

## God With Us and You

**Matthew 1:18-25**  
**December 21, 2025**

**First Presbyterian Church**  
**Pastor Dave Carlson**

Dennis Bratcher, in his article “The Christmas season,” says, “I think that the true meaning of Christmas is about possibility in the midst of the impossible. It is not the kind of possibility that comes from a confidence in our own skill, knowledge, ability or a positive mental attitude.

It is possibility that comes solely from the fact that God is God, and that he is the kind of God who comes into our own human existence to reveal himself and call us to himself. It is a possibility that is so surprising at its birth that we are caught unaware, and so are left with wonder at the simplicity of its expression in this infant child.”<sup>1</sup>

Being caught unaware of what God is up to in the midst of a troubling situation – that’s where Joseph found himself when he learned that, Mary, to whom he was engaged, was pregnant, though they had not yet had marital relations. And Matthew tells us that “Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly.”

Joseph doesn’t see how God could have any part in what he’s struggling with, except to condemn it. So he tries to hide it, unwilling to expose it, as Matthew says.

Don’t we do that? Don’t we try to hide things we’re struggling with, so as to not let anyone know? We don’t want anyone to know about our darkest family issues, our most personal struggles, our deepest fears and worries. In fact, there are some things we’re reluctant to share even with God.

How ridiculous. As if God expects us to be perfect. No. “The Incarnation of God didn’t happen in the perfect family .... God made the imperfect family perfect for the Incarnation of God. ... (And) God is still in the business of making imperfect situations perfect.”<sup>2</sup>

God knows what we’re going through, and any attempt to shield it from him – that just shields us from God, from God’s grace and mercy, compassion and blessing.

Whatever fear or struggle or worry is consuming you, let the story of Joseph and Mary be a comfort and a guide. Matthew tells us that while Joseph was trying to hide his struggles, “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.’”

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Bratcher, “The Christmas season,” [crivoice.org/cyxmas.html](http://crivoice.org/cyxmas.html). Retrieved June 5, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> As Jeff Hood and Kyle Sigmon say in t, “On The Shepherds, The Parents and The Magi,” [Patheos.com](http://Patheos.com), December 7, 2021.

Just when we think we're all alone in handling our struggles, that's when we need to be looking for the in-breaking of God, for God to enter into the situation in surprising ways.

Perhaps that's news of a little help coming your way when you least expect it, or an unexpected phone call from someone willing to listen and support, or a turn of events that shines light on the darkness you face.

Whenever you find yourself facing a troubling situation, do so from a place of openness, being open to God sending his angels to comfort and guide you.

The angel sent to Joseph brought him comfort and guidance concerning Mary, saying, "She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." The name Jesus means "the Lord saves."

Here, God is inviting Joseph to be open about his fear – fearing that this "illegitimate" baby will be their downfall. And then God invites Joseph to take his greatest fear and rename it, reframe it in keeping with God's desire to bless him and Mary and all the world, through a blessed baby to be named Jesus.

It's not enough just to notice the in-breaking of God – just to listen for the angels God sends your way – you have to then live into the promise of what you see and hear. We have to be willing to look at things in a new light, to step into the possibility of the blessing that awaits us. It matters what we expect from God when it comes to inviting Jesus into our lives. It matters what meaning we give to the name Jesus.

The story goes that one fine day in heaven, Jesus got to thinking about his earthly father, wondering where in heaven was he. Just then, he spotted an elderly man sitting on a golden bench, sobbing as if his heart would break!

Jesus sat down next to him and asked what the what was wrong. The old man raised his head and sobbed, "I'm looking for my son!"

Startled, Jesus said, "Tell me, was your son really your biological son?"

"No ... he wasn't. But he always wanted to be like all the other boys!"

"Well, was he ... nonhuman ... sort of?" Jesus asked.

"Well, he looked human enough ... but he wasn't ... really."

Jesus was very excited. "And are you ... a carpenter?!"

"Yes ... I was."

“Is your name Joseph?”

“Well ... translated, it is, I think ...”

Jesus threw his arms around the old man, shouting, “Joseph! Father!!”

The man wrapped Jesus in his arms and cried in joy, “Oh, my son, Pinocchio!!”

It matters what meaning we give to the name Jesus – Lord and Savior or just an ancient story with a hopeful ending.

Jesus as Lord and Savior is not all that we receive when we’re open to God’s presence and willing to reframe things accordingly. We also gain relationship – relationship with God and, in that, new relationship with one another.

Matthew tells us that God’s message to Joseph is in fulfillment of what was spoken long ago by the Prophet Isaiah, who said, “Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.”

“God is with us.” This means that we are not left to suffer the sins of the world all alone. As much trouble as we face in life, God is with us, to redeem this world in keeping with his plan and purpose, for us and all humanity. “... They shall name him Emmanuel,” says Isaiah. They – all people – will come to know that God is with us, and that with God by our side, we have nothing to fear.

As Dennis Bratcher says concerning the Christmas season, “(The Christmas season is about possibility), a possibility that is ... symbolized by a helpless infant who has nothing of its own by which to survive; yet an infant who, because he is Immanuel, God with us, will forever change the world and all humanity.”

Joseph risked everything when he took Mary as his wife, but he did so trusting that God would enter into that situation. So, too, with us, when we trust God enough to take a risk and do what he would have us do, we enter into God’s plan, and not just for us alone, but for our families, our friends, our community and our world. You, like Joseph, are instrumental in what God is bringing into this world – which was and is and always will be.

Immanuel, God with us, transforming us and our world into the greatest Christmas blessing you could ever hope for or imagine. Amen.

## PASTORAL PRAYER

You call us to prepare, gracious Savior — to prepare to entertain angels, to be alert to wait and watch, to be awake for the coming of glory, to receive your presence in our lives.

Send your Spirit upon us, we pray, that we might be made ready to open our hearts and lives with gladness. Fill us with the joy of anticipation, and make our waiting a sweet time of communion with you.

And as we wait, we stand in awe, knowing what the birth of this particular baby means for our lives, yet unable to fully comprehend the depth of your love for us. We come before you in worship this morning, hoping that our thoughts, prayers and songs of praise are pleasing to you.

We pray for others we know who are dealing with life's difficulties. And for all of us, Lord, give us a sense of wonder this Christmas. Strengthen our bonds as family at home and at church. Let our lives be a prayer, manifesting the love of God, that we might be true disciples of Jesus the Christ, who taught us to pray together, saying:

**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 debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**