

The One Who Would Have a Miraculous Birth

sermonaudio.com

God's Plan for Our Messiah

By Dustin Folden

Bible Text: Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18-25

Preached On: Sunday, December 8, 2013

Faith Church

5526 State Road 26 E

Lafayette, IN 47905

Website: <http://www.faithlafayette.org/church>

Online Sermons: <http://www.sermonaudio.com/faithlafayette>

Let me ask you a question: do you ever make plans and they just don't quite work out? Okay, good, I'm not the only one in the auditorium who does that. One example of that was the day after Thanksgiving, my father-in-law and I were planning to hang some speakers from the ceiling because the previous house owner that we bought the house from, had all the speakers wired up in the ceiling. So it was all ready to go, minimal work and my speakers mount on the wall so I had these wall mounted speakers and my father-in-law and I were trying hang them from the ceiling using wall mounts. We're trying to use wall mounts on the ceiling. You can already tell that our plan is not teed up quite right. But we came up with a really creative plan that required one long screw we had to go buy, that was it. It was a very creative plan; it was a good plan. So, it was simple, it was cheap and it used most of what we already had. So, no hardware store, the Friday after Thanksgiving, had the thread needed so the day after Thanksgiving we are going to all these different stores. It was not a great idea and we didn't find it. It was not an A-Team moment. The plan did not come together. It was a good plan, we just didn't pull it off.

Has that ever happened to you? You had a plan and it just didn't come off how you wanted it to? Maybe it was a family get together and afterwards you said, "That just didn't go how I was envisioning it." Maybe it was a project and you're all done and you looked at it and you're like, "It didn't turn out how I wanted it to." Or maybe a trip you took and you just weren't able to visit the things you wanted to see. Your plans just weren't fulfilled. I think all of us can look back at examples, maybe even this week, how something we planned just didn't come to fruition, it just didn't work out.

The good news is: God's plans are not like our plans. What God plans to do, he does. Oftentimes, in amazing Technicolor so that we can see and rejoice and give him all the glory. Last week, Pastor Viars began a series entitled "God's Plan for The Messiah." Theologically we know that God had a plan from the very beginning of time. What's so shocking and, frankly, amazing is that God revealed his plan on page 2 of our Bibles. At the very beginning, all the way back to the Garden of Eden, God gives us a promise that one day his people can expect to be fulfilled. In Genesis 3:15, we learn that one day there will be a person who would crush the head of the serpent. At the cross, you can actually hear the bones breaking. Remember how Pastor Viars spoke about crushing the head of

the serpent. Crrrrr, making that sound, it's just fun to do. It's a good family activity. Read Genesis 3 and see who can make the best face and the best sound in mimicking crushing the head of the serpent as we rejoice in the promise at the start on page 2 in your Bibles.

As fun as that is to do, it's not the end of God revealing his plan and it's my hope, as we look at the Scriptures this morning, we will stand amazed at the detail, at the careful planning of God as we learn from each component of it. Most importantly this morning, I hope that what you see and learn and observe from God's word energizes your faith, causes you to move closer to God. So this morning we're going to consider another element of God's plan for the Messiah. Not only would the Messiah crush our enemy, he would also have a miraculous birth.

I want to invite you to open your Bibles to two passages this morning. First, turn to Isaiah 7. It's on page 491 of the front section of your Bible. Once you get there, mark that spot, hold it with your finger, and then turn to Matthew 1:18. That's on page 1 of the back section of your Bible. Let me read, starting in Isaiah 7:14 and then we'll jump over to Matthew and read 1:18-25.

“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.”

We'll come back to this verse later on. Flip over to Matthew 1. Look at verses 18-25.

“18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. 19 And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. 20 But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of 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 Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 23 ‘Behold, the Virgin shall be with Child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which translated means, ‘God with us.’ 24 And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, 25 but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.”

Now as we consider these texts, I want us to focus on three fitting responses to the miraculous birth of Christ. Notice the phrase “fitting responses.” As your faith is energized by these truths, as you dig into the word, as it nourishes you, it is to result in discernible action. There is supposed to be a response to what we read.

The first response is to praise God. Praise God because Jesus was conceived through the work of the Holy Spirit. I mean, we see that in Matthew. “Now the birth of Jesus Christ

was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.’”

