

12/21/25
4th Sunday in Advent
For Group Meetings from December 7th – December 13th

OUR MISSION: As a missional congregation we **celebrate** Christ's presence, **invite** people into a growing relationship with Jesus, and **equip** them to **serve** in a broken world.

Prayer of the Day: Almighty God, you sent your angel to Joseph in a dream to reveal the newborn Savior as Emmanuel, God with us. By your Holy Spirit, calm our fears, strengthen our faith, and make us obedient to your Word, that we may welcome Christ into our lives and homes with trust and joy. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

BIBLICAL EQUIPPING TOGETHER

Share: How did last week's scripture (Luke 1:26-38) work in your life this week?

Mission:

- What was most satisfying about your ministry last week?
- Where do you see God at work?
- How did you participate in God's missional activity?
- How did inviting go last Sunday?

Hear: Matthew 1:18-25

Explore Questions: (Use these or develop your own.)

1. What does this text tell us about Joseph's reaction to Mary's pregnancy?
2. How does the angel convince Joseph to go ahead with his marriage to Mary?
3. What actions does Joseph take after waking from the dream?

Connect Questions: (Use these or develop your own.)

1. When have you experienced someone showing mercy to you?
2. What does faithful obedience look like in the ordinary rhythms of your life?
3. What practices help you remain attentive to God's presence during seasons of uncertainty?

Memorize this verse: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." (Matthew 1:23) What name/title for Jesus most resonates with you? *You might want to google alternate names for Jesus*

BIBLICAL EQUIPPING APART:

Obey: During this week follow through on your intentions.

Meditate: Meditate on Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19. How does this speak into your life?

Reflect: What have I learned in my week of living with this text? What can I share with my group when we next meet?

Notes for ChristCare leaders:

Do you sense some of the heartache in Matthew's story about the nativity? If you didn't catch it the first time you read or listened to the story, that's understandable. It's easy to miss. Part of reason is simply that Matthew's depiction of Christ's birth is so remarkably brief, contained in a half verse at the beginning of this passage – "Now the birth of Jesus took place in this way" (1:18) – and in the verse bookending it at the end – "but he had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus" (v. 25). Another reason it's easy to miss is our understandable focus on the extraordinary elements of the story. The appearance of the angel in a dream, fulfilled prophecy, the virgin birth. But I think the main reason we gloss over, or perhaps fail to detect entirely, the heartache at the core of this familiar story is that we have unintentionally domesticated it. Whether by hearing it read in hushed tones by candlelight, or because of beloved hymns which cast a rosy hue around it, it's easy to forget that Joseph and Mary were real people. In our imagination, Jesus never cried, Mary looked more like a blushing young bride than someone who had just given birth, and Joseph is calm, protective, and paternal.

Let's start with this matter of engagement. In the first century world of Joseph and Mary, this is not a romantic declaration of intent. Rather, it is a legal contract, binding in every respect. To be engaged – or espoused, betrothed, or pledged (some of the other words used in English translations) – was essentially to be married without having consummated that marriage or as yet living together. Which means that when Joseph learns that Mary is pregnant, he can only conclude that she has been unfaithful to him and so likely experiences the pain, anguish, and sense of betrayal that any of us would have felt at such a devastating revelation. In Joseph's day, there were only two realistic possibilities when faced with the prospect of Mary's infidelity. He could either publicly declare his injury, in which case Mary would likely have been stoned, or he could divorce – the translation "dismiss" softens the reality as "engagement" did earlier – her quietly, and he chooses the latter course. If Joseph is suffering, it's hard to imagine Mary comes through all this unscathed. Because Matthew narrates his account of the nativity from the point of view of Joseph, we get very little insight into Mary. But she likely detected the unexpected pain her pregnancy caused her betrothed and, if she sensed his intentions, would likely have had great cause for concern herself. Given the spare details of Matthew's account, I recognize that much of this is clearly conjecture. But let's keep in mind it takes a visit from an angel to calm all this down and orient Joseph to God's intentions. And as angels usually get involved in the biblical story only when heavy-lifting is involved, I think it's safe to say that the months leading up to Christ's birth were not one blissful baby-shower after another but were fraught with anxiety and concern and flights of emotion we have all experienced at various times.

Which is why I think this passage provides a good reminder that God worked through real people with real challenges. He didn't choose a fairy-tale princess to bear the savior, but rather an unwed peasant girl. He didn't choose a political or business success story to name and care for Jesus, but rather a man with his own doubts and questions who wanted to do the right thing but needed angelic guidance to accomplish it. All of this helps flesh out the name "Emmanuel" that Matthew draws from Isaiah to apply to Jesus. "God with us." That is, God coming to be with us as we are. Not as we know we should be, or are trying to be, or have promised to be, or will be some day, but with us as we are now...today...in this moment.

Thanks be to God,

Pastor Thadd (tbook@desertcross.org)

Traditional version:

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come,
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us
from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power,
And the glory, forever and ever. Amen

Contemporary version:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those
Who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial
And deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the
power, and the glory are yours,
Now and forever. Amen