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Good morning everyone. Merry Christmas. Please turn with me in your bibles to Matthew chapter 1. We'll be in verses 18-25.

This is the second part of our 3 part Christmas series called "Come Behold the Wondrous Mystery," with part 3 coming on Christmas Eve.

We're asking the question: "What's so wondrous about Christmas?" Why do we make such a big deal about Christmas, about Jesus coming to earth. What's the big deal?

Last week, we talked about the coming of the King. We took a look at 2 Samuel 7, a passage known as the Davidic Covenant. Remember, in the bible, Covenant essentially means "Promise." God made a promise to David.

If you remember, there were two parts to that promise. First, God promised that there would be a King in David's line who would rule forever. That the line of David would never die out, because there would be a king that came after him who would reign on the throne forever.

Second, that King would have such a special relationship to God, that God would consider him a Son.

We saw two things that would have to characterize this king's life if he was going to qualify: He would have to live a perfectly righteous life, and he would have to be perfectly faithful to God.

A king who would reign forever, who would be God's Son, who would live a life of complete Righteousness and Faithfulness. For a thousand years Israel wondered who this king would be. We know the answer. His name is...Jesus.

Christmas is a big deal, because the King has come. The King who will reign forever, the Son of God.

But that's not the only reason why Christmas is a big deal. The king came, but he came in a way that nobody but God himself would have ever imagined up in their wildest dreams. He came as a baby, born in a manger in Bethlehem.

That's what we're going to look at this morning. Our king has come, robed in frail humanity. Look with me at Matthew 1:18-25.

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. **19** And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. **20** But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. **21** She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." **22** All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). **24** When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, **25** but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Let's pray.

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Father, you are so good. Your ways are so much higher than our ways, and your thoughts are so much higher than our thoughts. We thank you for your Word this morning, thank you that you have given it to us so that we can know who you are and what you've done, and thank you that you've given us minds to understand it. We confess our weakness, we confess that our flesh gets in the way, we confess that our pride can blind us to what you want us to see. Help us to approach your word humbly this morning, and we ask that the Spirit

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would intercede so that we can understand its glorious realities. Apart from the Spirit we cannot discern your truth.

We thank you for your Son, the king who will reign forever, who came to earth as a child. Our savior, lying in a feeding trough. What a thought. We love you. In Jesus' name, amen.

As a kid growing up in the suburbs of Chicago in the mid 90's, you won't be surprised to find out that my hero was the same as every other kid's hero at the time, Michael Jordan. The greatest basketball player to ever live.

If you were a kid in Chicago in the 90's, you were a bulls fan. My brother and I would always argue about who got to be Michael Jordan when we played basketball in the driveway. And I remember one year, right around Christmastime, I got the greatest news any kid could imagine, my dad had gotten Bulls tickets. We were going to go to the game.

I still remember it like it was yesterday. I was in kindergarten at the time. Showing up to the arena decked out in my bulls gear and finding our seats. And when the clock hit zero and the pregame warmups were over, all of the sudden, the lights went off in the arena. And that music started playing. If you're a bulls fan, you know what song I'm talking about.

On the Jumbotron you saw cgi bulls running through the city, stampeding over anything that got in their way. And once they got to the arena, the spotlight started panning over the crowd, and the music got louder. And the announcer said in a deep voice not unlike Brian Middleton, "And now, the starting lineup, for *your, CHICAGO BULLS!*"

He announced the players, and everyone cheered as he introduced Luc Longley, and Scotty Pippen, and Ron Harper, but we weren't there for those guys. There was one name we were all waiting to hear.

Finally, the last name was called. "Guard, at 6'6, from North Carolina, Michael Joooooordan!" And the crowd went wild.

I still get chills when I hear that song. It was the exact introduction you'd expect for the greatest basketball player of all time. Everyone in that arena knew they were about to witness something special.

The coming of the king of kings, the birth of the Savior; the incarnation of the Son of God, did not take place in this way. Honestly, it feels like kind of a missed opportunity.

If I was the head of the PR team that was in charge of managing the Son of God coming to earth, and I had all the resources of heaven at my disposal, I probably would have done things a little differently that God did them.

If I'm in charge of sending the savior of the world, the Son of God to earth, I'm not sending him to Bethlehem. If I'm going to the trouble of having an army of angels announce the birth, it's not going to be to some random group of shepherds. And there's no way I'm sending him as a baby. Babies can't do anything! They just sit there and cry and eat and go to the bathroom. That's how you're sending the King of Kings? That's the Savior of the world?

But God's ways are different than our ways. God operates on an entirely different plane than we do. That shouldn't surprise us, but it does. Where we prefer the strong, God often uses the weak. Where we prefer the rich, God often uses the poor. Where we prefer the grandiose, the biggest and best, God uses the smallest, the humblest, and the most subtle.

God's values are different than our values. This morning, as we look at Matthew chapter one and talk about our Savior robed in frail humanity, we're going to see why that matters. We're going to see why Jesus came the way that he did, the reason why he didn't get the Michael Jordan treatment when he came to earth.