Matthew paints us a picture of God’s plan. We see a woman and a man who are betrothed. When you think of betrothal, think of engagement but on steroids. It was strong. You had to actually get divorced to break a betrothal. It was strong. So you can just imagine the happy scene of two people being betrothed. You know, they’re picking out the venue, picking out the tablecloths, whether to have goat or lamb at the reception. I mean, what are they going to have? But there’s one problem: betrothed girls are not supposed to be pregnant. We learn this is not a normal pregnancy. Somehow, the Holy Spirit has done an amazing work, a miraculous work.

But Joseph didn’t get the memo. He doesn’t know this and he makes plans. He’s planning to send Mary away but we see all of a sudden here, God having a different plan and he reveals this to Joseph and Joseph submits to God’s plan. You see, what God plans, he does and his plans govern the day and he’s willing to change other plans to bring his about. That’s what you get with Joseph: he changed Joseph’s plans because he had a plan and he planned to bring about the birth of Jesus in a miraculous way.

There are two important aspects to point out of this miraculous birth. Because the Holy Spirit is involved, Mary’s purity is ensured. This is a very important part as we focus on the reality of the situation, how God gets the glory and how we’re to praise him as we analyze this. Mary was pregnant with a child out of wedlock and, apparently, it was obvious.

Notice how it says Joseph was “a righteous man.” This doesn’t mean he was perfect; it doesn’t mean he was sinless. It’s just Matthew’s way of saying he was an upright man, he was a godly man, a man who was careful to follow the Scriptures, a man who was concerned about the sanctity of marriage but was also compassionate to not make a public scene and disgrace his betrothed even though it appears she conceived a child out of wedlock. You see, Mary’s purity is under scrutiny and you didn’t need a microscope to see it. Ultimately, the natural conclusion was that Mary was unfaithful so he was going to send her away because this was a serious issue.

How serious was it? Well, this comes up in the gospels. You look at the Pharisees debating with Jesus, look at John 8 where they say to him, “Where is your father?” He’s talking about his Father, God the Father, and they’re basically saying, “Where is your father?” And later they say in John 8:41, “We are not born of fornication. We have one Father, God.” They are basically saying, “We know who our father is.” It’s not a very subtle jab at Jesus. They say, “No one knows who your father is.” But we do: God was the Father. And because God was the Father, Mary remained sexually pure despite

carrying a baby. This was part of his plan, part of his amazing plan that a virgin would conceive.

God was able to do something even more significant as well. The Spirit's involvement ensures that Jesus was not corrupted by human involvement. So Mary's purity was intact and also the purity of Jesus. So God is to be praised not only because of the situation with Mary but also the sinless nature of Jesus is preserved. You see, Mary was by nature a sinner. She was a godly woman but she was a sinner. Any child born of any woman is in a process where the sin nature is passed on. David says this in Psalm 51, "In sin my mother conceived me." Paul says it in Romans 5, that "through one man sin entered the world." Our sin nature is passed on through the process of procreation. Being a sinner is literally and figuratively a part of our DNA. Do any parents want to testify to that? That everyone is born a sinner? Can I get a parental witness towards the reality of that? But we see it in Scripture, ultimately, that sin is a part of our very nature and it's passed on.

So then the question follows: how can a sinful human being give birth to a sinless Savior? The answer is because the Holy Spirit was involved. The Holy Spirit came into the equation and ultimately he gets the glory. I like to think of it this way: when you look at 2 Peter, the end of the first chapter, you see that men were used to write the Scriptures and we see clearly that the different writers of the Bible had different styles. We also see that the people who wrote the Bible had plenty of sin in their life. I mean, just consider Paul as a persecutor of the church. Think of Peter, the one who struggles to act without thinking. Think of all his foibles laid out in Scripture and then think about how he laid out Scripture. Think about Matthew, even the one who wrote this text, as a corrupt tax collector. These are just a few notable examples of men God used to write Holy Scripture.

So how did sinful man not corrupt the word of God? The answer is the Holy Spirit was involved. In the same way, how does Mary's involvement in the birth of Jesus not corrupt him? It was a work of the Spirit. Just as the Holy Spirit is able to preserve the sanctity of the written word, the Holy Spirit is able to preserve the sanctity of the Incarnate Word, Jesus. Jesus, the Word, became flesh and dwelt among us and God was able, by the Holy Spirit, to keep him sinless. Isn't this plan amazing? Who thinks of this plan? Who conjures this up in their mind because it's amazing? And the result is that we have got to praise God as we even consider this. You brought about the birth of Jesus through a virgin? And he's sinless? The Holy Spirit did this? That's amazing. A virgin will conceive and give birth to a son. We need to praise God for that.

