



Advent (Part 2) – Compassionate

Matt McCauley – December 7, 2014

Good morning. You can have a seat. How are you? Good! Good! My name is Matt McCauley, and I serve on staff as our Children's and Middle School Minister. It's a pleasure to be with you this morning. If your house is anything like mine right now, you are in full-on holiday mode, right? The tree is up. The lights are hung, and the stuff that 11 months out of the year fills up half of your attic space is now filling up half of your living space. The season is upon us, and there's excitement in the air. You can't just *see* it; you can also *feel* it.

I think this is especially true for children, because there's so much that is aimed toward children in the holiday season. For myself, I particularly remember as a child... This is true. My parents were here last night. They can vouch for it. I would get so worked up over Christmas, get so excited about the Christmas season, that my little stomach literally could not take it anymore. Not every year, but most years when Christmas approached, I would just unexpectedly throw up. I would vomit with excitement about Christmas.

I remember one year in particular, I was about 6 or 7 years old, and we had just had Christmas Eve dinner at my house. My sweet aunt leaned over (I was in the kitchen), and she said, "Matt, are you excited about Christmas morning?" which was the wrong question to ask me at that point. I wasn't able to verbally respond, but what came out of my mouth, it was clear that, yes, Matt was excited about Christmas this year. She had to go and find another Christmas sweater to put on for the rest of the night.

With that lovely story shared, in our second week of Advent this week, my hope is that we will look at the two birth narratives out of the Scriptures: one from Matthew and one from Luke. As we do that, we will see why the month of December has this particular flavor to it. It has for over a thousand years as we celebrate the birth of Christ. I just wrote this out, so I'm just going to read it like I wrote it, because here is my hope.

As I have prepared for this message and prayed and thought about you, my hope is this. As we look back and as we witness the promises perfectly kept by God surrounding the birth of the Messiah, we would be moved, we would be stirred, to hold fast and to have confidence in all of the promises God gives us underneath that promise for those who are in Christ, particularly the idea that our God is a compassionate God.

If you have children in Little Village, this is exactly what they are learning this morning: the attribute of God that deals with his compassion, particularly that God sees, God cares, and God acts when his children are in need. That is the promise I hope, as we see God perfectly keep his promises about the Messiah, will encourage us to believe about himself today.

As you grab your Bible, I'm going to invite you to turn to Matthew, chapter 1. Then we are going to quickly flip over a couple of books to Luke, chapter 2. Matthew, chapter 1, and Luke, chapter 2...the birth narratives of Jesus. I'm going to give you a heads up. I'm going to be throwing up (not literally throwing up) a lot of Scripture on the screen this morning. You Bible drillers are going to love this message. There's going to be a lot of page turning.

I had to explain to my wife what "Bible drill" is. She doesn't have the great Southern Baptist roots like I do, and she had no idea that was an actual thing. Yes, there is a thing called Bible drill. You present your Bible, and you turn to the book as fast as you can. The first one to get there is the winner. She had no idea what that is, but you guys are going to love it. There's a lot of page turning this morning. You can't have too much Scripture.

If you're a guest with us and you don't own a Bible or did not bring a Bible, I want to invite you. There should be one in the seatback in front of you. Go ahead and take that and turn to Matthew, chapter 1. Then find Luke, chapter 2, a couple of books over. After the service, we invite you to take that Bible home with you. That is our gift to you this morning. We're so glad you are here.

Okay. Before we dive into these two passages, here is some really quick background. You're going to notice as we read Matthew that he is writing to a particularly Jewish audience. He is going to reference (and he is even going to quote) a prophecy from the prophet Isaiah. You are going to see him tie that connection for his Jewish audience.

As we read Luke, he was writing most likely to a Greco-Roman audience, so he is not going to quote any Old Testament because they wouldn't have been familiar with it. What he *is* going to do is he is

going to reference and connect the birth of Jesus with some names, some places, and some time period a Greek or a Roman would have been so familiar with.

With that said, let's jump into Matthew 1. I'm going to ask everybody as we read together the Word of God that you would stand if you're able this morning. We're going to start in Matthew, chapter 1, verse 18. As I read, I invite you to listen and follow along. Matthew 1:18 says this:

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet [he quotes Isaiah]: 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel' (which means, God with us)."