Ultimately we're going to see that outside of the cross, the humble birth of our Savior is the greatest expression of his love for us, and the ultimate display of his glory.

Jesus born as a baby in a manger is the greatest expression of God's love for us, and it's the ultimate display of his glory. Let's take a look.

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Look at verse 18: “**18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.**”

The book of Matthew starts with the genealogy of Jesus, and then immediately jumps into the story of his birth. In this verse we are introduced to Mary and Joseph, and we're told that they were betrothed, which is a fancy word for engaged.

So Mary and Joseph are engaged, but they're not married yet. They haven't come together as husband and wife. And then, from Joseph's perspective, the unthinkable happens. His fiancée gets pregnant.

Now, put yourself in Joseph's shoes when he got that information. You need to understand, a virgin getting pregnant was not a thing back then, just as much as it's not a thing now. There was no parallel for something like this. It was a completely unique event in human history. So it's not like he found out the news and asked, “Did you have an affair or did the Holy Spirit get you pregnant?”

Mary was pregnant, which meant she had an affair. And Joseph, I'm sure, was devastated that his fiancée had betrayed him like this.

So what did he do? Verse 19:

19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

Engagement was a little different back then. People usually got engaged about a year before marriage, and the engagement carried the same legal weight as marriage. Meaning an engaged couple couldn't just call off the wedding; they would actually have to get divorced.

According to the law, Joseph would have been required to divorce Mary and “put her to shame”, meaning that he would have had to make it public so that everyone knew what kind of character his woman had who had an affair.

That would have been a harsh penalty, because just like in the time of Ruth, a woman without a man was a woman without hope of success in that society. And a woman divorced for infidelity would have been highly unlikely to find another husband.

Joseph decides not to bring her to public shame, but instead “resolved to divorce her quietly.”

So Joseph, in deciding to divorce Mary quietly, is actually being incredibly merciful in looking out for the future of both Mary and the baby, and in doing that, the Bible calls him “just”.

However, back to the story, we know that Joseph can't divorce Mary. Why? Because Joseph is the connection to the Davidic line! If Mary and Joseph get divorced, it would mess everything up! Mary isn't the blood line to the Davidic kingdom, Joseph is!

Which means, interestingly enough, that Jesus is adopted! Jesus being from the line of David isn't from blood, but through adoption.

Jesus is adopted by Joseph, and that adoption secures his place as the king the line of David who would rule forever. So, sidenote, if any of you are adopted, you can tell people that you have something in common with Jesus. And as someone who has an adopted son, and an adopted brother and sister, I think that's really cool.

So it would be catastrophic to the story if Joseph decided to divorce Mary. Thankfully, that doesn't happen. Because in the middle of all this, in the middle of Joseph's plan to divorce Mary quietly, Joseph has a supernatural encounter. Verse 20 tells us:

20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

Can you imagine that? Joseph, heartbroken, who was gearing up to get married and begin his new life with his bride, and now trying to figure out how to put the pieces of his life back together, is visited by an angel in a dream.

And that angel told him the most incredible news. That Mary had actually conceived not from a man, but by the power of the Holy Spirit. And that her child, soon to be his adopted child, would be the savior of his people.

The more you think about it, the more unbelievable it gets.

If you skip down to verse 24, you see that Joseph is obedient.

24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, **25** but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

He called his name “Jesus.” Just like the angel commanded.

Come behold the wondrous mystery. The Son of God, the savior of the world, has come into the world as a baby, robed in frail humanity.

Why did this happen? Verse 22:

22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

23 “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).

Immanuel. God with us. Jesus came to earth as “God with us.” Here, in a manger in Bethlehem of Judea, Immanuel has come, and God is with us.

The one through whom the entire universe was created, and the one who sustains the universe, who holds all things together. The one who was in the beginning with God. Jesus has come to earth as a man. And he is God with us.

God with us, humbly, lying in a manger.

Listen to what J.I. Packer says about the incarnation:

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“It is here, in the thing that happened at the first Christmas, that the profoundest and most unfathomable depths of the Christian revelation lie...the Almighty appeared on earth as a helpless human baby, unable to do more than lie and stare and wriggle and make noises.

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Needing to be fed and changed and taught to talk like any other child. And there was no illusion or deception in this, the babyhood of the Son of God was a reality. The more you think about it the more staggering it gets. Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as is this truth of the incarnation.”

I love that. The more you think about it, the more staggering it gets. Like, imagine potty training the king of kings. Imagine teaching the inventor of beauty how to say his colors; teaching the author of languages his abc's. The more you think about it, the more your mind can't even comprehend it.

So why did he come like this? Why didn't he get the Michael Jordan treatment times a million when he came? Why did the king who would reign forever, the messiah who would deliver God's people, why did he come so humbly? Why did Jesus come as a baby?

Like we said at the beginning of the sermon, Two reasons.