Not only that but we also need to have a response of an increased love for God. We need to love God because Jesus is qualified to be our Savior. Matthew 1:21 lays this out. It says, "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." Love for someone flows out of a thankfulness for them. Love for something flows out of a thankfulness for it. Jesus, himself, taught us, "The woman who is forgiven much also loved much whereas the one who was forgiven little, loves little." The plan of God involves the Messiah crushing our enemy. Crrrrr, that's the best I can do. I'm sure you can do better. Have fun with your kids.

So, part of God's plan is to crush your enemy but also, at the same time, be our Savior. He came to crush but also to save. You think of even the name of Jesus, think of the name of Jesus. That's a name that's translated from Greek Iesous. Well, where do you get Iesous? Go back to Hebrew and that's the translation to Greek from Hebrew, from Yeshua. What's Yeshua? It's the word we get Joshua in English. So you think Joshua, Yeshua, what does that word mean? That name means "Yahweh saves." Yahweh was the covenant name of God in the Old Testament. Yahweh, the Covenant God saves. The God who keeps his Covenant, saves. When you think of Jesus, you think of the covenant keeping God who saves. The name Jesus, Matthew uses to remind us that his name is Jesus and that he will save his people from their sins.

You know, if you're here today and you don't know that you know that you know, this is an opportunity for you to come to terms with who Jesus is and why he came with a miraculous birth. If you are here and you say, "You know what? I do know that I know that I know," your heart should be full of love for your Savior. He did what you could never do on your own. He gave you a gift that you could never possibly earn. He removed a punishment that you would not want to receive.

This Christmas season, I hope that we ponder the amazing work of Jesus, how he saved us from our sins. And in turn, that would result in a deeper love for God and a love to do what pleases him because of who he is and what he did and his miraculous birth points us back to this. You know, ultimately, pleasing him is not some high and lofty idea, it's boots on the ground, it's specific active steps. One of the ways that you love him is just by serving him, just by using your gifts, your abilities, your time, to serve him. I hope that your salvation encouraged you as you served in the Living Nativity whether it was cold or not.

Next week, I'm going to be serving at the end of the tour, greeting, and I really enjoy that area of service for a couple of reasons, one: there's cookies there and they need to be greeted just like anything else. Sometimes multiple times but besides the cookies, it's really all about meeting people who have just heard the gospel message. I know that many of you would agree that part of the joy of serving in the Living Nativity is by pondering the reality of how many people have just heard the gospel message? That makes the joy of serving so wonderful because the love of God wells up within us as we think about him. The same is true for Christmas for everyone. I would hope that your desire would be to please God and that, ultimately, you would be willing to invite someone to hear the Christmas musical, to hear this message during the Christmas time because they may be willing to come and hear the good news of Christ.

It also just comes down to practical ways you interact in your marriage. There are very practical ways. You know, when I'm full of God's love, when I'm focused on loving the Lord with all my heart, my soul, my mind and my strength, then I'm willing to serve and love my spouse rather than be longing for and wanting them to love and serve me. When I focus on the love of Christ, I want to then serve my spouse rather than desire service from them.

I hope that you're excited about the reality of the Messiah's name being Jesus and that he will save his people from their sins. But if you're here and you say, "You know what? That's really not where I'm at. I don't think I have a saving relationship with Jesus." I want to tell you that it's possible today, it's possibly today to come to terms with your relationship with Christ. Ultimately, it starts with recognizing that the reason we have a Savior, a reason a Savior came, is because people needed saving. In fact, all of us are sinners before God. We have all offended him. Can I just get an "Amen" for that? We have all offended God? We're not quite there yet.

We have all offended God with our lives. The good news is, Romans 10:9 leads us into a position where we can trust him. It says, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." The person and work of Jesus can be what you trust in to be saved even today. I would encourage you, if that's not your testimony, to even think about that in this moment, today, who Jesus is and the fact that he can save you from your sins and that's why he came to have a miraculous birth.

The significance of Jesus as Savior brings up another interesting point. Do you remember the book of Acts, after Jesus was resurrected and the apostles are teaching and going out and sharing the good news of Christ? The religious leaders actually are contemplating killing them. They want to kill the apostles. They have them in front of them and one of their own stands up, Gamaliel, in the book of Acts, chapter 5, and he talks about a couple of other people who have raised up and basically petered out and nothing really came of it. Theodas and Judas of Galilee, and he says at the end of Acts 5:38, he says, "So in this present case," talking about all the apostles sharing this truth about Jesus, "I say to you, Stay away from these men and let them alone for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown." Verse 39 says, "but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them or else you may even be found fighting against God."

