

## “Two names for you” Matthew 1:18-25

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Do you remember how God famously declared through Isaiah the prophet? **“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”** (Is 55:8-9) That sums it up.

Our perspectives are so different. That’s why so much of what God does and how He does it, doesn’t make much sense to us. This is why we can’t understand our God and His ways and His thoughts unless He explains Himself, as He indeed does as He speaks to us in the Scriptures.

The first chapter of the Gospel according Matthew, or we can say of the New Testament, begins rather strangely. **“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers...”**

And off it goes ... listing all the forty-two generations. And then we get to the event of Jesus’ birth which we heard today. I guess you all love to read who was the father of who. Isn’t that exciting? Or perhaps it is... if we know all the background stories for those people, some of them are quite shocking. And then we get to this strange event.

**“When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.”** Just one sentence. Not much explanation is given to us about this rather extraordinary event.

Just **“she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.”** Who was found with a child? A young Jewish girl, engaged with an older man Joseph, they lived in a little-known town of Nazareth, in Galilee, somewhere in the outskirts of the Roman empire.

How did she get the child? O, yes! From the Holy Spirit... from the Spirit of God. That must be the first thought that crossed Joseph’s mind. “O, perhaps Mary is pregnant

from the Holy Spirit!” That’s what people usually think, when someone gets pregnant and we don’t know who the father is. Today people joke about it, without giving much thought to this unique event that stands in the centre of time.

But then, an angel of the Lord was sent to Joseph to explain what was going on. In a dream... How would that be? What sort of dream would that be? What sort of vision, or revelation? How certain? How convincing? How did Joseph experience it? Wouldn’t you want to know more about it?

**“Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”**

Whatever the angel did or said, however he did or said it, it obviously worked. For Joseph took Mary as his wife and when the child was born, he called him as the angel had commanded – Jesus. It is not difficult to see that this whole account of Jesus' birth is very strange and unusual to our ears, no wonder that people struggle with it. Even we may wonder about this account...

But God’s ways are not our ways... He sees things differently. And once we are ready to listen to Him, He gladly opens the Scripture for us. He delights conversing with us. He reveals to us His ways and His thoughts, and what a wonderful revelation it is, how beautiful and comforting reality suddenly comes alive before our eyes.

Let’s reflect a bit more. **“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”** Jesus, conceived by the Holy Spirit, the son of Abraham, the son of David. Do you see how much is summarized in these few words!

We could say the whole history of mankind up to the moment of Jesus' birth. When our first parents turned away from the true God, the Son of God Himself came looking for them in the Garden and proclaimed to them the first Gospel promise (Gen 3:15).

That the offspring of woman, meaning, someone without a human father, someone mysteriously conceived and born, will crush the ancient serpent’s head, will break the curse, and will restore the goodness of God’s creation. See! Hear this! Our God knew already back then what He was going to do, and when He was going to do it.

His ways are not our ways... Our plans may extend to the next week, or perhaps year, or may be a bit longer. Even then, we never know how they will unfold. We can only hope, as too many things are outside of our control. It is different with the Triune God.

From the beginning, even before the beginning, He knew what He will do, when and how He will carry it out. He knew who will be His beloved and chosen in Christ, who will receive His inheritance in the New Heavens and New Earth. He knew about you.

Choosing and calling of Abraham was just one more step towards the fulfillment of God’s plan. Almost an incomprehensibly long step for us, but not for our God. Then the Son of David. One more step for our God. 1000 more years later.

God Yahweh promised to the famous king David that his son will receive the kingdom that will last forever. But not right away, not Solomon, but someone born in the house of David, again – yet another 1000 years later. Thousand years! That's just a number for us, really, we can't actually fully grasp how long a time it is.

When we read in Matthew chapter 1 about Abraham, about David, when we read the long genealogies, they may seem irrelevant to us, for we just can't perceive the magnitude of God's works, of His ways. But all those people were relevant for our God, more, all those people actually played their part in your salvation.

