

Mt 1:18-25 Hidden Christmas

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We're spending a couple of weeks
looking at the hidden meanings of Christmas.
Most people think they know what Christmas means.
In fact I think the most common response people give this time of year
is that Christmas means putting on weight.
That's not a hidden meaning.
That's one that everyone can see.
You can try to hide it with baggy clothes.
It's still not hidden.
But there are some hidden meanings of Christmas that are hard to spot.

So today we are looking at the hidden meanings
from Joseph's perspective.
Not a bad idea.
Fathers are important.
Hidden meaning number 1.
God has absolutely no hesitation in upending your plans at Christmas.
Imagine it, you've got the Christmas food all purchased.
You've got the extended family coming over for Christmas lunch.
And there's an electrical storm.
The power goes out.
They don't get it back for days.
And everything in the freezer goes off.
Your Christmas plans have been upended.
It would be a nightmare.
But compared to the upending of Joseph's plans,
that would be nothing.
Joseph had good God honouring plans.
He had a fiancé.
He wanted to marry her.
She was a lovely girl who loved the Lord.
He wanted to get married,
settle down with his new wife.

Build her a nice house.
Establish a quality carpentry business in Nazareth.
Have some children.
Faithfully bring up his children to follow the Lord
down the local synagogue.
Who could fault those plans?
They are not selfish or immoral.
Good wholesome plans of a young man who serves the Lord.
And God upends his plans.
The meaning of Christmas.
Your plans, even your best God honouring plans,
are not sacred to God.
He can and will upend them.

Joseph had his good plans.
And what were God's plans?
Well God made Joseph's fiancé pregnant.
Now that would seriously upend Joseph's plans.
It might of been a long time ago,
but the people still knew how long 9 months was.
And Joseph lived in a society where chastity mattered.
People round about could conclude one of two things.
Either Joseph had jumped the gun prior to getting married.
And they would draw negative views about his character from that.
Or Mary had been playing around with someone else.
And of course in that case if Joseph went ahead and married Mary,
then he was a bit of a loser who couldn't find a decent wife.
Either he was a man of poor character or a loser.
Those were his options.
He decided that neither option was palatable.
To break off an engagement in those days required a divorce.
So Joseph planned to get one.
It was the only way to keep his honour in the community intact.
It would have been a massive kick in the guts for Joseph.
One day he had all these wonderful plans
for settling down and starting a God honouring family.

The next day his plans have been upended.
All of his dreams have flown out the window.
And he's going to have to start again.
Find another girl who will marry him.
Make plans again.
With painful scars from his last attempt.

Well God wasn't quite content
with upending Joseph's plans to that extent.
God sent him an angel to tell him that he needed to marry Mary.
Now the angel has some good news.
"What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."
Mary had after all not been fooling around.
That would have been a great relief to Joseph.
He could trust Mary after all.
But what he couldn't do was convince the neighbours.
What do you think the neighbours are going to say
when Joseph tells them
that Mary's baby was conceived by the Holy Spirit?
"OK Joe, conceived by the Holy Spirit, eh?
Sounds plausible.
That would be like who else in history?
Ah no one. Mary is 100% unique.
Not just in our town.
Not just in this country.
But in the entire course of human history.
OK Joe, we believe you.
Honestly, we do.
We're sure that you aren't just believing what you would like to be true."
Joseph and Mary are going to have to endure the jibes of the neighbours
for a long time.
And that is under direct instruction from God.

But it doesn't finish there.
When you get a pet,
you get to name your pet.

The one who gives it the name is the one it belongs to.
Who named our rabbit 'Spock'?
Alvoli did.
Must be Alvoli's rabbit.
Naming rights are for the owner.
It works that way with kids too.
You don't actually own your kids.
But you do get to name them.
And that shows they are your kids.
Who got to choose all of the creative names for our kids
that no one can remember?
Well Cherida and I did.
I made 'em up, Cherida gave them the tick of approval.
It's how you know they are our kids.

Who gets to name Joseph's kid?
Not Joe.
1:21 "She will give birth to a son,
and you are to give him the name Jesus."
God says, "Sorry Joe, I have a name already picked out.
You don't get to choose your son's name.
I get to choose my son's name.
Because he's my son not yours."

So here's the hidden meaning of Christmas.
God doesn't mind about upending your plans.
Do you think God would only do that to Joseph?
Not a bit of it.
History is full of people who made plans and God had other ideas.
St Paul thought he was going to be a famous and respected Rabbi.
God's plan for him was for him to be whipped, stoned, shipwrecked and
jailed.
Peter was going to run the family fishing business on lake Galilee.
God's plan was that he would end up crucified upside down in Rome.
Upside down so he wouldn't be the same as his Lord.
William Tyndale planned to be a scholar at a University in the 16C.

God's plan was that he would be strangled at the age of 42 as a punishment for his crime of translating the Bible into English. God doesn't mind upending your plans.

Happy Christmas!

Even the upending of plans we read about for Joseph today was far from the end of it.

He wound up having to flee to country to escape King Herod's murderous intentions for his son.

Joseph was with his family a refugee.

Does it shock you, that your plans are not sacred to God?

Even when your plans are good and godly plans that honour him, they are not sacred to God.

God has his own plans.

He's got stuff he wants done.

And he will instruct his servants to accomplish his plans.

That has been known to severely inconvenience his servants.

Sometimes it has been known to result in their deaths.

But you will I'm sure be comforted to know, there's a reason for it.

God is not being difficult.

He has purposes for our good.

The angel said to Joseph.

"You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

There is a purpose.

"He will save his people from their sins."

If Joseph had set up a carpentry in Nazareth, and brought up his children down at the local synagogue, and loved his wife Mary and cared for all her needs, that wasn't going to save God's people from their sins.

Joseph had good plans.

God had more important plans.

They might not have been fun plans for Joseph.

But they were God's plans and they were important plans.

God had a very good reason
to upend Joseph's plans on that first Christmas.
His plan was no less than saving the world.
And for that you and I can be eternally grateful.
If Joseph's settled family life and his reputation in the community
hadn't been upended
your sins wouldn't have been forgiven.
It's that important.

Matthew tells us that not only is this important,
it is the fulfilment of prophecy.

1:22 "All this took place to fulfil

what the Lord had said through the prophet:

"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son,

and they will call him 'Immanuel' which means 'God with us'."

Lots of Australians take a completely different view.

Lots of Australians say, "Look I get the purpose of other miracles.
Jesus healed the sick.

That was a good thing.

Jesus rose from the dead.

Great news! Death is defeated.

But Mary being found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.

What's the point of that?

Why does it matter?

And isn't it more likely that Joseph and Mary just cooked up a story
because they didn't want to admit to what they'd been getting up to?

Or maybe the early church cooked up a story

because they wanted to claim

that Jesus had some sort of special divine origins.

But surely we can accept his teaching

without cooking up fanciful stories about his divine origins."

But the virgin birth is so important to God,

that he had the prophet Isaiah foretell it 700 years earlier.

You see if Jesus was the son of Mary and Joseph,

then he was a good teacher,

a wonder human being,

but nothing more than that.

But if Jesus was the son of Mary and the Holy Spirit,
then he was the divine Son of God taken on human flesh.

Well the whole of Christianity stands or falls
on whether Jesus is the eternal Son of God taken on human flesh.
Because Christianity depends not just on what Jesus taught
but on what he did.

The angel commanded Joseph,

"You will name him Jesus

because he will save his people from their sins."

Only the eternal Son of God can save his people from their sins.

Only a perfect sacrifice is payment for the sins of the whole world.

Unless God himself was prepared to pay the price,

then the price could not be paid.

The virgin birth is not some weird anomaly from out of the blue
that just randomly makes Jesus different from every other baby.

It's fully crucial to the central fact of Christianity.

Jesus came to save his people from their sins.

To do that he must be Immanuel, God with us.

Only God with us can save us.

But I think for Christians, Immanuel, God with us,

can take on a day to day significance as well an eternal significance.

When the prophet Isaiah first spoke those words,

"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son,

and they will call him Immanuel",

he wasn't in the first instance speaking of the Lord Jesus.

His nation Judah was facing the threat of war

from the Syrians teaming up with the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

And Isaiah was pointing to a sign

that the nation could take confidence that God was indeed with them.

Here is the sign that God is with you.

A young woman is going to have a baby called 'God is with us' -

Immanuel.

And that will be backed up when the Syrians and the northern kingdom,

instead of threatening Judah are roundly trounced by the Assyrians.
Well if the middle Eastern politics is confusing don't worry.
Middle Eastern politics has always been confusing
and is still confusing.
But the basic point is simple.
The sign Immanuel is a sign to show you that God is with you.
Jesus is Immanuel.
That means that God is with us.
Yes of course in saving us from our sins as the angel said.
But also with us in living our lives.

I think this year, I have encountered more people angry
with things about how the world is going,
than I have ever encountered before.
People angry with governments.
If they are on the political right,
they are angry about vaccines and mandates,
coercion and the restriction of freedom,
and the perception of a lack of care
about the fate of small business owners.
If they are on the political left,
they are angry about a perception
that the economy is put ahead of people's lives in the decision making
and angry about the lack of action on climate change.
It really doesn't matter your politics,
people are angry on both sides.
People are angry at multinational companies.
Some are angry at the tech giants like Facebook and Google
for censoring their voices and being unchallengeable arbiters of truth.
Some are angry at the pharmaceutical giants like Pfizer
for profiteering from the pandemic and concealing the truth.
People are angry at foreign governments.
Some are angry at the Chinese
for their bullying of Australia and Taiwan,
and their human rights abuses and well pretty much everything.
Some are angry with America,

and that can be for any number of reasons
depending on your perspective.
Some are angry with the French for being angry with us.
And some are angry at our government for upsetting the French.
I'm sure it's not just me.
There are more people angry about more stuff right now
than I have experienced at any time in my life.

In a world where things are not as you would like them to be.
In a world that makes you angry,
you need the sign of Immanuel.
You need to know that God is with us.
Our hope for the future doesn't depend on political freedom,
it depends on God and God is with us.
Our hope for the future can't be snuffed out
by multinationals and their schemes.
God is more powerful than multinationals and God is with us.
I'm not saying that we should have a 'she'll be right' attitude
to the problems of the world.
If there are problems in the world,
it's good to do what you can to work to remedy the problem.
It's also good to discern what things are out of your control,
and not let those things weigh on you.
But whether they are things you can work on,
or things that are out of your control,
we need to approach them with an attitude of Immanuel.
God is with us.
This isn't going to disturb my equilibrium,
because I know that God is with us.
How does it look to non believers
if we in a tizz about stuff?
They would look at us and say,
"These people claim to believe in God,
but in their lives
they get just as thrown by the problems of the world as I do."
If we say we believe in God,

we actually need to believe that he's in charge in practice,
not just in theory.

Jesus was born at Christmas.

Jesus is Immanuel.

That means God is with us.

So here's the hidden meaning of Christmas from today's passage.

Your plans are not sacred to God.

He's quite willing to upend them.

But when he does that it will be for a good reason.

When your plans are upended,

there's no call to go into a spin

because Immanuel, God is with us.