

**SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS**  
**Commentary by Michael Sigler**  
**December 20, 2009**

**Emmanuel Is Born**

**Matthew 1:18-25**

**Key Verse: “She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).**

Matthew 1:18-25 is a significant part of the Bible’s testimony regarding the birth of Christ. Of particular importance is the fact that, in these eight verses, Christ is given three titles that describe His *identity* and His *mission*:

**1. Verse 18 refers to Christ as “the Messiah.”** “Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way.” Of the four gospels, Matthew is the most concerned with clearly identifying Jesus as the promised Messiah of Israel, the fulfillment of messianic prophecy. So, this passage begins by identifying Jesus as this promised Messiah. The title “Messiah” helps describe the *identity* and the *mission* of the baby born in Bethlehem.

Kevin DeYoung highlighted the significance of this title when he wrote that the baby born in Bethlehem was: “Not just another prophet. Not just another rabbi. Not just another wonder-worker. He was the one they had been waiting for: the Son of David and Abraham’s chosen seed; the one to deliver us from captivity; the goal of the Mosaic law; Yahweh in the flesh; the one to establish God’s reign and rule; the one to heal the sick, give sight to the blind, freedom to the prisoners and proclaim Good News to the poor; the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world.

“This Jesus was the Creator come to earth and the beginning of a New Creation. He embodied the covenant, fulfilled the commandments, and reversed the curse. This Jesus is the Christ that God spoke of to the serpent; the Christ prefigured to Noah in the flood; the Christ promised to Abraham; the Christ prophesied through Balaam before the Moabites; the Christ revealed to Isaiah as a Suffering Servant; the Christ predicted through the prophets and prepared for through John the Baptist.” (from “*Who Do You Say That I Am?*”)

**2. Verse 21 identifies Christ as the Savior.** “She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” When the angel spoke these words to Joseph, he identified the baby to be born to Mary as *the Savior* of the world.

The name Jesus means “the Lord saves.” Jesus himself would identify his mission and purpose, saying: “The Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). So, by identifying Jesus as the Savior, this passage further describes the *identity* and the *mission* of the baby born in Bethlehem.

I don’t know who wrote this, but I know it is true:

*If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator;  
If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist;  
If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist;  
If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer;  
But our greatest need was forgiveness, so God sent us a Savior.*

**3. In verses 22-23, Jesus is given the title of “Emmanuel.”** “All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,’ which means, ‘God is with us.’” (Here Matthew cites the prophet Isaiah.)

In giving to Jesus the prophetic title of Emmanuel, the Bible further describes the *identity* and the *mission* of the baby born in Bethlehem. He is our Emmanuel, God coming to be with us, wrapped in human flesh, yet never ceasing to be God.

John described the miracle of the incarnation in these words: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being....And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1-3, 14).

“Messiah,” “Savior,” “Emmanuel—God with us.” A world of truth about the identity and mission of Jesus is contained in these three titles. Yet, our world still stumbles over these fundamental questions: *Who is this baby born in a manger in Bethlehem? And why was he born?*

Radio personality Paul Harvey told a story about a man who struggled to answer these questions:

*The man to whom I’m going to introduce you was not a scrooge. He was a kind, decent, mostly good man. Generous to his family, upright in his dealings with other men. But he just didn’t believe all that incarnation stuff which the churches proclaim at Christmas time. It just didn’t make sense, and he was too honest to pretend otherwise. He just couldn’t swallow the Jesus story, about God coming to earth as a man.*

*“I’m truly sorry to distress you,” he told his wife, “but I’m not going with you to church this Christmas Eve.” He said he’d feel like a hypocrite. That he’d much rather just stay at home, but that he would wait up for them. And so he stayed and they went to the midnight service.*

*Shortly after the family drove away in the car, snow began to fall. He went to the window to watch the flurries getting heavier and heavier and then went back to his fireside chair and began to read his newspaper. Minutes later he was startled by a thudding sound...then another, and another. Sort of a thump or a thud.*

*At first he thought someone must be throwing snowballs against his living room window. But when he went to the front door to investigate, he found a flock of birds huddled miserably in the snow. They'd been caught in the storm and, in a desperate search for shelter, had tried to fly through his large landscape window.*

*Well, he couldn't let the poor creatures lie there and freeze. So he remembered the barn where his children stabled their pony. That would provide a warm shelter, if he could direct the birds to it.*

*Quickly he put on a coat and galoshes and tramped through the deepening snow to the barn. He opened the doors wide and turned on a light, but the birds did not come in. He figured food would entice them in. So he hurried back to the house, fetched bread crumbs and sprinkled them on the snow, making a trail to the yellow-lighted, wide open doorway of the stable. But to his dismay, the birds ignored the bread crumbs, and continued to flap around helplessly in the snow.*

*He tried catching them. He tried shoing them into the barn by walking around them waving his arms. The birds scattered in every direction except into the warm, lighted barn. He realized then that they were afraid of him. "To them," he reasoned, "I am a strange and terrifying creature. If only I could think of some way to let them know that they can trust me...that I am not trying to hurt them, but to help them. But how?"*

*He realized that any move he made would only frighten them, confuse them. They just would not follow. They would not be led or shooed because they feared him.*

*Then the man thought to himself, "If only I could become a bird, and mingle with them and speak their language. Then I could tell them not to be afraid. Then I could show them the way to the safe, warm barn....But I would have to become one of them—so that they could see and hear and understand.*

*At that moment, the church bells began to ring. The sound reached his ears above the sounds of the wind. And he stood there, listening to the bells—"Adeste Fidelis"—listening to the bells pealing the glad tidings of Christmas. And he sank to his knees in the snow.*

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