

12/24

Matthew 1:18-25 NRSV

18 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. 19 Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. 20 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. 21 She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." **22 All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:**

23 "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." 24 When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, 25 but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

Title: [Look and Know God Is Here](#)

The "all this" Matthew refers to here is his version of virgin birth, which includes the dilemma it creates for her fiancé Joseph. Matthew makes a point of saying that Joseph was "a righteous man and unwilling to expose [Mary] to public disgrace." As he plans to part ways with her discreetly, an angel appears to him in a dream and tells him – in so many words – to accept that the Holy Spirit, Giver of Life, has brought this baby into being. He is going to need an earthly father, Joseph. God wants you to be that father. You are to name him. You are to raise him. Claim him for your family, the House of David. Claim him as your own.

This is the night when we may, once again, receive the Christ child as our own. We, like Joseph, can set aside our objections, our doubts, our egos, and accept the gift – with all the joy and the trouble that comes with it. We can say yes to the privilege of making a home for Jesus. In doing so, we also say yes to the responsibility. We can choose to open our hearts, open our minds, and open our arms to receive Emmanuel, God with us. But as it was for Mary and then for Joseph, so it is with us. God doesn't force Jesus on us. We have a choice.

In what ways is Christ's presence in your life a source of joy?

In what ways does it feel like an inconvenience – or worse – an unfair burden?

Can you be honest about that with God tonight?

Despite the depictions in renaissance art, there were no haloes over the holy family's heads. Mary and Joseph's choice did not confer to them some visible sign that their new family should be venerated instead of gossiped about. This choice didn't make life easier for them. It made things much harder. They would soon become refugees, fleeing to Egypt to escape the

murderous rampage of Herod. But they said “yes” to it, for the sake of their people. They yes for the sake of the world. They had no idea about the cross, we can be pretty certain of that. But we can also be pretty certain that they didn’t believe being the parents of God’s messiah was going to be a cake walk.

Welcoming Emmanuel is beautiful, and it is hard. It makes life so very much better, but it doesn’t make life easier. The blessing comes with a burden. Can we accept that we can’t experience one without the other? And can we admit that we wouldn’t want it any other way? That is, can we see ourselves as people who, like Joseph and Mary, courageously and joyfully accept the call to bear Christ into a hard and brutal world for the sake of others precisely because we know it’s hard and we know it will hurt but we also know it is what is needed. This is what love requires.

Parenting can sometimes be a thankless job, we know. As I celebrate this third Christmas with you all, I reminded of the many stories I’ve heard about the hard things you have done as parents. You did them because that was what love required. You’ve prayed or struggled through years of infertility. You’ve taken harrowing trips to foreign countries to complete adoptions. You endured in longsuffering love for children struggling with addiction. You’ve raised the kids from your extended family when their parents couldn’t provide the needed care. You’ve claimed strangers as your kids and your grandkids and made them your family. You’ve taken yearly journeys to Baja to support a ministry dedicated children who have experienced truly unspeakable things.

You didn’t do these things simply because they were hard. But their difficulty confirmed that love was the compelling reason and love was the compelling goal for doing them.

Love is the reason.

Love is the goal.

So it is, toward us, in the coming of Jesus. Emmanuel comes to us at great cost. For God so *loved* the world that he gave his only begotten Son. In giving the Son, God gives us *all*. Being human is hard, and *becoming* human is hard! This is a night for anticipation, but it’s also a night for gratitude!

Jesus Christ is a gift worth celebrating, not just on Christmas eve but every eve! At the end of each beautiful, hard, joyful, scary day we live, as darkness falls, we can give thanks. We can be grateful for both the joys and the troubles that come by walking close to God. We practice gratitude as we wait in hope for Christ’s return. We arise, and we shine, for our light has come! Look! The glory of the Lord has risen upon us!

As we enjoy our tradition of sharing candlelight with one another, let’s make this a ritual of recommitment.

As you give the light to your neighbor, say:

Christ our light, God’s gift to you!

As you receive the light, say:
I welcome you, Lord Jesus!