



Matthew 1:20-21

20 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. 21 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.”

Yesterday in verses 18 & 19 the story of Je-

sus started in earnest. We've been plunged into a real life crisis. We learn in Luke that Mary's been away at her relative Elizabeth's house and when she first presents herself to Joseph she's four months pregnant.

Imagine how Joseph felt when he first saw her, the confusion, the hurt, the betrayal ... his betrothed, the women he had been planning to spend the rest of his life with, all the arrangements made, the hope of a having a family together, and to see her, pregnant by another man, standing there. You can imagine how he felt.

And as we read yesterday in verse 19, Joseph had resolved to divorce her quietly. He was a man of character and compassion. He had to break it off because of her sin, that's what the Old Testament said, but he still cared enough for Mary that, for her sake, he'd try and keep it quiet

for as long as he could by divorcing her quietly.

Joseph had made up his mind but just before he acted, we read in verse 20, that an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. And again, it's hard to imagine the emotions he must have felt in that moment. Imagine the worst moment of your life turning into the greatest moment of your life. Going to sleep dejected and depressed and waking up euphoric, having just found out that God had chosen you to be the earthly father of the saviour of the world.

Verse 20 says an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. Angels are created spiritual beings. In the West we baulk at the concept, but the rest of the world are far more comfortable with the idea of a spiritual realm. Spiritual beings are real, some are in league with God, they're called angels, some are in

league with Satan, they're called demons. And angels turn up at several key points in Matthew's gospel and Jesus speaks about them quite often. The term 'angel' means messenger, which is appropriate here because Matthew doesn't spend any time at all describing what the angel looked like – he's 100% focussed on the angel's message, which is this: 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid' *of the shame this will bring on you and your family*, 'take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.'

What a bombshell! From barely being able to look at his unfaithful bride, to the relief and pride in learning she's been blessed by God to carry the saviour of the world – the Holy Spirit himself conceiving her child. That by the way isn't a sexual reference, it's merely the way of describing God's creative act in her

womb so that she would give birth to Jesus. You see the Holy Spirit, right throughout the bible is God's creative agent to mankind, he's the agency of God's power, he's the means God uses to accomplish his work in people on earth. In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit, God's Spirit, would come upon prophets, priests and kings to empower them for ministry but no-one ever before had been conceived by the Holy Spirit. What grand plans must revolve around this child! This son of God.

The angel goes on in verse 21,

'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.' 'Jesus,' means 'God saves,' it was a popular name among Jewish children at the time. There were lots of little Jesus' run-

ning around, as reminders to God's people that one day God would send his Messiah, his Christ, to save the Jewish nation.

But save them from what? Here's the surprise in the text. The Jews were expecting an all conquering warrior king, like King David, to unite their nation, and take back control of their land from the Romans. But that's not what the angel says.

'You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save people,' not from the Romans, but 'from their sins.'

You see Jesus gets right at the heart of humanity's problems. Humanity's biggest problem is sin. You might think your greatest problem is the way you were raised, or a relationship that has left you damaged, or a looming redundan-

cy, or some great injustice that you're still coming to terms with but the underlying problem in every instance is sin; your sin and then sin of others. And sin has eternal consequences, not just flow on effects in this life, but eternal consequences like judgement and eternal exile from God in hell. The Jews went into exile because of sin, they'd turned their backs on God, and so he rejected them and punished them with exile. When we sin, we're turning our backs on God, and there'll be consequences in this life, and then in the next, God will rightfully punish us with eternal exile in hell – and so Jesus gets right at the heart of humankind's greatest problem, the problem of sin.

Jesus came to save people from their sins. And yet we often do exactly what the Jews were doing. They had created in their minds a Jesus who would conquer the Romans for them.

We're often tempted to create our own Jesus, the Jesus we'd like as well. Like Jesus the great moral teacher, or Jesus the inspirational historical figure, or Jesus whose message is love and tolerance, but not judgement and punishment. But we have to take Jesus on his own terms.

The angel of God says the purpose of Jesus' coming into the world is to save people from their sins. Christianity isn't about good works, or social action, or finding meaning and purpose in life, sure, all of these things flow out of Christianity, but at the heart of Christianity is humankind's desperate need to be saved from the consequences of our sins. We're all sinful, we all fall short, no one is right before God, not even one of us, we all need forgiveness, we all need saving, and Jesus came into this world to save people from their sins.

Why not take some time now to think over this passage. Perhaps try and rise above some of those smaller problems that seem to be writ large in the day ahead, and think about the problem of sin. The problem of sin in your own life and the problem of sin in the world. What is the significance that Jesus came to save people from their sins? Think over the cost. Think over the price he paid. Think over the gravity of sin, how out of place it is in the life of a Christian, and the dire situation that many of your friends and family find themselves in. Then pray about it. Thank God for the forgiveness only found in Jesus, and pray that his grace might extend to those you love, perhaps even through a conversation you could have with them today.