The truth of Jesus as our Savior focuses on the reality that this is God's plan and it cannot be stopped. There are many in our society who view Jesus as just another man, just another human being. They might say, "You know, Jesus was a good man but when it came down to it, he wasn't a Savior. He's just another person who is kind, got into trouble with the authorities, was crucified and rotted in his grave." But Jesus was not just another man. He is the centerpiece of God's plan that absolutely cannot be stopped.

That raises a question: how does his miraculous birth actually qualify him to be a Savior? Part of this plan that cannot be stopped? Well, his miraculous birth demonstrated his deity. It demonstrated who he was, the importance of the centerpiece of God's plan. Jesus was not conceived by normal human process. The Holy Spirit indicates that the child is not like any other.

But he wasn't just unique, he was divine. You see, Jesus can simply do things that others can't. Jesus has abilities that nobody else has. He reads the hearts and minds of people. He sees what you're thinking when you're standing in front of him. People just can't do

that. Friends, remember the story of the lame man who was lowered down the roof and Jesus says, "Your sins are forgiven." And then Jesus says, "Why is everybody thinking in their heart evil?" And they were like, "I said that in my heart. How do you know that?" Because he is different. He also shows that by healing the man. He's different: he forgives sins, he walks on water, he turns water to wine, he gives sight to the blind, he restores hearing to the deaf, he releases captives from their captivity. Jesus, because he is God, can simply do things that others can't.

Because Jesus was fully God, he is without sin and he was also eternal, therefore, he can pay an eternal penalty for our sins. God planned to pay the price himself because only he can pay an eternal price. I hope that creates within you a deep love for God so that when somebody sins against you, when your plans don't go the way you want them to because someone's sin impacts you and they sin against you and they hurt you and they bring pain into your life, your thinking would be fixed on the saving work of Jesus in your life as you see the sin of someone else impacting you negatively and affecting your plans. On the flipside, when something goes just how you want it to go and a plan works out, you and your thinking would be fixed on the saving work of Jesus in your life. In other words, your success reminds you, "Ah, only by grace and in God's successful plan that I can come here and rejoice in this good news."

The miraculous birth of Jesus demonstrates that Jesus was fully God and leads us to praise him but it also shows something else. It's miraculous because it demonstrates also his humanity. You know, Jesus was also fully human. He tired. He hungered. He experienced temptation, scorn and pain. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit but he was born of the virgin Mary so Mary brings the human element to the table. Without Mary, we just have a Christophany, which is to say, a miraculous appearance of God. But because of the miraculous conception, the following birth indicates that God took on humanity. He took on our weakness. He took on our suffering. You see, God didn't and couldn't just declare that his wrath is satisfied. There had to be a suffering sacrifice.

Not only can Jesus be a representative of the human race because he's fully human, not only can he be a substitutionary sacrifice on our behalf, he, because he's human, can also identify with our suffering. He knows what you and I go through because he is fully human. His suffering adds an element. A verse like Hebrews 4:14-16 comes to mind, he's our great High Priest. It says, "since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

You know, the Christmas season can be really hard for some of us. Maybe this is the first year without a lost loved one. Maybe there is so much conflict in your family that you're really just not looking forward to getting together at all, it often is more exhausting than refreshing. Maybe you're going through a trial right now and the fact that you can't focus on some of the things you rejoice in, makes it extra painful. Or maybe this time of year brings up some painful memories in your life. If that's your situation, draw near with

confidence so you can receive mercy and grace in your time of need. You know, one of the ways that we draw near as we focus on how Jesus' miraculous birth was a perfect combination of the divine and the human, so that as the divine, he can actually satisfy the wrath of God. So our biggest problem has been taken care of: the wrath of God. Because Jesus could do that. But then also in his humanity, that his suffering was real, it was genuine and he can actually relate to you and I as we go through suffering, draw near to him because of the wonder of the gospel. God planning to save man by becoming man? And dying on a cross meant for man for you and for me?

As we read the Scriptures, isn't there a lot to learn? Isn't there a lot to learn and to grow in? There is a lot of knowledge to be gained and quite frankly, sometimes it makes your head spin when you think about what does it mean to be fully God and fully man? But as we read God's word, there needs to be a response in a way that reflects more than just knowledge. We need to respond to God's plan with praise and with an increased love for God and with worship.

