

Session 1

December 5, 2021

GOD WITH US

Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18-25

God is absolutely sovereign.

He never operates in a random fashion. Unlike many of us (myself included!), God doesn't make it up as He goes, "fly by the seat of His pants" (so to speak), ask Alexa for suggestions, or Google anything looking for answers. He doesn't second guess Himself, or fret over what may happen next. As Adrian Rogers used to say, "The Holy Trinity never meets in emergency session." The beloved Corey ten Boom reminded us as well, "There is no panic in Heaven. God has no problems, only plans." And so it is with our redemption. God didn't suddenly come up with a plan to "clean up" our sin mess. Rather, in His divine sovereignty, He put the plan into place even before creating the world in which it would all come about (see 1 Pet. 1:19-20; Rev. 13:8). And the good news is, He didn't hide it from us, but told us throughout the Scriptures exactly what He would do. Our Winter lessons look at God's faithfulness to His promises. The first lesson unfolds in four segments.

A prophetic promise (Is. 7:14). This oft-quoted Christmas prophecy was pronounced more than 700 years before it was fulfilled. The original context had nothing to do with Christmas per se, but rather with God's unshakeable faithfulness. Ahaz, the king of Judah, found himself in dire straits. Two rival kings were plotting to attack the holy city of Jerusalem. God sent Isaiah not to warn the king, but to inform him that the enemy kings would not prevail against him. Sensing his doubt and fear, the Lord invited King Ahaz to ask for a sign to assure God's protection was real, but Ahaz declined the offer. In indignation at the stubborn king, the Lord promised a sign anyway; one from God's grace alone that should settle any and all doubts the people of Israel might have regarding God's faithfulness to carry out His word. In a miraculous incarnation, and in the fullness of time, God Himself would visit His people. Hence, His name would be Immanuel; "God with us." For reflection: *Why do you think God would offer a sign of salvation to a sinful, idolatrous people, then wait 700 years before fulfilling His promise?*

A painful position (Matt. 1:18-19). Now we fast-forward to the New Testament. Unlike Luke's Gospel, that introduces the Christmas narrative through the ladies Elizabeth and Mary, Matthew traces the lineage of Joseph and begins the narrative from his perspective. Too often overlooked as a minor player, Joseph, in reality, shines as a hero. Blindsided by the sudden news of his betrothed's pregnancy, Joseph had every right under the law to scandalize Mary publicly, and even turn her over to the authorities to be stoned (see Deut. 22:21). But "being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, he decided to divorce her *privately*" (v. 19). Thus we see Joseph's honorable character as well as the love he felt for young Mary. For reflection: *Why do you think Joseph is so often overlooked in the Christmas story? Have you noticed that he is never mentioned later in Jesus' life? Why do you think that is?*

An important pronouncement (vv. 20-23). That Joseph "considered these things" demonstrates his careful thoughtfulness in dealing with the situation. Unlike Mary, who received an angel visitation face-to-face (see Luke 1:26 ff), Joseph's revelation came through a dream. The message was concise and full of information: (1) Go ahead and marry Mary; (2) The child is

conceived of the Holy Spirit; (3) He will be a son; (4) Name Him Jesus; (5) He will be the Savior. Matthew is quick to point out that this was all in direct fulfillment of the prophecy from Isaiah 7:14 (above), even translating for his readers the meaning of *Immanuel*. For reflection: *Why do think Mary's angel visitation required a face-to-face, but a dream was enough for Joseph?*

A proud parent (vv. 24-25). The final scene is again about Joseph. He did those things that he was instructed to do: he took Mary as his wife; he kept her a virgin to insure there was no possibility of a human father; and he named Him Jesus. For reflection: *If Jesus was the Son of God, then why did God even bring a man into the picture? In other words, why do you think God got Joseph involved at all?*