Okay. Flip over to Luke, chapter 2. Here's his account of the birth of Jesus. Starting in verse 1...

"In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn."

You can be seated. These more than likely are some familiar passages. Maybe your family grew up reading these on Christmas Day or on Christmas Eve, particularly the Luke narrative. I hope this morning as we look at these passages and zoom in and focus on the prophecies that were fulfilled

and referenced in these passages that they will take on a fresh face. We have to ask ourselves where we got these prophecies about the birth of the Messiah. Where did they come from?

Well, prophets of the Lord hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus made predictions about the details surrounding the birth of one who would become and be called the Messiah. The Messiah was a deliverer sent by God, promised to be sent by God that would save humanity from its greatest enemy. In all, there are over 60 major prophecies concerning the birth, the life, and the death of the Messiah. This morning, we are going to look at three that particularly deal with his birth. Matthew and Luke reference these three.

The first prophecy about the birth of the Messiah is it was prophesied the Messiah would come from the house of David. The Messiah would have Davidic lineage. You could trace his family tree back to King David. Where do we get this? Well, Isaiah was prophesying to the southern kingdom of Israel about 700 years before the birth of Jesus. Israel faced destruction at the hands of the Assyrians. It was another nation that was oppressing them, and things weren't looking good.

Their king had failed them, and Isaiah spoke of one who would come who would not fail them, who would usher in a perfect peace that was previously unknown. This is what he said. This is Isaiah 11, verses 1 and 2. Isaiah prophesied, "**There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse [Jesse is the father of David], and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.**"

Then he goes on to say in verse 10, "**In that day the root of Jesse [speaking of this same person], who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.**" He connects the birth of the Messiah to David. This lineage will continue. Not only that, about a hundred years after the prophet Isaiah gave this prophecy, another prophet by the name of Jeremiah was prophesying to the northern kingdom of Judah. He also heard from the Lord about the one who was to come. This is what he prophesied.

He said in Jeremiah 23:5, "**Behold, the days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch...'**" He uses this same imagery. "**...and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.**" All the contemporary kings of this time had failed the nations of Judah and Israel. So God determined to provide his own

perfect ruler from the Davidic dynasty: the Messiah, one who, to this day, Jews still long and hope for that he would come.

We know as followers and worshipers of Jesus Christ that the Messiah has come. He has ushered in his kingdom. One day, he will return to establish and reign over it forever. Matthew and Luke are both going to make clear in their narratives that this Baby born to Mary can trace his lineage back to King David.

Matthew is going to say and clarify that Joseph, the stepfather of Jesus, was the son of David. Luke is going to say the reason why Mary and Joseph had to travel to Bethlehem was Joseph was of the house and lineage of David. They make it crystal clear that this prophecy about the Messiah is fulfilled because of his lineage. The first prophecy is fulfilled.

The second prophecy about the birth of the Messiah is it was prophesied the Messiah would be born in the little town of Bethlehem. Where does this come from? Well, around this same time Isaiah was speaking for the Lord in Israel, the prophet Micah was also speaking on behalf of the Lord in Judah. Judah would eventually fall to the Assyrians, but not before Micah would give them a word and promise of hope that one day there would be peace among all nations, when swords would be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks.

This is what he says. All of this peace would be brought on by a royal deliverer, a Messiah born in Bethlehem. This is what he says in Micah 5:2. **"But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days."** That can also be translated *eternity*.

We get from Luke's account the reason why Jesus was born in Bethlehem and not his parents' hometown of Nazareth. It wasn't because Mary and Joseph just decided last minute to take a little road trip to Bethlehem to visit their hometown. We see the hand of God, his ultimate sovereignty over all of creation in this act, because it wasn't Mary and Joseph deciding or electing to. It was a pagan emperor 1,400 miles away issuing a decree that all the world should be registered.

That is what led Mary and Joseph away from their hometown of Nazareth to the small town of Bethlehem so Jesus would be born. I love thinking about this truth, because it's not like Mary and Joseph just elected to do this on their own. They weren't trying to help God be sovereign, help the

Bible be true, because it's probable that Mary and Joseph, being Jewish, were familiar with this prophecy about the Messiah being born in Bethlehem.

