

READ Mathew 1:18-25

What – Merry Christmas! Matthew had no idea when he wrote this gospel that the church would celebrate Jesus' birth as a holiday of remembrance (the church did not officially recognize Christmas until around 336 AD. Check out a great article for details at www.christianitytoday.com/ch/news/2000/dec08). He was simply recalling the birth of the one who his entire gospel would be about, his main character, his teacher, his rabbi and his savior, Jesus. Matthew was a Jew, and Jews were very concerned about lineage, family traditions and genealogy. For that reason, Matthew gave far more detail about Joseph than does Luke in his gospel. He reminded us that Joseph was a righteous man and that God worked in the lives of Joseph and Mary to fulfill the prophecy and bring His son to this earth. He reminded us of the purpose that God assigned to the life of His son, to save His people from their sins. He also informed us of a startling and still difficult reality. Jesus was God in the flesh. Then after all those bombshells, Matthew simply stated that, "she gave birth to a son, and they named Him Jesus." As books go, even if you were not reading this as the Word of God, you would know this one was going to be good!

Why – Matthew said two things in this scripture that define the rest of the New Testament and the history of the world. First, Jesus would save His people from their sins. At Christmas God introduces the Savior of the World, the Way, the Truth and the Life and the only name under heaven and earth by which men must be saved. God starts His final battle against sin and Satan here (see Rev 12:1-7) and the world, as any history professor in any high school or college on earth can tell you, has never been the same. The second, and no less important reason this scripture defines history is the statement that Jesus will be called "God with us". Not enough Christians realize the immense importance of this statement. This is what separates Christianity from every other faith in the world. In most religions, and unfortunately in the practices of many Christians who do not realize the purpose and plan of God, God is distant. He resides in heaven far away, and man resides on earth. God deals with His people through rules, communication of various sorts and indirect action, but He (God) does not come to the earth. This idea of a far away God has been the standard for all modern thought since the Greek philosopher Plato (hence the word "Platonic" meaning "not intimate"). Jesus SHATTERED that understanding of faith. God becoming like His creation for the sake of that creation is a totally new and unthinkable plan that only Christianity can claim. There never was and never will be another like Jesus. He was God in the flesh. He redefined love and salvation and set His people on a new course that changed the world and continues to change lives today.

WOW – As if God taking up residence on earth was not enough of a WOW, God delivered another awesome revelation in this scripture. He showed us that the prophets had predicted what was happening. That was Gods way of saying that He had planned this from the start. He is in charge. The virgin and the Holy Spirit remind us that Jesus was fully God and fully man. His Godliness was necessary because a perfect sacrifice was needed to reconcile us with God. His humanity was needed to set an example for us and to shatter forever the yoke of Platonic separation from God. His plan was perfect. But the biggest WOW from this scripture is that His plan is STILL perfect. Here is what I

mean. When I read this scripture two things stuck out to me, namely MARY and JOSEPH. These were two ordinary people, and young people at that. Why did God choose them? What made them stand out to Him? We get a clue from the text. Verse 19 told us that Joseph was a righteous man who put Mary's needs and feeling ahead of his own. Luke reminded us (see Luke 1:38) that Mary was a humble, obedient follower of God. We can do those things! We can be obedient. We can be righteous. God's example to us, even in the implementation of His plan, is that He wants to use us for His kingdom purposes. What an amazing Christmas message. God will use you if you let Him. I know there will never be another Jesus, but I also know that God is still working. What is His plan for you in the future? The bible says "ask, and it will be given unto you." I believe this what God is talking about. If we seek Him, if we truly desire to follow and serve Jesus, then God will use us to work miracles in the lives of those around us just like He used Mary and Joseph. There is no better gift that God could give you.