

Experiencing the Miracles of Christmas
(Matt. 1:18-25)

Good afternoon! Have you all recovered from Thanksgiving? I know many of us were busy – cooking, entertaining guests, watching football, shopping, even working. I hope you're settling down now. But then, it's December already and we'll be entering another busy season. You never get a rest, right? And this time, it seems like there's no transition because we just celebrated Thanksgiving a few days back and here we are, already making plans for the biggest celebration of all. And some of us are wondering if we could cope with it all. Our minds are probably already creating a mental list of things we need to, to buy, to call, to visit, to wrap, to send cards to, and so on and so forth. Tackling all these things seem impossible. We need a miracle, right?

Well, I hope busyness is your only problem. Because there are some of us here who probably are facing more serious problems or difficulties. And to you these difficulties seem too hard to overcome. You feel like they're impossible to overcome. Maybe, you're behind your bills. Maybe your doctor just gave you a grim prognosis about your health. Maybe your relationship with your spouse is teetering on the brink of collapse. Maybe your children are hard to control. Maybe you feel anxious and afraid and you feel insecure by something you don't know. Maybe your job is on the line. All of us are carrying something. It's a heavy burden that maybe you and God only know. And you don't know whether God is really there because he doesn't seem to be listening. But you need him now. You need a miracle.

This afternoon, I'd like to start a series called "Christmas Miracles". You see, Christmas is a reminder of God's miracles. We see that over and over again in Christmas movies like "Miracle on 34th Street" and "The Preacher's Wife".

Sadly, however, people sometimes miss God's intervention in their lives. We sometimes fail to realize God's provision when it comes our way. God still does miracles. God wants to intervene in your life today.

You see, he wants to use this Christmas to remind us of God's miracles. The first Christmas reminds us of some of God's miracles...miracles that God wants us to experience. And I believe that most of us need to be reminded of that today.

Folks, you can celebrate this Christmas because God wants to do a miracle in your life. Christmas reminds us of the miracles of God. Let me share several of them with you beginning in this message. I believe God is going to speak to each person today about a specific miracle he wants you to experience. That's why I've entitled this message, "Experiencing the Miracles of Christmas".

Please open your Bibles to **Matt 1:18-25**. Follow along as I read this passage.

In the passage I read, we find some miracles of Christmas that God wants you to experience and celebrate.

What are they?

1. You can experience the miracle of God's plan for your life.

That is the first miracle I want you to see - the miracle of God's plan. That is what we see from verses 18-21. No doubt you've heard the story many times. When Joseph learned that Mary was pregnant...the news floored him. Why? Because he was engaged to her...and he knew that he had not been with her...that he couldn't possibly be the father. There was only one logical conclusion...Mary had been unfaithful to him. Though they were not married yet, so sacred was the period of engagement that they were by custom considered as if married.

According to the law Joseph had two options:

1. He could divorce her publicly and shame her in a court of justice, or
2. He could put her away secretly by means of a private divorce.

What would he do?

Verse 19 says because he *“did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.”*

Do you see Joseph’s dilemma? His world has just been rocked...the woman he loves and is engaged to, is pregnant and he is not the father. That, my friends, qualifies as a dilemma.

We all have experienced dilemmas in our lives when we just don’t know what to do...it may be family problems, financial problems, faith problems. And like Joseph, we are left scratching our head wondering, what am I going to do?

I like the way the Message paraphrase v.20, **“While he was trying to figure a way out, he had a dream. God’s angel spoke in the dream: “Joseph, son of David, don’t hesitate to get married. Mary’s pregnancy is Spirit-conceived. God’s Holy Spirit has made her pregnant. (Matthew 1:20 (Msg))**

Have you ever been there...trying to figure a way out of your dilemma? Here is something we can learn from this passage...God replaces our dilemmas with His dreams. Some of you came this morning trying to figure a way out...you’ve got a dilemma. Good news...God wants to intervene...but you need to listen for His message. God used an angel to speak to Joseph in a dream about His miraculous plan.

God wants to speak to you this morning...through His Word, through other people, through circumstance, through prayer, and maybe through a dream. Often times when faced with a dilemma...like Joseph, we only see the solution from a human perspective...and we forget the God factor.

What is the dilemma you are facing today? As you have been trying to figure a way out of it...what solution did you come up with? You see, that is our pattern for problem solving. The Christmas story reminds us there is a better way...God’s way.