Mary knew, because the angel Gabriel had spoken to her in Luke 1 that she was carrying this Messiah. She thinks, "Oh no, Joseph! We're in Nazareth. This baby has to be born in Bethlehem. Let's warm up the donkey. We have a road trip to take!" Right? I've learned some things about women during their pregnancies. There are some limitations on their travel, right? They don't even let women on airplanes at certain points. You're telling me Mary just elected to jump on a donkey and ride 80 miles uphill so baby Jesus could be born in Bethlehem? I highly doubt it.

They didn't have to force or encourage or help God be sovereign. God did that on his own. They simply were obedient. God decided, "I am going to take the heart of a king. I am going to stir it as I will like a stream of water and issue a decree so you and Joseph get to take the trip to Bethlehem." We know from Luke's account that while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. The second prophecy fulfilled: Jesus born in Bethlehem.

Then finally, and perhaps most miraculously, it was prophesied the Messiah would be born of a virgin. Isaiah in chapter 7, verses 10 through 14, says this: "**Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz...**" Ahaz was the king at that time. "**Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.' But Ahaz said, 'I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.'**"

The Lord had promised something to Ahaz that would come to be, and Ahaz didn't want to put his faith in that. Isaiah said, "Hey, the Lord has not only promised this, but he is going to give you a sign this will come to be so there's no doubt this will come to pass." Ahaz refuses. He says, "I don't want a sign. I don't want to have a reason to have to believe." Look at what the Lord says.

"And he said, 'Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign.'" "You don't want a sign? Too bad. The Lord is going to give you one anyway, and here is what it is." **"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."**

Two chapters later in Isaiah, this child is spoken of again. Isaiah 9, verses 6 through 7, say this: **"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."** Then it goes on to describe what his rule and what his reign will look like.

What is no doubt the most miraculous prophecy about the Messiah and what I would argue is the most important because of its theological implications is also the most controversial prophecy about the Messiah. Opponents of Jesus (those who opposed Christ) are going to argue the word Isaiah used for *virgin* technically means young woman or maiden. The gospel writers, in order to twist the story and to fit their narrative, twisted this word to emphasize the idea that Mary was a virgin.

Now they're correct in saying there is another Hebrew word that explicitly means *virgin* that Isaiah could have used, but the word Isaiah does use (this word for *young woman* or *maiden*), while it doesn't explicitly communicate *virgin*, it implies she was a virgin. I'll give you an example. It's similar to me calling my wife Ashley my *bride*. If you look in my phone for her number, it's going to have her name, and then next to it, it's going to say, "My bride." I'm not explicitly calling her my *wife*, but what is implied if I call Ashley my bride? It is implied she is also my wife.

It's the same thing with this word (this word Isaiah uses). It is implied this woman will be sexually pure, this unmarried maiden woman. Not only that, but if you look at the actual prophecy, you're going to see Isaiah make this bold pronouncement. He is going to say, "Behold, I will give you a sign." If you just take it to mean this *young woman*, that's not really much of a sign. "Behold, I will give you a sign. A young woman will conceive and bear a child."

That happens all the time, right? That's not really much of a sign. That's pretty common. If you want to make it really profound, change that to *young man*. "Behold, a young man shall conceive and bear a son." Now that's going to get some people's attention, right? That's going to be noticed. What is noticed, what is a sign, is this young woman, this maiden, will have not known a man. She will be a virgin. "This is your sign." That is something that will be noticed.

While it will be argued that this is not what he is implying, it is clear from the Scripture, it is clear from this passage, that is what is meant by this word. This woman will have not known a man. Matthew makes the connection clear by telling us that before they came together (speaking of Mary and Joseph), she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

Luke tells us and makes this clear by recording Mary's response in Luke 1 whenever the angel Gabriel tells her she will conceive. Mary's response is, "**How will this be...?**" She is confused! "**How**

will this be, since I do not know a man?" The Messiah is born of a virgin woman. Three prophecies about the birth of Jesus perfectly kept. Three promises fulfilled.

