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Advent IV
19 December 2010
Grace and Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Matthew 1:18-25

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

St. John the Baptizer was the last prophet before Christ—
and we certainly accept that he was the Elijah to come (Mt 11:14).

But before St. John became a prophet of the Lord,
His soon-to-be uncle-in-law, Joseph, the fiancé of young Mary,
was called to be the Lord's prophet.

We don't normally think of Joseph as prophet, but all the tell-tale signs took place:
an angel appeared to him in a dream,
speaking about what would take place and what Joseph should do.
The angel gave him a Word from the Lord to speak—
a word not of his own doing,
but that would forever change the world as he knew it—
“And you shall call His name *Jesus!*” (Mt 1:21)

Jesus...

That's all Joseph was given to speak,
and, as a prophet, that's all he said.

Now, you've all heard sermons where the pastor asked you to put yourself in Joseph's shoes,
or to try to imagine what must have gone through Mary's mind.

No doubt they were both terrified and confused;
and yet there was an odd certainty and comfort despite it all.

But more to the point, what in the world was *Yahweh* thinking?
Doesn't the Lord know that Virgins don't conceive?
Doesn't He know this would ruin her reputation,
and probably Joseph's, too?
Doesn't He know that now's not a good time—
Herod's the sort who'd kill countless children trying to get this One?

What was Yahweh thinking...

Well, if you read through the Old Testament, you'll find that Yahweh has a one-tracked mind—
He was thinking of *Jesus*.
He's *always* thinking of Jesus.

He was thinking of Jesus some 750 years before this young virgin conceived.
The prophet Isaiah declared:

**“Behold, the *virgin* shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name
Immanuel”** (Isa 7:14).

Jesus is Emmanuel,
 “**which means, *God with us***” (Mt 1:23).

But is this Good News?

For King Ahaz, it wasn't!

In fact, this prophecy of a virgin conceiving and bearing a son,
 whose name would be called Immanuel,
 was a word judgment and condemnation!

Listen to what Isaiah says:

**“Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also?
 Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign.
 Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name
 Immanuel...
 Yahweh will bring upon you and your people and your father's house such days as
 haven't come since the day Ephraim left Judah—the King of Assyria”** (7:13-14, 17).

The day of *Immanuel*, for Ahaz, is a day of destruction,
 the day that the King of Assyria would lay waste to Jerusalem.

Could anything be more fearful to the sinner than *God with us*?

And yet, this didn't scare Joseph.

**“When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him:
 he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son.
 And he called His name Jesus”** (Mt 1:24-25).

For Joseph, *God with us*, Emmanuel, was *very* good news.

Not only did it explain his pregnant fiancée,
 but it meant something far more wonderful—
 Yahweh remembered His people.

His people.

What makes this people *His* is that they bear His name.

And here's Joseph, the prophet of Yahweh,
 commissioned to speak the name of *God with us*—
 Jesus.

Jesus is our *Emmanuel*, and for us,
 who are known by *His* name,
 this is very good news!

It's good news because of His *name*:

**“You shall call His name Jesus,
 for He will save His people from their sins”** (Mt 1:21).

Jesus means Yahweh saves.
He saves *His* people from their sins.

Emmanuel, *God with us*,
is only good news if its tied to this Son, born of Mary,
Jesus.

Only in Jesus is God revealed as *Savior*.
Only in Jesus is *God with us* a word of mercy and peace.
Only in Jesus is *God with us* good news!

As it is, the Lord has already gathered us together *by* this name.
In your baptism, the Lord put *His* name upon you:
“I baptize you in the *name* of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:20).

And wherever He puts His name,
He does the work that the name proclaims: *He saves*.

And so we’re best to gather around this name.

As St. Matthew says a bit later on in his Gospel,
**“Where two or three gather together *in my name*,
there I am in the midst of them”** (Mt 18:20).

This gathering of two or three around the *name* is exactly what you’re all doing right now!
Remember how the service began,
“In the *name* of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

We call that the invocation.
As those who bear the name, we’re given to call upon His name.

We call upon His name asking Him to do what He’s promised to do:
save us from our sins.

As long as you bear the name, your sins can’t hurt you anymore!
He’s saved you.
He’s saved you from the guilt, punishment, and fear of your sin.

He has saved you by His name—
by the name Joseph was given to speak onto virgin’s Son,
onto *Emmanuel, God with us*.

It’s by the name of Jesus that you are saved.
And that’s what Yahweh was thinking by sending His angel to Joseph.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit