the Holy Spirit v. 18 *do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is **from the Holy Spirit.***

& 20 *but before they came together, she was found to be with child*

through the Holy Spirit.

v. 23 Mary was a virgin

v.25 Joseph had no union with Mary prior to J's birth

Name = **Immanuel** = God with us

Despite all appearances to the contrary: early Christians being fed to the lions or burnt alive:..... Immanuel: God with us

Despite the world being in a mess.... Immanuel: God with us

Maybe our own personal lives are in a mess – Joseph's certainly was:

(viz Jo's own personal situation: happily betrothed – all of sudden his beloved, pure, innocent Mary is pregnant.

Jo doesn't know who the father is, but the one thing he does know is that it isn't him. Either he divorces the girl he loves or he remains with her and

bears the stigma of being considered either immoral or a fool)
But the angel says *Joseph, don't be afraid,,,,,* Immanuel: God with us

3. Jesus is the Messiah because He is our true Saviour

v.21 You are to give him the name *Jesus* – Greek for *Yeshua = Yehoshua = Yahweh saves*

v. appropriate name for the Messiah whose job is to rescue & liberate Israel
His namesake **Joshua** had led God's people into the promised land.

In the same way Jesus' mission was to lead God's people into the promised land of God's kingdom

However, Matt links this with *Psalm 130: 8*

(the Lord) himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.

Israel was expecting a Messiah who would rescue them from their situation in the world. from their political and military enemies, the Romans

However, this was not the reason Jesus came....

He came to rescue us not from our enemies in the world but from our sins.

He came not to deal with human institutions but with human nature

Because as David Watson used to say: the heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart

What does all this have to say to us today?

1. God's planning is perfect

22 *All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet:* (phrase comes 12x in Matt's gospel)

Paul talks in our first reading about:

the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures 3 regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David,

What appeared at first to Joseph to be a total mess - his beloved fiancée Mary pregnant by someone else - was in fact all part of God's perfect plan.

A plan that had been foretold through the prophet Isaiah 700 years earlier and which had indeed been in the making since in the time of Abraham before the very formation of the nation Israel

c.f. Eph 1: 4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

2. Be open to the Spirit of God

Joseph had thought the best thing was to divorce Mary quietly.

It can't have been easy to accept what the angel was telling him.

It involved a whole new way of looking at the situation:

to realize this wasn't a disaster, but part of God's plan

But Joseph was open to hear what God was saying.

Sometimes things happen to us, which seem a total disaster,

but like Joseph we need to be open to hear what God is saying to us in the situation.

Often what seems like a disaster is part of God's perfect plan

And always **Immanuel** – God is with us.

3. Be obedient

Once Jo was able to see the situation through God's eyes, he was completely obedient.

God told Joseph through the angel: marry Mary – so Joseph did

God told Joseph through the angel: name him Jesus - so Joseph did

Scripture had said *a virgin will bear a child* – so Joseph has no union with Mary – until after Jesus is born.

Joseph realized that God was asking him, plain old Joseph,

to be involved in the most wonderful event in history.

Being obedient would not be easy –

people would think he was a fool or disobeying God by marrying an immoral woman - but this was a small price to pay for the glorious privilege of being intimately involved not only with God's plans, but with the Son of God himself.

We too are invited by God to be intimately involved in his Kingdom plans

It won't always be easy to obey. At times it will be costly.

But what a privilege: to see God at work first-hand

and all the time to be living in the company of His own dear Son.

To come back to my first question:

What difference does Jesus make to the world?

We have seen through Joseph how He makes all the difference in world to us as individuals if we, like Joseph, are open and obedient to him. And through such people, one by one, the world has been changed.

Through such faithful, open, obedient followers of Christ, huge changes have over time come into our world: hospitals and education, democracy, the abolition of slavery, prison reform, the universal vote, the hospice movement, countless charities and relief organisations, a peaceful society based not on fear but respect of each individual.

Of course there is still a very long way to go, but such change can only start with individuals responding, like Joseph, with openness and obedience to the Spirit of God.

Cut out from Moultsford sermon under

What does all this have to say to us today?

1. God's timing is perfect

Must have been many times in Israel's history when people thought why doesn't God do something now?

So Matthew starts gospel with a genealogy which shows

not only that Jesus a direct descendant of David (1:1)

but had appeared at just the right time

(could have had genealogy read but it is the season of goodwill)

Genealogy pivots on David. 3 x 14 generations = 6 weeks of generations

Jesus begins the 7th week i.e. God's jubilee week

Many historians: 0 BC = perfect time to have a global impact on human

history: single Greek language from Europe to India;

Roman infrastructure