If God can perfectly keep the promises made about the most important thing in the history of mankind, the birth of the Messiah, is he not capable and able to keep every promise underneath those promises? That is my hope this morning. I wrote it like this. We can be sure that what God declares to be destined will come to pass, whatever it may be. We can have confidence in what God confesses about his character. God can be trusted.

Here are those current promises this morning I ask you to hold fast to about the character and nature of God. It involves his compassion, the idea that God *sees*, God *cares*, and God *acts* when his children are in need.

1. *God sees*. This Thursday, my wife and I went and saw the movie *Interstellar*. It just did one of *those* to me. You know, I'm still thinking about that movie. Movies like that (another one was *Gravity*) that deal with the vastness of space and how infinite the universe is, after I watch them and think about them, they make me feel extremely, extremely tiny. I realize how small I am when you compare my tiny, little life to the vastness of the universe. I am just this little speck in the galaxy God has created.

When you consider the vastness of space, the billions of stars, it's hard not to feel this way, to feel just tiny and unimportant. We begin to start to believe this lie that surely with all God has under his control and command, he has something more important and more significant to do than to notice my little life down here on earth. You can begin to feel that somehow you've been missed, or somehow you have been overlooked with the billions of lives God is sovereign over.

This, I think, especially comes true in times and seasons of suffering. You begin to question, "God, do you see? Do you notice? Are you aware of what I am in, of the situation I have found myself in?" God promises this to those who are in Christ. He has not...nor will he ever...hide his face from you. He will not turn his gaze from you.

Psalms 34 puts it like this: "**The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry.**" Last week as we looked at God as deliverer, Matt referenced the story of the exodus, God saving his people from oppression in Egypt. There's a passage in Exodus where God is speaking to Moses, and he talks about what he sees taking place in Egypt. He says this in Exodus 3: "**Then**

the LORD said, 'I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters.'"

"I have seen, and I have heard. I am intimately aware of your situation." Jesus is going to also affirm this truth in Matthew, chapter 10. In Matthew, chapter 10, Jesus sends out his twelve disciples to minister, to proclaim the good news that has come. He is aware and his disciples are aware this is going to involve danger. He even says, **"I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves..."** He has this word of comfort for them.

Speaking to his disciples, he says, **"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?"** meaning they are not of much value. **"And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father."** God is aware. **"But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows."** We have a good God who is acutely aware of every happening within the entire universe. Nothing goes without him knowing about it.

Not only that, not only does he meticulously observe every situation, but he is intimately involved in every action. Like a conductor waving his baton, he is orchestrating the symphony as he perfectly pleases. Nothing is outside of his control or sovereignty. I find great comfort from this quote by Charles Spurgeon about the absolute sovereignty of God over everything. He says this: "I believe that every particle of dust that dances in the sunbeam..."

You're at home, and you sit in your living room, and the sun hits the window just right. You see all those little dust particles just floating in the air. Charles Spurgeon is going to say, "I believe that every particle of dust that dances in the sunbeam does not move an atom more or less than God wishes—that every particle of spray that dashes against the steamboat has its orbit as well as the sun in the heavens—that the chaff from the hand of the winnowing is steered as the stars in their courses. ...the fall of sere leaves from a poplar is as fully ordained as the tumbling of an avalanche."

Everything from the smallest subatomic particle to the largest stars in our sky God sees and is sovereign over them all. I have trouble just keeping the 2,000-square-foot of my home I'm responsible of in some kind of order. Then you throw in a 1-year-old (which is what we have now). It doesn't matter how much I pick up or how much I put away, it just seems to never want to stay in order.

But not so with our God. It is not a task or a stretch for him to keep the universe in order. He sees every moment of every millisecond of your life. Hebrews 2:8 says, "**Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control.**" Take great comfort this morning in the reality that God your heavenly Father has his gaze fixed on your every experience. He sees, and he knows. Not only that, but...

2. *God cares.* God cares when his children are in need. First Peter 5 says, "**Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he...**" What? "**...he cares for you.**" In the Exodus passage after God says, "**I have surely seen the affliction...and have heard their cry...**" he then says, "**I know their sufferings...**"

It's not enough for me when I have a friend who is in suffering to simply see it. It's not enough for me to simply go, "Hey, I see you're really having a hard time." That's not enough. I have to move beyond that. I have to move to care. I have to move to compassion for that friend. There are two ways I can show my friend or you can show care and compassion. You can do that by showing *sympathy*, and you can do that by showing *empathy*. Both are good. Both are necessary.

