

# We Hear The Christmas Angels The Great, Glad Tidings Tell

Matthew 1:18-25    November 30, 2025

*O Little Town Of Bethlehem* is one of my favorite Christmas carols. In its final stanza we sing the line, "We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell."

The story of Christmas is *full* of angelic activity. In fact, there are at least six different moments when angels arrived with a message connected to Christ's birth, not to just one person or group, but to a variety of people. A priest, a carpenter, a young bride, a group of shepherds.

Each interaction had specific emphasis and purpose, but all were part of announcing that the Savior is born. The Hope of the world, the Eternal King has come to rule and rescue.

In the weeks ahead, we want to take a look at three of these angel visits, and hear their great glad tidings and remind ourselves of the wonder of Jesus' birth and how that changes *our* futures.

**Matthew 1:18 - <sup>18</sup> The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way: After his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, it was discovered before they came together that she was pregnant from the Holy Spirit.**

Sadly, in our culture, there's little concern for sexual purity. Most of our leaders and entertainers and neighbors don't think things like monogamy and a Biblical family structure are important.

But in first century Judea things were *very* different. Not only was there a *cultural* expectation that Jewish men and women would be celibate until marriage, this ethic was part of their *legal* system. It was a big, big problem that Mary was pregnant before she and Joseph tied the knot.

Before we move on, let's talk about Godly morality in our relationships. God has given us very clear, very achievable, very *good* directives and boundaries when it comes to our sexuality. He doesn't do so because He's trying to cheat us or repress us or anything like that. Human sexuality is a *gift* given to us for enjoyment and for procreation and for intimacy between a husband and a wife.

But the world has totally perverted this good gift. And now it offers us this poisoned version of human sexuality. The world around us and the sin nature within us lies to us, saying that if you do all these different things you will be happy and pleased and so much better off than if you follow God's design, but it's a trap. Expressions of sexuality that disobey God's commands destroy our relationships, our minds, in some cases our bodies. In fact, Paul wrote:

**1 Corinthians 6:18 - <sup>18</sup> Flee sexual immorality! Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the person who is sexually immoral sins against his own body.**

God's design for human sexuality is very easy to understand. It is reserved for a man and woman who are married. If you call yourself a Christian and you're having sex before you're married, you need to stop. If you're committing adultery, you need to stop. If you're watching pornography, you need to stop. God commands it. If you will trust and obey Him, He can really, truly bless that aspect of your life within a marriage relationship - and that's what He *wants* to do for you and your spouse.

But let's get back to our text. At *this* point Mary and Joseph were *betrothed*. They're engaged. Betrothal would last at least one year, but it wasn't like in our day where if an engagement is called off, it's a sad thing, but there's no penalty other than tears. In *this* time, being betrothed carried the same legal responsibilities as being married, which is why Joseph is called Mary's husband in verse 19. If they wanted to cancel the wedding, Joseph would have to get an official divorce.<sup>1</sup>

Notice what it says: It's not, "Mary came and told Joseph what had happened." It was *discovered*. Meaning everyone can notice that Mary is pregnant.<sup>2</sup> Now, this immediately raises questions. Was she trying to conceal her pregnancy? Why hadn't she told Joseph about *her* angel visit?

Mary wasn't trying to hide it from Joseph.<sup>3</sup> In Galilee, it was frowned upon for betrothed people to spend time together alone.<sup>4</sup> We read "before they came together" as a reference to marital intimacy, but it's also possible that it means they literally didn't get to spend time together to talk.

But now, it's obvious. *Everyone* looking at the situation would've thought that Mary had done a very bad, illegal thing. And it seems that, at the time, Joseph thought so, too.

**Matthew 1:19 - <sup>19</sup> So her husband, Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly.**

We learn a lot about Joseph in this one sentence. First, that he is *righteous* - meaning he cared deeply about honoring God and going God's way - following His commands. But second, we see his love and compassion for Mary. "Not wanting to disgrace her publicly."

Understand, *that* was his heart toward her *while he thought* she had been unfaithful to him. *That's* Godly love. A love that does not ignore what is right and wrong, but is full of mercy, of kindness, of grace *even to the guilty*. Now, Mary *wasn't* guilty, and she's about to be exonerated, but we're talking about what's happening from Joseph's perspective. He had true love for Mary.

At the same time, Joseph's *Godliness* dictated his decisions. Not feelings. Not external pressure. He *obviously* loved Mary - he *wanted* to marry her - but in this situation, the Law of God told him to separate from her and he was willing to do so in submission to God's way. Godly principles applied with love made Joseph a *great* man. That's what helped him navigate difficult days and situations.