All that time our God was patiently working towards the fulfilment of His plan of salvation, keeping also you and your eternal future on His mind. Every single person was important, for they gave birth and raised the next generation and the next and the next... until the time came for the special One to be born, the offspring of a woman.

The One who was promised in the very beginning. Who will be this special One? We have **two names** given to us in our today's Gospel reading, and they explain this greatest of mysteries. These **two names** explain who this special person will be, what He will do, what the purpose of His birth and life will be.

That's what the Holy Scripture provides for us – breathtaking insights into God's ways and thoughts. Now the first name. It was revealed through Isaiah the prophet seven centuries before Jesus' birth: **“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel.”**

What does Immanuel mean? It means in Hebrew – God with us. This special One, who will be born of woman, who will be the son of Abraham, and the Son of David, will be no one else but... yes, God Himself. God Himself will be born as one of us.

Sure, as seen through human eyes, the whole birth of Jesus seems strange at best. Strange choice of time. Strange choice of place. Strange choice of the fateful woman. All of that seems strange, especially because there was no outward glory to this divine event that stands in the very centre of time.

The whole world counts time from that event. Seen from our human perspective the circumstances were as ordinary as they get. Not so from God's perspective. What was promised in the beginning, had come to its fulfilment. God was with us.

The Word had become flesh. Immanuel. He had come to fulfill the ancient promise given to our first parents. And what will He do? What is the purpose of His life? The second name gives us the answer. Jesus ... is the answer. What does Jesus mean? In ancient Hebrew it means – Yahweh saves. God Yahweh saves.

As the angel of the Lord foretold: **“He [this child] will save His people from their sins.”** This prophecy is the purest Gospel. What does it mean that Jesus will save us from our sins? Does it mean that all our sins will be forgiven, whatever you've done?

Yes, it means that because of what Jesus did, God now offers you forgiveness of all your sins. Does it also mean that Jesus takes away our guilt and gives us a good and peaceful conscience? Yes, that is most certainly true! Now you can wait for the Last Day, the Day of Judgment, without fear, in peace and with joyful longing.

Does it also mean that sin will have no power over us? Yes, certainly so! Once we belong to Jesus, once He is our Lord, sin loses its power over us. We are able to stand firm, not on our own, but in the power of the Holy Spirit, free to live our lives as God's chosen and beloved people.

There is more, Jesus not only saves us from our sins, guilt and shame, but He also gives us a new identity, children of God, a new heart and a new life. And that is not only about being saved from, we are also and most importantly saved for.

Save for what? For this new and adventurous life with this Triune God where He invites you to participate in His two Great Commissions, caring for His creation and all His creatures and making disciples from all nations.

This is what we are called and sent to do. To serve all those people whom God has placed in our lives and whenever possible to bring them the Great News about this God who is with us to save us.

And when the time is up, when He is done with these two great commissions, when the last of His children is brought home, He will cleanse and purify His entire creation from anything sinful, He will restore the goodness of His creation, and then... there will be no more nor pain, or death, or morning. All of that will be gone. Forever.

We often worry about today and tomorrow. I do. About our plans that fail. Because we don't see the big picture. We don't see this reality as our God sees it. But when we are willing to listen to Him, when we are interested to learn His ways and His thoughts, what a great comfort His revelation brings to us.

This is how our today's reading blesses us. It gives us these two names that our God has revealed for us. These two names open for us the Father's friendly heart, and help us to understand His thoughts and His ways, and what He has prepared for us.

Our God has come to you, so that He could take you to Himself. These two names assure us that everything that happens in this world and in our lives is in our Father's hands. Everything. That the whole history of mankind is unmistakably heading towards the fulfilment of God's plan for us. For He Himself guides it.

That our God in flesh – Immanuel, is with us. That God Yahweh Himself – Jesus, will save us. His ways are not like ours, that's for sure, and His thoughts are not like ours, as we can learn, but these two names reveal to us something beautiful.

Whatever high His ways and whatever high His thoughts are – they are all about us. They are about you.

Amen.