One is always a guarantee. You can always have one, but the other isn't always a guarantee. Let me give you an example. During my wife's pregnancy, I could be sympathetic toward her all day long. I could say, "Baby, you're handling this so well." I could listen to her. I could tell her that she is handling it with such grace, and I could try to serve her and help her and comfort her and assure her. I could show her sympathy.

Here's something I could never say and I could never do. I couldn't say, "Babe, this is tough. I know. I have been there." Right? "This is hard." I can't do that! I can't extend empathy to my wife during her pregnancy because that's something I will never know. That is something I will never be able to relate to because that will never occur to me. I can't express empathy to her, but here's the great thing about God in Christ.

Not only does our God care for us by showing sympathy because he is a loving God, but because of God in Christ, because he was made like his brothers in every respect, we have a God who can empathize with our every suffering, a God who can empathize with our every temptation because he was made like us. In Immanuel, we have God with us. In the incarnation, we have God made like us.

In your suffering, he knows, and he cares, because he too has been there. You can come to Jesus in great loss, and he too will know that loss. Whether it's a loved one who has passed or a friend who has betrayed you, Jesus can say, "I know. I know, and I care, child, because I have been there." We have a God who sees. We have a God who cares, but we also have a God who acts.

3. *God acts*. He is a God who acts when his children are in need. If you go back to that Exodus passage one more time, God says, "**I have surely seen...and have heard their cry... I know their sufferings...**" Then he says, "**...I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey...**"

"I have come down." God acts when his children are in need. Here is the wrestle we experience. In the midst of suffering, in a trial, we want that immediate action. We want God to fix it now, to stop it now, to end the pain now. We have our eyes fixed on that immediate, temporal thing. My comfort to you this morning is that God has acted. Maybe not immediately, maybe not temporarily, but God has acted in a way that is eternal, in a way that will one day end that suffering forever.

Followers of Jesus are not promised a life free of suffering. You won't find that anywhere in Scripture. Instead, you'll find passages like this. You'll find Psalm 34:19 that says, "**Many are the afflictions of the righteous...**" Not just a few, not just a couple, but *many* are the afflictions of the righteous.

Then in 1 Peter 4, Peter is going to say, "**Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.**" Anyone who has promised you that in Christ is false. We are not promised a life free of suffering and free of pain. The Lord won't prevent every affliction, but here's what he has promised for those who are in Christ.

If you continue reading Psalm 34, it says, "**Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken.**" Yes, the trial will come, but your bones will not be broken. "**Affliction will slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned. The LORD redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.**"

Then 1 Peter 4. If you continue reading that passage, it gives instruction on how to respond to trial and suffering for the believer. It says (which sounds odd), "**But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.**" Then it says, "**Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator...**"

This morning God is telling you to entrust your soul to him while doing good. In the midst of suffering, may we shift our eyes from what is temporary, what is not eternal, and entrust our souls to the One who sees, cares, and acts when his children are in need. Remember this promise from 2 Corinthians 4: "**For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory...**" One we cannot comprehend. It is meaningful. Your suffering, your trial, is meaningful because it is preparing for you an eternal glory that will far outweigh it (what you are now in).

Then for all of us this Advent season, as we think about Jesus, as we reflect on the Messiah who has come, may we thank God that he has satisfied our greatest eternal need by sending his Son, the perfect Son Jesus, to lay his life down so we might be reconciled to God for eternity. That is our greatest hope. Let us pray.

Father, we do thank you that you are a compassionate God. You see it, you care, and you act when your children are in need. I pray this morning that those of us who are in great need, those of us who are in a season or trial of suffering, we would hold fast to that promise that you are aware, you care, and you have ultimately acted to end all suffering by sending your Son Jesus.

Where we lack faith, would you give us that faith this morning? We celebrate the birth of Jesus. Our hope is completely wrapped up in that Child who was born. That is why we celebrate. That is what we celebrate this season. We love you, Jesus. We thank you, and we pray all of this in your name, amen.