---

<sup>1</sup> Craig Keener *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Second Edition)*

<sup>2</sup> Frank Gaebelein, D. A. Carson, Walter Wessel, and Walter Liefeld *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke*

<sup>3</sup> Gaebelein

<sup>4</sup> Keener

**Matthew 2:20 - <sup>20</sup> But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.**

I don't know why, but God often likes to wait until what seems like the *last second* from our vantage point. Why not send an angel to Joseph *before* the pregnancy like He did for Mary? Instead, He waited until *after* Joseph had decided, but before he actually implemented his plan.<sup>5</sup>

It's a reminder that, in our own lives, God wants us to watch for Him. He wants us to listen for Him. He wants us to walk faith. It's ok for us to make plans and choices that are motivated by Biblical principles. But all the while we should expect the Lord to speak and to lead according to His specific purposes for us.

Now, the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary face-to-face one day. This angel comes to Joseph in a dream. That happens *three* times to Joseph. For some reason, he always got the dream team. In *this* encounter, the angel gives both instruction and encouragement. The instruction was to change his mind and go ahead and take Mary as his wife *and* adopt her child and his own son. The encouragement was to not be afraid.

This is a common message from God to His people. Don't be afraid. But does that mean there is nothing to *fear*? The truth is, Mary and Joseph will be seen *running for their lives* in a few verses. For the rest of their days, the community around them would think badly of them. As a family, they would be misunderstood, jeered at, lied about. Most parents feel inadequate for the task of raising kids. Think of how this couple would feel knowing that God had entrusted them with caring for *the Savior of the world*. There were *many* fearful things ahead.

When God tells His people to not be afraid, it's never about the *factors* around us, it's about His *faithfulness*. Facing the bleak wilderness before them and a charging Egyptian army behind, the children of Israel had a lot to fear. But listen to what God said about it in Haggai chapter 2:

**Haggai 2:5 - <sup>5</sup> This is the promise I made to you when you came out of Egypt, and my Spirit is present among you; don't be afraid.' "**

Jesus would later say in Matthew 10, "When people come to *kill* your body, don't be afraid." Not because God won't let them kill you - He might - but because *you* are extremely precious to the Lord and He will see you through. When we face fearful things, God's message to His people is:

**Isaiah 41:13 - <sup>13</sup> For I am the LORD your God, who holds your right hand, who says to you, "Do not fear, I will help you.**

---

<sup>5</sup> John Nolland *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Gospel Of Matthew*

Now, we cut the angel off mid-message. He said something kinda vague: "What has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit." Ok...so *what* was conceived? If the home inspector came to you and said, "We found *something* living in your attic," the very first question is, "What is it?"

**Matthew 1:21 - <sup>21</sup> She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."**

Mary carried the Baby, but it was very important that He be officially adopted as Joseph's Son. That's why the angel emphasizes that *Joseph* would name Him. That's part of the legal adoption process at the time.<sup>6</sup> When Joseph adopted Jesus, it made Him a legal heir to the throne of David. Now, we believe that Mary was *also* a descendent of David, but it is through the father that the inheritance was given.

Jesus is the Greek form of the name Joshua.<sup>7</sup> And the name means, "Yahweh is salvation."<sup>8</sup> Jesus came as a *Savior*. He came to deliver us from our sins. Notice: He did *not* come to shower material riches. He did *not* come to kill Caesar. He did not come to give political power to the Jewish people. That's what the Zealots were hoping for. He came to save us from sin.

This brings us to two questions we should answer. The first is: Are we *playing* with sin? Oh sure, maybe we're not doing the *big* ones - big in *our* minds. Probably very few serial killers in the audience today. But Jesus Christ came to *rescue* you from sin. Sin is not a joke. It angers God. It breaks His heart. It harms the people and the world around us. James explains that sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death.<sup>9</sup> If you are dabbling, dealing, or practicing in sinful things, it is like getting taken out of a burning building by a fireman and then running back into it for fun.

The second question is: Are *you* one of Jesus' people? Notice what the angel said: He will save *His people* from their sins.