That's our third point this morning: worship God that he sent Jesus to be our Immanuel. We want to praise him. We want to love him. And we want to worship him. Look at Matthew 1:22-23. Worship him because of his awesome plan. "Now all this took place to fulfill what he had spoken by the Lord through the prophet, Behold, the virgin shall be with Child and shall bear a Son and they shall His name Immanuel, which translated means, God with us." Matthew pulls this quote from the book of Isaiah which we read, "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel."

As Matthew reflects on the birth of Jesus, he references Isaiah, in particular, a promise God gives to the nation of Israel. God at that time was seeking to comfort his people. The news of the miraculous birth in Matthew does the same. It brings comfort. His miraculous birth results in great comfort. You know, there are times in our lives where we just feel like, "Is God even there?" Have you ever experienced that? In your dark moments, have you even thought that? "Where is God? He's not here." Oftentimes we wonder that because our lives become so filled with pain that that's the framework and our vision gets so small that all that we see is the pain that's right in front of us and our vision is not any larger. Sometimes we choose to run from God in those moments. We don't seem to draw close to him, we draw away from him. We push away from the Almighty and we try to find other sources of comfort, other sources of encouragement.

This is the situation that the people of God were in, in Isaiah. Go back to Isaiah 7. I want to read the context and just paint the picture of people who were struggling and how they wanted to actually go somewhere else besides God. Isaiah 7, starting in verse 1 and we're going to go through verse 14, "Now it came about in the days of Ahaz, the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin the king of Aram and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but could not conquer it. When it was reported to the house of David, saying, 'The Arameans have camped in Ephraim,' his heart and the hearts of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake with the wind." They are scared of all of their enemies. "Then the LORD said to

Isaiah, ‘Go out now to meet Ahaz, you and your son Shear-jashub, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, on the highway to the fuller's field, and say to him, “Take care and be calm, have no fear and do not be fainthearted because of these two stubs of smoldering firebrands,” don’t you love how he says that? Two stubs of smoldering firebrands, “on account of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and the son of Remaliah. Because Aram, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has planned evil against you, saying, ‘Let us go up against Judah and terrorize it, and make for ourselves a breach in its walls and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it,’ thus says the Lord GOD: ‘It shall not stand nor shall it come to pass.’” What does God say? It shall not stand nor shall it come to pass. “For the head of Aram is Damascus and the head of Damascus is Rezin (now within another 65 years Ephraim will be shattered, so that it is no longer a people), and the head of Ephraim is Samaria and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.” All of these are people, these are humans. “If you will not believe, you surely shall not last.”” God says, “It will not stand nor shall it come to pass” because their leader is God. “If you will not believe, you surely shall not last.”

Verse 10, “Then the LORD spoke again to Ahaz, saying, ‘Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; make it deep as Sheol or high as heaven.’ 12 But Ahaz said, ‘I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!’ 13 Then he said, ‘Listen now, O house of David! Is it too slight a thing for you to try the patience of men, that you will try the patience of my God as well?’” Verse 14, “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign.” Ahaz, you don’t want it, I’m going to give a sign to all the people, “Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.”

The situation is bleak. The people are shaking in fear because of they are surrounded by enemies. The nation of Israel, the northern ten tribes and the nation of Aram, north of Judah, want to conquer her and Judah has no political friends, no safety net. And Ahaz, their leader, is a complete fool. He has no relationship with the Lord. He has no meaningful relationship with God and he has no time for the Lord. If you want to learn more about Ahaz, 2 Kings 16 highlights his wickedness.

And the Lord invites Ahaz, in verse 10, to ask for a sign. The language God uses is like, “Here’s a blank check. Ask for anything that you want.” Remember Solomon? He also got a blank check. Ahaz is the opposite of Solomon, he claims piety, he pretends to be pious even though he hasn’t lived for the Lord for five seconds. He says, “I don’t want to put the Lord to the test.” But God wants to give his people a sign so that they would put their trust in him, so that they would be comforted by him in the midst of their struggle, in the midst of their trials.

He wants to comfort his people and give them a sign but Ahaz, the king of Judah, doesn’t want to lead the people to put their trust in the Lord, he wants to make relationship with Assyria and seek, ultimately, comfort by giving them money. He doesn’t want to go to God. Can you imagine living here in this time? You’re supposed to submit to a government that’s totally corrupt and incredibly foolish. There is little hope anywhere in Judah but in the midst of all this chaos, God does something. He gives his people a sign.