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First, Jesus came humbly because he loves you very much. He loves you very much. Not any more complicated than that.

The power of the story of Christmas is not in its grandness, but in its simplicity. Jesus' birth is incredible not because it's so extraordinary, but because it's so ordinary.

The ones who came to see Jesus on the night he was born weren't priests and religious leaders, but shepherds, who were as one pastor puts it, “Just ordinary guys working the night shift.”

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The gospel message is not a message for the special few, for the elite; Jesus didn't come to earth to rub shoulders with the big shots; the gospel is for ordinary men and women and kids like you and like me.

So the message this morning is simple; and it's this: you need to know that Jesus loves you. Jesus loves you. So much so that he came to earth as a baby and 33 years later died on the cross for your sin.

Maybe you've never heard that before. Maybe you think you're unlovable with all the ways you've messed up the chances you've been given. Or maybe you feel like life's been stacked against you since day one, and there's no one that loves you.

Let me assure you, Jesus does.

2 Cor 8:9: **For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet For your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich**

If you place your faith in Jesus, you're justified, you're made righteous, you're forgiven. And when you believe in Jesus, the Bible tells us that you have peace with God. The greatest gift you could ever receive.

He became poor so that you might become spiritually rich. He came so that you might have peace with God.

For some of us, you know that Jesus loves you, you believe it, but it doesn't always feel that way. Last week we talked about making a big deal about Christmas, but for some of you, it might feel like all you can do as we finish this year is limp across the finish line.

Sometimes life beats us up a bit. And if that's you this morning, and I suspect it's many of us, you can take comfort in this.

That Jesus didn't come into the world like a fairy tale. He could've made everything easy for himself, but he didn't. He entered into a world of pain, of suffering, of poverty, of difficulty. And as people who

spend their whole lives in a fallen world, we can take comfort in the fact that Jesus loved us enough to enter into this fallen world with us.

Verse 23 says "They called his name Immanuel, which means "God with us." You might be thinking, "Well Pastor Mike, they called him that because he was literally with them on earth, but he's not here anymore."

But what are the *very last words* in the book of Matthew? What is the last thing Matthew records Immanuel, God with us, saying to his disciples? "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Immanuel is still Immanuel. He's still with us.

So if you find yourself limping to the end here in 2019, I just want to tell you this simple thing, and I don't want to make it any more complicated than this: Jesus loves you.

Kids, how do we know that? How do we know that Jesus loves you? For the Bible tells me so.

Jesus came in an ordinary way because the gospel is for ordinary people. Jesus put on flesh as a baby, because he loves you very much.

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Second, Jesus came humbly because he loves his own glory.

This is the great paradox of the Christmas story: the humility of Jesus declares to us the glory of God.

The humble beginnings of our savior show the extraordinary power of our King.

A few weeks ago Emily spent the day decorating our house for Christmas. When I got home from work, she said, "You have to go upstairs and see Owen's nativity set."

She showed Owen the nativity and she said, "Now Owen, all these people came to see the baby Jesus." And he took that to heart. When I got upstairs I saw his nativity had baby Jesus in the middle,

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and then tightly in a circle around him every piece was looking right at Jesus. And then around that circle were lions and helicopters and tractors and dogs and trains and dinosaurs all lined up to see the baby too. I wish I had taken a picture of it.

It was so cute that he had taken Emily's words so literally, but it was also a great picture of what Christmas actually is. What Christmas calls us to do.

Christmas demands of us that we look at the baby in a manger. Demands that we reckon with the fact that God doesn't work like we expect him to. That God doesn't often use the powerful and the strong, but the weak and the lowly.

Philippians 2 tells us that Jesus,

though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

In emptying himself, in making himself nothing, he was exalted and given the name above all names.

And when we see it, when we *behold* the wondrous mystery, when we understand that *that baby* lying in a manger means *everything* about my life now has to change, that I *have* to live for him in *every* way, that *he's* my king, that *he's* my savior, that my *eternity* rests in his work...well what greater way for God to be glorified.

What's a greater display of God's power, a greater display of his glory, than sending a baby in a manger to change everything about history?

The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

And in that manger, 2000 years ago, lied the greatest display of God's glory, only to be topped by his death and resurrection 33 years later, defeating death once and for all, and making a way for all men, all nations, to have peace with God.

The Government shall be upon his shoulders, and his name shall be called wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, prince of peace.

(SLIDE)

Come behold the wondrous mystery indeed. Our King has come, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger.

Let's pray.

Father, we confess that these truths are sometimes too hard to even wrap our minds around. We thank you that you work in ways we couldn't even begin to comprehend. Thank you for sending your son. For the display of your love and the display of your glory that we see lying in a manger in Bethlehem. Father, help us to know how much Jesus loves us. Whether we've never heard it before or we need to be reminded, help us to understand it. We thank you for the promise of Jesus, that he will be with us always. We need that. We're too weak, too fragile to make it through life without him. Help us bring glory to your Son with our lives.

In Jesus' name, amen.