

Advent: Week Two Study Guide

2. The Announcement — Matthew 1:18-25

In Matthew’s account of Jesus’ birth, the focus shifts to Joseph’s perspective. In Jewish culture, betrothal was a binding legal commitment, so Mary’s pregnancy would have appeared scandalous. Joseph’s quiet righteousness is revealed in his desire to protect her rather than shame her — until an angel visits in a dream and changes everything.

The angel’s message is deeply theological: “Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.” (v. 20). This miraculous conception fulfills Isaiah 7:14 — “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel,” meaning “God with us.” Matthew consistently points to the prophets to show that every part of Jesus’ story was foretold.

Culturally, Matthew’s readers would have seen Joseph as a model of faithful obedience. He responds to revelation not with argument but with action — taking Mary as his wife and naming the child Jesus (“The Lord saves”). In doing so, he becomes a participant in God’s redemptive plan.

This section shows that faith is not passive belief but active trust. Just as Joseph received the Word and obeyed, believers are invited to live out their faith in ways that align with God’s unfolding purposes.

Cross-References for Matthew 1:18-25

Prophetic and Old Testament Background

- Isaiah 7:14 — The virgin will conceive and bear a son called Immanuel.
- Exodus 29:45–46 — God promises to dwell among His people and be their God.

- Psalm 130:7–8 — The Lord will redeem Israel from all sin.
- Jeremiah 31:31–34 — The promise of a new covenant written on the heart.
- Ezekiel 37:27 — “My dwelling place will be with them...” God’s presence among His people.

New Testament Connections

- Luke 1:26–38 — Gabriel’s announcement to Mary.
- Luke 1:46–55 — Mary’s song of faith and surrender (the Magnificat).
- John 1:14 — The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.
- Romans 8:3–4 — God sent His Son in the likeness of human flesh to redeem us.
- Philippians 2:5–11 — Christ’s humility and obedience in coming to earth.
- Hebrews 2:14–18 — Jesus shares in our humanity to bring salvation.

Word Study: Fulfill

Key Verse: “*All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet.*” — Matthew 1:22

The Greek word **πληρόω** (*plēroō*) means *to fill up, complete, or bring to its intended goal*. Matthew uses this word more than any other Gospel writer—over a dozen times—to describe how Jesus brings the Scriptures to completion. Each time we read, “*This was to fulfill...*” Matthew is pointing out that God’s plan is unfolding exactly as He promised.

To Matthew’s Jewish readers, this idea of *fulfillment* was monumental. It connected the story of Jesus to everything they already knew—the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms. Jesus wasn’t a new story; He was the continuation and culmination of **the story God had been writing since the beginning**.

The word *plēroō* doesn’t just mean that a prediction came true; it means that the deeper purpose of Scripture has now been filled to overflowing. God’s covenant promises, His longing to dwell with His people, and His plan to redeem creation all find their fullness in Christ. As Paul would later write, “*For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ*” (2 Corinthians 1:20).

Reflection

Every time Matthew says, “This was to fulfill,” he’s reminding us that **God keeps His word**. The same faithful God who fulfilled His promises through Jesus continues to be faithful in our lives today. Even when we cannot see how, His story is still being written, and His purposes will reach their perfect completion.

Word Study: “Immanuel”

Key Verse: “*The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanuel*” (which means ‘God with us’). — Matthew 1:23

The name **Emmanuel** (Hebrew: עִמָּנוּאֵל, *Immanu’el*) appears only a few times in Scripture, yet it carries the heartbeat of the entire gospel story. The name literally means “**God with us.**” Matthew, writing to a Jewish audience steeped in Old Testament prophecy, quotes directly from **Isaiah 7:14**, where the prophet spoke of a miraculous child who would be a sign of God’s presence and deliverance for His people.

In Isaiah’s time, the name *Emmanuel* was a reassurance that **God had not abandoned Israel**, even when enemies surrounded them. Matthew sees in Jesus the ultimate fulfillment of that promise — **God Himself stepping into humanity**. In Christ, the presence that once filled the temple now walks among His people.

The theme of “God with us” frames Matthew’s entire Gospel. It begins here in chapter 1 and ends in Jesus’ final words: “*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age*” (Matthew 28:20). From the cradle to the cross to the resurrection, the promise remains the same — **we are never alone.**

Reflection

Jesus is *Emmanuel* — not only for ancient Israel, but for us today. Wherever we are, whatever we face, God is near. The Advent story reminds us that His presence is the greatest gift of all.