

## Matthew 1:18-25

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do 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 as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, for He will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet. "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means, 'God is with us.'" When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son, and he named him Jesus.

## "Conspiracy of Love"

God will recruit as necessary from the human cast  
in order to reorder human history.

Walter Brueggemann



On the night when Joseph tried to write himself out of the 'Greatest Love Story Ever Told', an angel came to him in a dream and recruited him to be a leading character in the Holy drama of Jesus' birth. His fears about the visitation were relieved when he heard the name Emmanuel. In faith speak, Emmanuel means "God-With-Us." Commenting on the importance of that name in Joseph's story, Theologian Hinkle Shore wrote: ' . . . the main character in action here is God, so 'it is fitting to give God some verbs here,' for in this story it's God whose Spirit has come upon Mary in the first place; it is God who speaks to Joseph, calms his fears and gives him instruction and in the end, 'comes to the aid of Israel and all people according to their needs.' (taken from 12/16/02 Sermon Seeds by Kate Huey; quotes from New Proclamation 2007) In faith speak what this means is that Joseph sensed that it was God who was recruiting him. In our prayer life, Joseph's Emmanuel, God-with-us faith now helps us to pray:

Holy God, Emmanuel always you are with us.  
We are aware of you only because  
you have created us to know you and enjoy you forever.

Covenant God, Emmanuel, always you are with us.  
You entered human history, chose a particular people,  
And walked with them in sorrow and joy.

Companion God, Emmanuel, always you are with us.  
You are the God of Abraham and Sarah, Miriam and Moses,  
Deborah and David, Elizabeth and Zechariah, Joseph and Mary.

Humble God, Emmanuel, always you are with us,  
Now as one of us, Jesus of Nazareth, born of a woman,  
With a face, a name, and a story.

Word in flesh, Emmanuel, always you are with us.  
We praise and adore you. Amen.

(Always You Are With Us' by Brian Wren, from Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, p. 47)

Joseph was given two jobs. The first was to take Mary as his wife. The second was to name her baby, Jesus. The name Jesus means, "He Will save." Rev. Kate Huey notes: 'This unique gift of 'the God who saves' is Jesus, who is 'more than the accumulated best of his ancestors.' Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, we watch and listen as Jesus reveals the hand of God at work in the world, undoing the damage that has been done by human sin, so this extraordinary birth 'is the beginning of the fulfillment of God's saving purposes . . . This fresh new act of God ushers in an age, long expected and hoped for, yet in a fashion so unusual that it could hardly be anticipated.'" (Charles Cousar quotes, Texts for Preaching Year a) Or, as Marilyn Oden wrote in *Manger and Mystery* (p. 89): In the babe, Love is born—a living Love, who taught and demonstrated the greatest commandment.

Jesus saves . . . in so many ways. One I hadn't thought about is written about in the New Testament book of Galatians 4:4-6.

'But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'

In his reflection on this scripture, Rev. Quinn Caldwell wrote: 'Every once in a while, some well-meaning person of goodwill will refer to my son's birth parents as his 'real' parents. They almost always catch themselves with a hand over their mouths as soon as the word passes their lips, and apologize. Nevertheless, you can imagine how I feel about the implications of the statement. And yet, of course I can see how people's minds are working. In our world and families, so much depends on biological connection. Crowds used to watch queens give birth, to make certain the baby wasn't switched and therefore had the necessary royal blood. Daytime talk shows make a mint on those paternity test shows . . . as do high-end retailers, who sell genetics kits that promise to tell you exactly where in the world your ancestors are all from (spoiler alert: it's not where your grandmother claimed). People act like there's something mystical about the blood that parents and children share. Perhaps there is, but the clear witness of the Bible is this: for God, adoption matters more than blood. And I'm not just talking about Moses, Esther, Jesus, and the other important biblical adoptees. I'm talking about something larger, which the Epistle writer says here in Galatians: whatever family, race, or religion we inherited by blood, our real Parent isn't finally the one to whom we're genetically related, but the one who adopts us and makes us heirs to the greatest of estates. This doesn't mean you have to leave your bio-family behind, of course: God's fine with open adoptions and you can totally still be in touch. It just means that in what happened with Jesus, "real" got redefined.

And so it came to pass, that Jesus taught his disciples to pray: 'Abba, our father, who art in heaven . . . ' Amen.