

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

²⁰ But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us."

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

I don't think anyone here is unfamiliar with Joseph's situation. A relatively ordinary man looking to live an ordinary life is thrust into an extraordinary situation. But he was a righteous man we are told. He knew God's will and he wanted to carry it out in his own life. And so when the young woman he was going to marry was found to already be with child, he responded in an extraordinary way. And I mean extraordinary. Just think how you would respond if just a few months before your wedding you had found out your betrothed was having an affair with someone else. Consider how that would make you feel and compare that to Joseph's plan. He was going to divorce her quietly and not disgrace her publicly. Joseph understood the basic principle of what we call the 8th commandment; help others maintain their good name at all times. Doesn't matter if they actually did whatever it is, we are not to expose others to public disgrace if it can be helped. How many of us can say we've done the same or would do the same in a similar situation?

All things being equal, Joseph's plan was the God-pleasing solution to his situation. But his situation was not what he thought it was, and so God had to bring him up to speed. God sent another messenger to tell Joseph the truth of what was happening and fill Joseph in on God's plan for him and his family. Mary was not pregnant in any dishonorable or sinful way. This was a blessing from God not just to them as a family but to all people everywhere. The angel could not have been any more clear in the simplicity of this message, Mary would give birth to a son and he is to be named Jesus because he will save his people from their sins. Jesus, in case you didn't know or have forgotten, simply means "God saves".

And as our author Matthew points out, this was in accordance with the prophecy from Isaiah, although he mentions a different name that the child would go by, "Immanuel", meaning "God with us". Both names by which he would be known. And both completely accurate. This was God with us, God made man who came to this earth with one specific purpose; to save us. But what I'd like to focus on most tonight is the connection between the two, the prophecy in Isaiah and the fulfillment made in Christ. This was, of course, not the only prophecy made about Christ. You can divide them up how you like, but some have said there could be considered as many as 200 discrete prophecies pertaining to the Messiah. And like the one we have before us today, every single one of them was fulfilled. All the way back to the initial prophecy made in the Garden of Eden just after the fall into sin.

Now none of us here would ever think to claim that God doesn't keep his promises, we know that as an intellectual fact. But let's just consider the circumstances here to help us as we sometimes struggle to accept this truth in our lives. The first promise of the Messiah was made in Eden and our best guesses put that at least four thousand years before the Messiah actually came. Four thousand years! Most of us won't even live to experience a hundred years, never mind four thousand. And even the promise that Matthew quotes from Isaiah came at least a half-century before this. But regardless of what we think of the timing, God was still faithful. He did what he promised and he did it at exactly the right time, so that everything would happen exactly as he needed it to.

He did what he said. He became one of us. He became Immanuel. And he lived as one of us, and he died as one of us. By his death and resurrection he carried out his namesake. God saves. Jesus. Doesn't matter how long it took,

what matters is that God did what he said he would. And by faith that sacrifice for sins was made for us all. Whatever else might happen really doesn't matter because God kept this promise, and because of that we are saved.

Joseph understood. For a guy who never gets a line of dialogue in the Bible, he has a lot to tell us. Doesn't matter to him that God made this promise so long ago, what matters is that God was keeping it. And since God was speaking, he would obey. He took Mary as his wife, and when the son was born, he named the child just as the angel told him to. Joseph did not doubt God's word because he knew that God was faithful. Whatever God promised God would do, and so if God had something to ask of him, it was for a very good reason. Joseph acted without question.

We have the benefit of looking back over the entirety of human history and seeing that God has never failed to keep a promise. We can see all that he has said he would do, and how he did every one of them at the proper time. We can see how if God had acted sooner or later in many cases, it would not have had the desired effect. And so not only are we assured that God is faithful, that he will always do what he promises, but we also are assured that God carries out his promises in exactly the right way at exactly the right time.

We must remind ourselves of these truths regularly. Because as I said, even though none of us would ever claim to call God a liar, we still struggle with applying that to our lives. We each have promises God has made to us that are, as of yet, unfulfilled; or in some cases, we simply can't see how they are fulfilled. And as we sit here in a world of sin that tries its best to regularly beat us down we are tempted to doubt. We are tempted to doubt that God will keep his promise to protect and provide for us in all circumstances. As we live a life in a world of sin we are tempted to doubt that God will ever deliver us like he said. And sometimes in the depths of our own sin that we can't seem to escape we are tempted even to doubt if there is enough forgiveness for everything we've done. And in all of it, the same old cry goes up as it has for centuries, "How long, Lord?"

Brothers and Sisters I want to reassure that God is faithful. What God promises, God does. He will always provide for you, he will always protect you. He will forgive all your sins by the blood of Christ and he will take you to be with him forever. But he will do all these things in his way and in his time. With a wisdom that we cannot comprehend or question. Do not mistake your lack of understanding for his unfaithfulness. God does what he promises. He always has, he always will.

When you find your confidence wavering, look to the manger, look to the cross. God did exactly what he promised there. It took him a while by our standards, but everything he did was done at the right time and in the right way. And because he was Immanuel, God with us, because he was Jesus, the God who saves, he will keep every promise to us. He has forgiven us and he will bring us together with him to eternal life. The one who promises us these things is faithful. He will do it. Amen.