

He shall save His people from their sins

Matt 1:18-25 etc.

So here we are on the third Sunday of Advent, time of preparation for Christ's coming. As we have discovered in recent weeks, it's not a preparation for Christmas *per se*, but a preparation for His coming – which in our case is His return. The marking of Advent before Christmas reminds us that His first advent was just part of the overall coming of the Son into this world and this week of Advent focusses on that.

Therefore we discover that the passage of Joseph's dream gives us some information vital to our understanding of the purpose of Christ's coming. The angel used two key phrases which help us with this.

She will have a son, and you will name him Jesus--because he will save his people from their sins."

The purpose of the son to be born was to save. The name Jesus or Yeshua means Yaweh saves. But what does "save" mean? I'll get to that in a minute.

"A virgin will become pregnant and have a son, and he will be called Immanuel" (which means, "God is with us").

The Saviour was to be God Himself, born as a human being, the son of a virgin. How does all this work out in the context of the NT?

At this point let me introduce some verses from Romans chapter 1 to you: *Roma 1:1 From Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus and an apostle chosen and called by God to preach his Good News. 2 The Good News was promised long ago by God through his prophets, as written in the Holy Scriptures. 3 It is about his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: as to his humanity, he was born a descendant of David; 4 as to his divine holiness, he was shown with great power to be the Son of God by being raised from death. 5 Through him God gave me the privilege of being an apostle for the sake of Christ, in order to lead people of all nations to believe and obey. 6 This also includes you who are in Rome, whom God has called to belong to Jesus Christ. 7 And so I write to all of you in Rome whom God loves and has called to be his own people:*

The words spoken to Joseph are even clearer to us when we look at this passage.

It is about his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: as to his humanity, he was born a descendant of David; 4 as to his divine holiness, he was shown with great power to be the Son of God by being raised from death.

In these verses we see Jesus' humanity and deity side by side. Jesus was a man, but He was wholly God too.

And why should God come on this great mission, and become one of us? He will save his people from their sins. How may we understand this? This is where the title Immanuel and the passage from Isaiah helps.

The history of Israel is a story of sin and its consequences. Reading about Ahaz a good example. He was an evil king. Here's his Wikipedia write-up: *His reign is described in 2 Kings 16; Isaiah 7-9; and 2 Chronicles 28. He is said to have given himself up to a life of wickedness, introducing many pagan and idolatrous customs (Isaiah 8:19; 38:8; 2 Kings 23:12). Perhaps his wickedest*

deed was sacrificing his own son. He also added an idolatrous altar into the Temple. He ignored the remonstrances and warnings of the prophets Isaiah, Hosea, and Micah.

The message through Isaiah to Ahaz in Isaiah 7 was that God was going to judge Judah – at this time it was an attack by Assyria, but it was a start of a process that led to its destruction and exile of the people at a later date. Even though there was restoration, the people of Judah never really recovered their independence and sovereignty over the land. It was the consequence of sin.

Picture that applies just as much to the rest of the human race. Sin breaks our relationship with God – it leads amongst other things, to the injustices of the world that are so prevalent. But it also leads to personal spiritual death and eternal separation from God.

The psalm I read at the beginning was a psalm written at a time of defeat when they knew it was a result of their sin. *Show us your strength; come and save us! 3 Bring us back, O God! Show us your mercy, and we will be saved! 4 How much longer, LORD God Almighty, will you be angry with your people's prayers?* The psalm is interesting, because it is a cry for mercy. It is a prayer that acknowledges sin and asks for God to save. Underlying the gloom and doom of OT prophecies about the destruction of the nation was the underlying promise that God was going to bring salvation and restore the nation through a person. And here we have one version of it - Immanuel – God with us. Jews just see Immanuel as a name, but we know and understand it literally.

So for Jews reading these passages in Jesus' time, and indeed now, the Messiah was to restore the kingdom of Israel – and they were looking for a descendant of David to do that – shoot from the stump of Jesse and all that.

But salvation is so much more than just restoration of God-centred rule on Earth in Israel. When Jesus came it was to save the people from their sins, not their enemies. What had caused the downfall of Israel was sin. Their sin. Salvation is all about saving people from sin and its consequences and it is clear that in the end Israel is going to be great again and will embrace the nations too. In Christ that happened. Back to Paul: *5 Through him God gave me the privilege of being an apostle for the sake of Christ, in order to lead people of all nations to believe and obey.*

For modern Jews, they see the nation of Israel as the fulfilment of prophecy and there is a desire to restore the old kingdom, whatever the cost, and to become a world power by having the same doomsday weapons as the great powers. Is that truly the restoration of Israel? They look and sound like the rest of the world – a world of injustice and rebellion against God. They want the restoration without dealing with the sin. They are an unjust society that oppress those around them and persecute God's holy people. Just like King Ahaz. They haven't changed. If you know your Bible prophecy, then you'll know that the same fate awaits.

But their way is not what Jesus, the Messiah is about. God **is** restoring Israel – person by person – under one King, the descendant of David – Jesus. All who follow in allegiance are part of His Kingdom. He is Immanuel, God with us. Those that don't aren't. He's not with them. Those who are of Israel who choose not to follow Him are treated as the followers of Jeroboam – branches pruned out - whilst we have been grafted in.

And Jesus will also return to establish His kingdom in the physical sense. We look forward to that during Advent, but the kingdom of God is already here and established in the lives of His

people.

What we see from this is that salvation is a process. The coming of Jesus was the start of that process. He was born to die as we all know. That death was the actual victory. It did not destroy Israel's enemies, but what it did was to deal with the underlying cause of death and injustice in the world – sin. It opened a way to restore the relationship between people and God, and give a clear picture of where the future of God's people now is.

There is one part of Isaiah's Immanuel prophecy that has a little mystery about it.

Well then, the Lord himself will give you a sign: a young woman who is pregnant will have a son and will name him "Immanuel." 15 By the time he is old enough to make his own decisions, people will be drinking milk and eating honey.

The picture of milk and honey is a reminder of the promise was when God's people reached Canaan. It was a land flowing with milk and honey, a peaceful plentiful and. By the time Jesus became an adult, a state of peace certainly didn't exist in Judea or anywhere else. How does that work?

When we look at Jesus we find He was subject to the Father, from the day He was in the Temple when he was 12 going about His Father's business, right up to His crucifixion. The decisions weren't His. He did the Father's will.

But He's now risen and He rules and reigns – He does make the decisions. He has the authority. Right from that point, His people have peace with God, are granted all the promises of heaven and are the inheritors of all good things the Father wants to give them. Et voila! Prophecy fulfilled.

So here is the message of Advent as we await Christmas. A Saviour has come who is Immanuel, God with us. If we know Christ, we should rejoice in that fact, because we have entered His Kingdom because we recognised His mercy, grace and love and decided to follow Jesus.

But the message of Immanuel is also a message of hope for His future coming. We have been reminded just this week of the horrors of life and death in the Middle East, particularly in Syria. The countdown is running and one day He will return to physically rule and reign. Let's be prepared for it and look forward to it.

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