We can experience the miracle of God's plan...if we will listen for his voice and guidance. But you've got to listen carefully or you might get the message mixed up...like the little 5 year old who was showing his little brother around the Christmas display at the church. "*Here are the shepherds,*" he explained knowledgeably, "*and there are the sheep and the cows and the wise men.*" He continued by saying, "*And here is Mary, she is Jesus' mother. And that's Mary's husband, Virg.*"

Their mother who was nearby, overheard and offered a correction. "*Mary's husband was named Joseph, dear,*" she said, "*not Virge.*" The 5 year old wrinkled his brow, "*Then how come the preacher always talk about Virge and Mary?*"

It's important to get the story straight! Whose voice are you listening to today when it comes to your future? Joseph listened to God's message and followed God's plan. What about you?

You can experience the miracle of God's plan for your life... listening for God's message and following God's plan for your life. In Jeremiah 33:3 God says,

"Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know." Jer 33:3 (NKJV)

God is a God of miracles...and he will show you His plan for your life... where to go and what to do. Will you call out to Him today...and ask Him to speak to you...and lead you and guide you through your difficulty today? When you do, you can begin to experience and celebrate the miracle of God's plan for your life.

There is a second miracle God wants you to experience and celebrate this Christmas season:

2. You can experience the miracle of God's pardon in your life

We see this very clearly in this passage as we focus in on the angel's message to Joseph in verses 20-21. Let me read again.

But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." Matt 1:20-21 (NIV)

The angel of the Lord made it clear regarding the name of the Son...it would be Jesus.

In the OT and NT times, Parents often intended the names they gave children to have some meaning. Have you ever wondered why your Mom and Dad named you your particular name?

When I was young, I often wonder why...why Rosello? I never encountered anyone else with the first name of Rosello. Rolly? Yes, there's millions of them in the Philippines. Quite a few here in the States. But Rosello? Anyway, I asked my mom. She said that when they were choosing a name for me when I was still in her womb, my dad proposed the name "Rosello" if I was a boy and "Rosella" if I was a girl. To all millennials here, during those days ultra-sound wasn't invented yet and so you just guess what gender your baby was. And one indication was the shape of the belly, right?

Anyway, they had a spat just naming me because my mom thought that my dad was naming me after one of his former girlfriends. My dad was a chick-boy when he was young. Rosella resembled one of his former girlfriend's name. He explained, however, that the name Rosello is actually the last name of his favorite college basketball player when my dad was about 10. I googled it and it's true. During World War II when the Philippines was under Japanese occupation, Enriquez Rosello played for Ateneo. He must be good because my dad liked him and my dad was a basketball player, too, when he was young. My mom was mollified after that and that, folks, prevented the outbreak of World War III. BTW,

I googled my name and I didn't see anyone else in the world with the first name of Rosello. There are lots of Rosellas. But not Rosello. My name is unique but unpopular.

Parents come up with some interesting names...don't they? You know, it is one thing for parents to give a child his or her name...it is another thing for God to give His son a name... it had special significance. *Jesus* is the Greek form of "Joshua." The name means "the Lord saves."

The idea behind the name is that of deliverance, of being saved from some terrible disaster that leads to perishing. God's message was loud and clear. His son...the baby Jesus would be born to save his people from their sins.

From the very start, the gospel of Matthew explains to its Jewish audience that Jesus would not save the people from Rome or from tyranny, nor would He set up an earthly kingdom. Instead, Jesus would save people from sin.

Have you ever heard of some bizarre miracles that supposedly happen with some of these faith healers, legs growing, etc. One of the greatest miracles of all is not growing a new leg or arm, but the forgiveness of sin. God pardoning a sinner and making them a new creation! I know because I've experienced the miracle of God's forgiveness.

Before I became a Christian, I was very religious, I was involved in my parish church so much that I was given the award of "Altar Boy of the Year" for two straight years in high school. Then, I became a Jehovah's Witness and without fail, I would go from house to house every Sunday. I wanted to become a missionary for them but I had to give up becoming married so I can concentrate on the field like the apostle Paul. But thank God because he saved me from this ambition otherwise I wouldn't have married the most beautiful girl in the world according to me and be having three wonderful children. More than that, however, God saved me from my sins. I thought I was saved because I was doing a lot of

good things for God. But when I read the Bible I realized that I was a sinner in need of a Savior.

Have you experienced one of the greatest miracles of all -- God's forgiveness? Many people in this world think they can get by because of their good works, or good deeds, or good relationships, or good education. But deep inside of us is a longing to be accepted and to be rid of all the shameful things we have done. Each of us has a skeleton in the closet. We don't want others to see what's inside the closet. And we often wonder, how could I get rid of this skeleton? If you are that person, there's hope this Christmas. A miracle is waiting for you.

