

READING

Dramatic reading: Mathew 1: 18-25

SERMON

A SONG WAS HEARD AT CHRISTMAS: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

The nativity season is upon us. Two mothers, Jane and Michelle, were waiting for their children to come out of nursery. The first mother, Jane, greeted her little daughter and then the little girl said to Jane, “Mummy, mummy, I am going to be Mary in the Nativity.”

“That’s fantastic, darling. You’re a star,” going into raptures, as only a parent can at times like this.

Then Michelle’s son came out and handed his mum a letter. On the top was the heading Nativity and costume. Michelle’s heart sunk as she thought of the work she was going to do. However all her son needed was black trousers and a white shirt – the school uniform for he was a sheep. Michelle did not feel that next to Jane and ‘her star’ that it would be right to go into raptures over a sheep.

Michelle went home that afternoon feeling a little down for herself and her son, the sheep. Later that evening Michelle rang her friend and was cheered up by her when she said that her little boy was in a Nativity play at his school, playing a gerbil!

It is that season again, Christmas is here, nativity plays are happening and children are being coerced into taking part – whether they really want to or not. Parents and grandparents will be going to watch their children on stage, picking their noses, scratching in unmentionable places and of course the child playing the innkeeper saying, “Yes, we have loads of rooms for you here!”

On the very first Christmas we have two people who did not ask for their parts – they were just given them. Of course we talk of Joseph and Mary. Mary and Joseph are, as we read in verse 18

“...pledged to be...” (Matthew 1:18 NIV)

In the times they lived, getting married was a three stage affair. Firstly there was the engagement, then the betrothal and finally the wedding day. Betrothal was a legal ceremony and could only be broken by divorce. This is why in verse 19 we read

“Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.” (Matthew 1:19 NIV)

Imagine yourself in Joseph’s shoes. You hear that your betrothed is pregnant – something like that would have spread like wildfire in the community. ‘Have you heard, Mary’s pregnant. What has she and Joseph been up to?’ But Joseph knew they had been up to nothing – so it must be another man. So we have a new baby on the way – one that is natural and supernatural, or let’s say human and divine.

Human

- Mary conceives, verse 18

“This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child”
(Matthew 1:18 NIV)

- Unmarried as verse 18 stated – that happens now a lot we know, and it happened then. Times do not change really, only people’s reactions to situations. Maybe in those times people would say, “Well they are betrothed and going to get married soon, you can expect that sort of thing to go on!” Nowadays people do not turn a hair at this sort of situation.

- Joseph, of course suspect that Mary has been unfaithful to him, this is why in verse 19 he is considering a divorce, albeit a quiet one.

Divine

- The baby is conceived by the Holy Spirit – again told to us in verse 18. It is a supernatural conception.
- There is an angelic message sent to Joseph about the baby. The first I knew we were having a baby wasn't through some angelic message, but because Sue said that she thought she was and ought to take the test! Angels are sent to tell of the supernatural birth
- Role of Jesus is to **save his people from their sins** (Matthew 1:21 NIV). That is supernatural

So we have Mary pregnant with God, God the Son, by God the Holy Spirit. But not all would go along with that – in the days when Mary and Joseph lived and also today.

This week I read this in a magazine. The Bible

...clearly states that Mary was the mother of the “Son of God”, not of God himself. Could she have carried within her the One whom ‘the heavens themselves cannot contain’

This was in a magazine that the Jehovah's Witnesses put out. But they have not gone through the whole thought process. Because in this birth we have the natural and the supernatural as we have seen we also have the human and the divine. Also if God is the king of the universe, then he will be able to come as a baby because he is God. If God cannot do that then how could we have a relationship with him if he is so vast and so out there, then he cannot be with us – he cannot be Emmanuel – God with us.

So we move on and look further into the human and the divine in the birth of Jesus, in Jesus being Emmanuel – God with us

Human

- Jesus, God the Son was born as a human being because he could then totally identify with us, with human beings. On the television at times there are programmes where a rich person lives for a week on the same money as someone who is unemployed. But they only do it for a week. So do they really identify with the unemployed and low paid? Not really because they know that they are going back to luxury very soon.

Jesus however came from heaven, left heaven, became human so that he could totally identify with us on earth. As Hebrews says when talking about Jesus as a high priest

“For we do not have a high priest (i.e. Jesus) who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are...”
(Hebrews 4:15 NIV)

Jesus came to know what we go through and so he could totally empathise, and identify with us. Jesus has been there and got the T-shirt!

Divine

- The verse from Hebrews we have just read actually goes

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15 NIV)

Yet was without sin. This was the divine part. All humans sin, they go against what God tells them, but God cannot sin, so Jesus is fully human and fully divine. How does that work? I do not truly know but God knows and God can do that.

- But we are also told in Matthew 1:23

““The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.”” (Matthew 1:23 NIV)

Immanuel, ‘God is with us’. Fantastic! God is with us – the divine came to earth and lived here.

So we come to the end of the passage, the last two verses, verse 24

“When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.” (Matthew 1:24-25 NIV)

It is the naming of the child, again natural and supernatural, human and divine. One of the things that parents can agonise over for ages is the name of their child. When our two children were on the way, we had big problems. At the time Sue was working on a children’s ward and I was teaching, so every time one of us thought of a name, the other knew some kid with the same name who was obnoxious, or had some obnoxious habit.

Naming a child is an important thing in many cultures, with naming ceremonies that mean so much, with names that mean so much. The name one calls oneself is important and it can change in life. We have a friend who when he was growing up was called Jamie, by everyone but now he is called Jim, sounds so much more grown up than Jamie.

Again with Jesus, the name is important. Again the human and the divine.

Divine

In verse 21 as the parting shot from the angel we read

“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.”
(Matthew 1:21 NIV)

Jesus is named by God because the name means ‘the Lord saves’. The name of Jesus tells us why he came. He came to save, to save us. But to save someone it has to be from something. We are saved from our road to hell and saved to a relationship with God. We are saved from darkness and brought into light. We are saved to be given eternal life.

Human

And then there was the human naming.

This is down to the father. And as we read

“...And he gave him the name Jesus.” (Matthew 1:25 NIV)

So this honour went to Joseph. Jesus would have been a common name then and it is in some countries now, so no-one would have really known that Joseph had received the name from his other Father, God.

Jesus came to save us, to be Emmanuel – God with us.

So Jesus is both 100% human and also 100% divine. How does this work out because no-one can be 200%? I can honestly say that I do not know, but I know it happened and I know it had to happen. Jesus had to be human to go through what we go through and experience what we do and so walk in our shoes. However Jesus also had to be divine because as a human he would have sinned but he had to be innocent when he went to the cross, he had to be without sin, which he was.

So what does this mean for us now? What does this mean for us tomorrow morning as we get up and go to work or go about our daily business? Remember Immanuel – God is with us. This is the title given to Jesus, but it is also true now, today.

The Holy Spirit, God the Holy Spirit has come and is living with us now. Jesus promised this

“When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.” (John 15:26 NIV)

The Counsellor, the Holy Spirit is here. God is with us now – Immanuel! This means that as you go about your daily routine, God is with you.

- When times are great – God is there and deserves to be praised – Immanuel!
- Even if you have a bad day and everything goes wrong – Immanuel. He is there to turn to, he is there to talk with
- He is there when the self-esteem gets knocked. He is closer than anyone else can be to you because he loves you, because he cares. As one person put it

“The fact of Jesus’ coming is the final and unanswerable proof that God cares”
(William Barclay)

Immanuel – God is with us because he cares. Remember that as you go about your daily round.

PRAYER