His prediction is a sign that God plans to keep his covenant. It's a sign that God has not abandoned his people. It's a sign that God intends to keep his plans.

Matthew, when he records the birth of Christ, he draws our attention back 700 years. He goes, "See, look at this. Remember this? Look back. God has this awesome masterful plan." At that time, God wanted to give hope to his people Israel, and he wanted to give comfort to his people but in the mind of God, there was something more: the comfort was ultimately going to come through a baby born to the virgin Mary whose name was Jesus and who would be our Immanuel, God with us. Sometimes, that is exactly what you and I need to hear, that God is with us. We need to hear that God is still with us even though we're going through a trial, even though we struggle with sin, even though those who are surrounding us at times and we feel like they want to hurt us, we need to hear the truth that God is still active in the world. He's not on vacation. Our God is not dead. He is here. He is present. God is with us. We need to hear the truth that God wants to fulfill his plans from the very beginning and he is doing that. We need to hear that and to be reminded of that.

If you're struggling with the difficulties in your life, your circumstances, we need to constantly remind ourselves that trials and suffering can affect our thinking in such a way that it encourages us to not think about the presence of God, not say "Immanuel, God with us." To say, "Where is God?" and to question his presence. That's why the word "Immanuel" is so wonderful. It means "God with us." It's shorthand theology, God with us. His miraculous birth points us to a theological truth that God designed to bring us comfort because he wants us to focus on his continual presence, that he is with us.

His miraculous birth results in his continual presence. Matthew begins his work with a promise that Jesus, Immanuel, will be with us. Matthew starts his book with that, well, guess how he ends it? Do you guys know the end of Matthew? Do you know what he says at the very end? It's the same thing he says at the very beginning. Matthew 28:19, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

The miraculous birth encourages us to worship because we have the unbroken presence of God with us. We can recognize his comfort in the midst of loss. We can recognize his grace in the midst of blessing. We can recognize his love in the midst of suffering. Immanuel is shorthand theology but it's a robust truth we need to use like a screen door, that which we use to view the world. Imagine yourself taking your screen door off of your back porch and just walking around and looking at life through your screen door. It would be kind of silly but the point is: you need a gridwork to view the world through and Immanuel does that. It's shorthand theology to remind you that God is with you. He miraculously sent his Son to be with you.

Think about that when your spouse seems to be withdrawing from you or has hurt you, God is with me. Think about it when your kids don't want to follow the Lord and they don't want to respect you, God is with me. Think about if your boss doesn't seem to

understand the challenges you are facing, God is with me. Think about it if your body isn't working how you would like it to, God is with me. It doesn't change my circumstances but often what needs to change is our view of God's presence because he says, "I am with you." Immanuel leads us to view God in the midst of trials and to worship him because of who he is. He is the one who is near, the one who is with us. And when we forget which we so often do, the miraculous birth points us back to the amazing truth that he is with us and helps us think rightly and respond in worship. Not because things go how we plan, but because God's plan is to be with us.

Let me just summarize in this way: the Christmas season helps us focus on the amazing plan of God, a plan that God had from eternity past and a plan that God is slowly but surely revealing. That plan involved a Messiah crushing the head of the serpent but also a virgin girl who conceived and gave birth to a baby by the work of the Holy Spirit who would save us from our sins. This isn't simple knowledge, it's something that invokes a response and we need to praise God because of the Spirit's involvement. We need to love God because Jesus is our Savior. And we should worship God because his presence is always with us.

Isn't his plan amazing? I mean, he used a virgin to bear a child, God became man to save man, he dies to defeat death and he promises, by his namesake, to be with us forever. His plan is amazing and I hope it evokes something within your heart this morning.

Let's pray.

Lord, you are amazing and what you plan to do, Lord, helps us redirect our focus from the pain of life, the suffering in this world and the difficulty to who you are and what you have done. Lord, as we think of who you are, help us recognize that you aren't just far away but as we think of you, we need to recognize that you are with us, that your presence is here and we can look at the person and work of Christ, beginning with his miraculous birth, to remind us of that truth. Lord, help us do that. Help us praise you as we marvel at God becoming man but taking on humanity in a way that you understand our suffering. Lord, help us love you because you are our Savior and you can pay the eternal price that we could not possibly pay. Lord, help us worship you because you are always with us and you are worthy of that worship as we view this life and go through this life. Lord, help us do that for your glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.