The Bible says that we are all sinners, no exception. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23). It also says, "There is no one righteous, not even one...there is no one who does good, not even one." (Rom. 3:10, 12b). What we think are our good works are filthy rags before God because the motives of our hearts expose us. Thus, our sins separate us from a holy God. We are all doomed to destruction, we are all going to hell. But because of God's great love for us, he showed us his mercy. Instead of punishing us for our sins, he gave us his grace to save us.

In Ephesians 2, it says, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast." (Eph. 2:8-9). So, we are saved not by our good works but by the grace of God. How did God save us then? By sending his Son Jesus to the world. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." And, if we continue to verse 17, it says, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

God made the way for us to be saved. What do you need to do? To follow the way. To put your faith in Jesus because he is the way. Jesus says, "I am the

way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

(John 14:6)

If you put your faith in Jesus, you will receive the miracle of forgiveness for your sins. Later on, I'll give you an opportunity to do just that.

There is a third miracle God wants you to experience and celebrate this Christmas season:

3. You can experience the miracle of God's presence in your life

Notice v. 22-23, “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’-which means, ‘God with us.’” Matt 1:22-23 (NIV)

Jesus came not only to die for us and deliver us. He came to dwell within us. The prophet Isaiah some 700 years before Christ's birth predicted His birth in Isa 7:14. Here we are reminded of the fulfillment of that prophecy. What is especially significant is the name Immanuel, which means *God with us*.

The name was used more as a title or description rather than a proper name. Think about this: in the OT God dwelt among His people in the tabernacle and in the temple. In the NT times God dwelt among His people in the person of Jesus Christ as He walked on this earth. Today, through the Spirit of God, Christ is present in the life of every believer! My friend, that is a miracle!!

At Christmas time, a family was driving around looking at manger scenes erected by various churches in their town. When they drove by the manger scene at one church, the curious little one wanted to know who the figures represented. Dad pointed out Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. They drove on and came to another church that had a nativity scene set up and the same inquisitive one, upon seeing the three figures with crowns on their heads, wanted to know who they were. Mom did the duties this time explaining that the figures were the three wise men looking for the

baby Jesus. *“Well they won’t find Him there,”* the child said. *“He’s down at the other church!”*

The love of God that came down at Christmastime is not confined to one church, tradition, race, or doctrine. One of the great miracles of Christmas is that of God’s presence. God in Jesus Christ is with you. He is with you everywhere all the time. He never takes a vacation or a long weekend.

The message of Christmas is God coming boldly into your life and staying there as your everyday companion. Wherever you walk God walks beside you. Whatever you pass through, God passes through it with you.

Oftentimes Christmas brings out a variety of emotions including sadness and loneliness. If that is where you are today...let me encourage you to experience the miracle of God’s presence in your life. Claim the promise of His presence.

In Josh 1:9 God says,

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”

Jesus says in Matt 28:20, “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

In Heb 13:5 God says, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

And in Isaiah 43, God says, “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”

(Isaiah 43:1b-3a)

Folks, You can experience the miracle of God’s presence in your life!!!

Before I end this message, let me just say that God is a miracle-working God. And he works according to his own time and his own way. As God says in

his Word, ““For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

What I’m saying is that when we ask God for a miracle, we must let God act according to his own plan and purpose. He may answer our request in a way that is totally different from what we expect. But, in the end, we will be blessed any way and God is glorified.

Let me tell you a story to illustrate this point. Author and speaker Tony Campolo, in one of his books, says:

I was in a church in Oregon not too long ago, and I prayed for a man who had cancer. In the middle of the week, I got a telephone call from his wife.

She said, *"You prayed for my husband. He had cancer."*

I said, *"Had?"* Whoa, *I thought, it's happened.*

She said, *"He died."* I felt terrible.

She continued, *"Don't feel bad. When he came into that church last Sunday he was filled with anger. He knew he was going to be dead in a short period of time, and he hated God. He was 58 years old, and he wanted to see his children and grandchildren grow up. He was angry that this all-powerful God didn't take away his sickness and heal him. He would lie in bed and curse God. The more his anger towards God grew, the more miserable he was to everybody around him. It was an awful thing to be in his presence.*

After you prayed for him, a peace had come over him and a joy had come into him. Tony, the last three days have been the best days of our lives. We've sung. We've laughed. We've read Scripture. We prayed. Oh, they've been wonderful days. And I called to thank you for laying your hands on him and praying for healing."

And then she said something incredibly profound. She said, *"He wasn't cured, but he was healed."*

I hope, this Christmas, you'll find your miracle as well in the hands of our Lord Jesus.