Have you ever been in a new place and thought, "These are my people!" Jesus doesn't save those who are *not* His people. One scholar writes, "As the story [of the Gospel] unfolds, it will become clear that a considerable part of the people place themselves beyond the reach of this saving activity, *and* that salvation is also opened up to those outside the historic people of God," referring to the Jews.<sup>10</sup>

So who are His people? Those who believe on Him. Those who are part of His *ecclesia* - His gathered assembly of people we call the Church or the Bride of Christ.<sup>11</sup> Those who become children of God through faith - being born again.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Nolland, Craig Blomberg *The New American Commentary, Volume 22: Matthew*

<sup>7</sup> Gaebelein

<sup>8</sup> Blomberg

<sup>9</sup> James 1:15

<sup>10</sup> Nolland

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 16:18

<sup>12</sup> Romans 9:25-30

**Matthew 1:22-23 - <sup>22</sup> Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: <sup>23</sup> See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel, which is translated "God is with us."**

In chapter 1:18 through chapter 2:23, Matthew gives five Scriptural proofs that Jesus *is* the Messiah the world has been waiting for. God keeps His word. He makes good on His promises. He is very concerned about fulfilling and finishing what He starts. That's true for the prophecies about Jesus, it's true of His promises to Israel, it's true of His plan for the entire human race, and it's true for the work He began in *your* life, too. Your part is to believe Him and trust Him and submit to His commands and participate in His ongoing work in your life.

Now, I have always wondered *why* Joseph named the Baby *Jesus* if it says right here to name Him Immanuel. Is *that* what's happening? No, the name is Jesus - which is the name Gabriel gave to Mary in Luke 1. So what's with this Immanuel thing? One source writes, "The people whose sins Jesus *forgives* are the ones who will gladly call Him God with us."<sup>13</sup>

There are people in your life who you have a special name for. A nickname maybe. A name others can't because they're not in that kind of close relationship. Can *you* call Jesus Immanuel? Is He with *you*? Has He saved *you*? If He has, remind yourself of Who He is. God *with* you.

**Matthew 1:24-25 - <sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke up, he did as the Lord's angel had commanded him. He married her <sup>25</sup> but did not have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son. And he named him Jesus.**

This calling was serious and heavy, with some difficult ramifications. And then consider the fact that Mary was probably around 14 or 15 years old and Joseph, if this was his first marriage, was maybe 18 or 19.<sup>14</sup> But he takes on the call and commands *immediately*.

I wonder if some of their family refused to come to the wedding? In this time and place, weddings were a big deal. Usually a 7 day feast.<sup>15</sup> What was *not* usual was a very obviously pregnant bride. Very few would've believed their story about the angel and the conception by the Holy Spirit.

And yet, Joseph and Mary bore it for the Lord. Joseph took his duty very seriously. He went beyond the *letter* of the angel's command. The angel told him to marry Mary and name the Baby Jesus, he didn't specify about not being intimate with her. But Joseph would not cast any *further* doubt on Jesus' legitimacy, and so he denied himself for a time in order to honor God and serve God.

This was a wonderful start to the life ahead. But it wouldn't always be easy. The *next* time Joseph talks with an angel, the trouble wouldn't just be gossiping neighbors, but men with swords coming to kill their Son. We'll take a look at that next time.

---

<sup>13</sup> Gaebelin

<sup>14</sup> Keener

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

But here, as we close, two things I'd like us to consider. First, the *gift* of salvation. Most of us will receive some sort of Christmas gift in a few weeks. Some you'll be excited about. Others, perhaps, that you're not interested in. Jesus Christ is the indescribable gift<sup>16</sup> sent from heaven to *you*. A gift that saves you from your sin. You *must* be saved from sin otherwise it will destroy your life and condemn you to an eternity of suffering in Hell.

I'm sure you've heard people say, "Only God can judge me." Of course, that's not really true. Policemen and judges and society can judge you, too. But, yes, God is the ultimate Judge. And He *will* judge you if you refuse His gift. Don't tell yourself, "Only God can judge me." The better phrase is, "Only Christ can save me." Have you received the gift of salvation? It is free, but it *does* come with strings attached. He gives salvation to you, and you give your life to Him. Of course, you're not losing anything when you give your life to Him. He takes your life and fills it and transforms it and enriches it with every spiritual blessing. He keeps giving again and again, day by day in ways you could never ask or imagine.

Second, a simple reminder. In this section of the Gospel story, we see angel messengers coming with the glad tidings. Why angels? Well, there were no disciples yet. No human messengers. But *now* He does. Now *you* are the messenger, sent with great, glad tidings to tell. The Good News that the Messiah, the Savior has arrived and that whosoever would believe in Him will be saved. Forgiven of their sin. Cleared of their guilt. Filled with everlasting life. Granted a home in eternity. Have their lives transformed by His power and grace. That our Lord, Emmanuel, *has* come to us and abides with us.

---

<sup>16</sup> 2 Corinthians 9:15