

Weekly Bible Study for Highcliffe and Bransgore Methodist Churches

Advent #3 Joy Matthew 1: 18-25 by Kathy Mathew w/c Sunday 13th December 2020

This passage in Matthew's Gospel will be read in Carol Services all over the country this Christmas. Jesus arrived after a period of 400 years of silence, confusion, prophecy and longing for the Jewish people. In these verses Matthew establishes the fact that Jesus is the Messiah. He was born, he did live and his life, death and resurrection changed the lives of a small group of people who God used to change the world. Matthew makes it clear that Jesus was the Son of God. He was God made flesh through the miracle of the incarnation. So it is with joy that we look forward to celebrating the coming of Jesus into our world.

There is much more in this chapter than the account of Jesus' birth. There are three areas that we should look at in the context of this reading. Firstly who was Joseph-the man chosen by God to be Jesus' earthly father. There are not many facts recorded about Joseph in the four gospels. But he was chosen to raise the Son of God and we know from this passage in Mathew, that he was a man of integrity and righteousness. He obeyed God in the face of severe humiliation and he was sensitive to Mary's condition practising obedience and self-control. God asked Joseph to do two crucial things. Firstly He cleared the way for Joseph to go ahead and marry, assuring him Mary was still a virgin and this baby was a miracle of God. Secondly, God gave Joseph the responsibility of naming the child "Jesus". It was a Jewish custom for naming a child to be the father's job. Joseph's response reminds us that obedience is connected to faith.

Q 1. Think for a minute what it would have cost Joseph to go ahead and marry Mary. What would have been the most difficult aspect for him in this situation?

Q 2.Can you recall a time when you were certain that God was nudging you towards a kind of obedience? How did you respond?

Q 3. Are you or anyone you know currently in this kind of situation (or in your group)? What are the costs involved? What is most frightening about it? Will Joseph's story encourage you that God knows what He's doing even if you don't understand?

Secondly, Matthew is quick to support the doctrine of the virgin birth or the Incarnation. This is referred to several times in the gospels but it is here in this passage that the most is said about the miraculous conception of Jesus. To the Christian, incarnation speaks of God becoming man in the person of Jesus Christ. The word incarnate means 'enfleshed' as John says in John 1. ".....and the Word became flesh"

At his birth Jesus Christ became both the Son of God and the Son of Man. It is only in the incarnation that we are able to know God. I remember hearing Philip Yancey– a Christian writer and speaker, giving this illustration of the incarnation. He said," I have a tank of fish and have been trying to befriend them but whenever I approach the tank to feed them and talk to them they dive to the bottom. I resolved in the end that in order to do this I would have to become a fish!" This is exactly what happened in the incarnation. For God to have a relationship with humanity, the Son of God humbled Himself to become human.

Q.4 Can you think of three instances in the ministry of Jesus that give evidence of Him being truly God? Now recall three occasions that show Him to be completely human.

Q.5 Why was it important for Him to become like us and be born as a baby? In theological terms, why is the incarnation vital to the gospel message?

Thirdly, there is **Joy**. In this the third week of advent, we are thinking about the good news of Jesus' birth which can powerfully bring us great joy.

Q.6. Do you agree that Jesus' entry into the world at Christmas is a source of a special joy for Christians? May the birth of Our Lord bring you true joy this Christmas. Kathy