

Matthew 1 18-25

Lets pray together now

Creator God,
Eternal Christ,
Reconciling Spirit

We gave thanks for the many ways in which You are present with us.
In times of joy, wholeness, love and hope.
As well as in times of fear, despair, longing, and brokenness.

We give thanks for what Your presence brings to our lives.
For the peace, grace, hope and reconciliation that can occur,
when we act out of Your larger, more loving story
and not out of the fears born out of our current circumstances.

At this advent time we thank You
for the transformative power of Emmanuel, God with Us.
Amen

We heard Matthew 1 -18-25 it is one of the lectionary readings for today and a classic Christmas passage. It is a powerful illustration of God's plan for Jesus birth – the long journey taken by his chosen people to bring them to that turning point in history. The opening verses of the Gospel of Matthew that we didn't hear today give us a long genealogy that dates back through the generations to bring the Saviour into this one special family. Matthew writes that to stress the fact that Jesus is in the line of David.

He is called Son of David repeatedly by Matthew the author and by the common men met by Jesus in ministry, the Jews at the time are a waiting people, although their history was one long series of disasters and at that time they were subject to occupation once again. They are Gods chosen people, and it is the dream of the common man that a descendant of David would come and lead them to Glory.

We have just had a most excellent nativity

Thank you to all the actors

But the traditional nativity we have is a beautiful mash up of Mathew and Luke giving two perspectives on the same event picking up on different things, in the next chapter of Matthew we meet the wise men but here in the passage we have just read Jesus is born, no shepherds, inn keepers, animals or stable. But there is an angel who appears to Joseph in a dream. A lot of this passage is about Joseph.

About the difficult situation he finds himself in, but his situation is a bit confusing to us here in Kinross 'the Good news' version we just heard from has to change the language for us, to help it make sense in our context. We hear he wants to break his engagement quietly, but even though they aren't married he actually has to legally divorce her. The custom at the time was for there to be an engagement, which might happen when the couple were little children, then there was a betrothal which lasts for one year, before this betrothal the engagement could be broken if the parents, the man or woman didn't want to go ahead with it but afterwards it was legally binding, it is in this betrothal period we find Joseph and Mary, Mary is legally Joseph's wife, but she remains in her fathers house. The marriage is complete when the husband takes the wife into his home.

We are told Joseph didn't want to disgrace Mary so instead of a public trial he is considering the allowable alternative of a private divorce before two witnesses. But he has a dream, explaining that it is by the Holy Spirit that Mary conceived and to name the boy Jesus. Names especially divinely revealed names, are full of meaning and significance. Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, meaning he will save or Jehovah is salvation. We have in the passage 'name him Jesus – because he will save his people from their sins.' This is a OT hope and expectation for the coming Messiah but not the dominant one, here we have the earliest warning from Matthew, God is doing a new thing, do not expect a king who will be a national liberator. The salvation of God. has come in Jesus who is the man born to save.

Jesus was 'Born of the Holy Spirit.' What we call the virgin birth. The point of the passage is not that Mary was a virgin, it is that the birth of Jesus is the work of the Holy Spirit. We hear in the preamble 'Mary was found to be pregnant through the holy spirit' and in the dream 'it is by the holy spirit she has conceived'

In Jewish thought the Holy Spirit had certain very definite functions, we shouldn't think of the Christian Holy spirit in all its fullness because Joseph would know nothing about that, I just finished a Church history essay and people were still arguing fighting and killing over ideas about the Holy spirit in the 4th century.

All Joseph knows is the Jewish idea of the Holy Spirit so what was that?

According to the Jewish idea the holy spirit was the person who brought Gods truth to men: taught the prophets what to say, taught the men of God what to do, throughout the ages and generations the Holy Spirit brings Gods truth to men. So now, Jesus born of the spirit, is the one person who brings Gods truth to us. More than that Jesus is the one person who can tell us what God is like, and what God means us to be. Before Jesus came men only had vague and shadowy often wrong ideas about God but Jesus could say 'he who has seen me has seen the father'

the time of guessing is over the time of certainty has come in Jesus. we will see true manhood, true goodness, true obedience to the will of God. Jesus comes to tell us the truth about God and the truth about ourselves.

The Jews also believe the Holy Spirit not only brings truth it enabled men to recognise that truth when they saw it. Our lives are quite different when Jesus teaches us how to look at things, when he enters our hearts, he opens our eyes to see things as they truly are.

The Jews specially connected the Spirit of God with the work of creation. It was through his Spirit God performed his creating work. In the beginning the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters separating order from chaos. 'The Spirit of God has made me' said Job. The psalmist says of all creatures 'when you send your spirit they are created'

The Spirit is the creator of the world and the giver of life. In Jesus the man born of the Holy Spirit, comes life giving power. The power that turned Chaos into order comes to earth to bring order to our chaotic lives. The power that breathed life into creation itself comes in Jesus to breathe life into us, into our weakness comes his power. Jesus says as a man 'I have come that they may have life, and have it in all its fullness'

The holy spirit is connected in not only with the work of creation but the work of re-creation. Ezekiel's valley of dry bones. When men are dead in sin and apathy it is the spirit of God that can waken them to new life. Jesus can bring life to the dead, bring life again to every soul that is dead in sin. He can bring life here to Scotland where many people have lost all concept of what life means, he can recreate the human soul when it has lost the life it ought to have.

The dream Joseph had with a visit from the angel of the Lord naming the Holy Spirit, is enough for him to put aside his shock, disgust, embarrassment and take Mary to be his wife, in naming Jesus he 'makes him his son' this is vital to God's plan written before the ages, the last person in that long lineage Matthew started with is Joseph. Jesus' line to David is through Joseph and this moment of him accepting him as his son.

The last thing I want to talk about today is 'Isaiah' did you notice it? Verse 22 – 23 ' all this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Immanuel'

That prophet is Isaiah and the reference is Isaiah 7:14 where he says just that.

Immanuel means 'God with us' its not his name they didn't call him that, but it is his role, bringing God's presence to mankind. Jesus meaning 'He will save' is Immanuel meaning 'God with us'. The salvation from sin Jesus provides results in God with us forever, with us like never before, the curtain torn, the world restored. The culmination of OT hopes and prophesy, the pinnacle of the narrative arc of the whole old testament, all God's promises fulfilled. In Jesus, God with us, to put right what once went wrong and save us from sin and death forever.

God comes to Earth to Mary and Joseph through the holy spirit and every year we commemorate it by reading familiar stories. Lets every year try to read them with fresh eyes so we don't lose sight of what an amazing thing God did for you and for me. In being with us in the flesh that first Christmas.

Amen

