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CONCEIVED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT [BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY]  
Matthew 1:18-24; Advent 4A; December 20-21, 2025

Joseph faced a dilemma. Mary, his fiancé, was pregnant and he knew he was not the father of the child. What should he do? If he married her and she gave birth not long afterwards, people would naturally think he was the cause of the pregnancy. If he accused Mary publicly of sexual immorality, adultery, she would be publicly humiliated. The punishment for adultery under the Law of Moses was being stoned to death (Lev 20:10; Dt 22:22). Joseph, a righteous man, was unwilling to put Mary to public shame so he decided to divorce her quietly, secretly. (In those days, engagement was a contract for marriage between families that could be broken only by getting a divorce.)

Joseph's logic concerning the pregnancy was flawless. It is a matter of cause and effect. A man and a woman must **come together** for her to get pregnant. He had not come together with Mary. Joseph was not the father of the child, therefore Mary must have committed adultery. The problem with Joseph's logic was it did not take God into account. Mary had not committed adultery. Cause and effect still apply in this case. God the Holy Spirit, no man, was the cause of Mary's pregnancy; the effect was she, a virgin, would give birth to her firstborn Son. **"That which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit,"** the angel told Joseph. We confess in the Nicene Creed that "Jesus Christ... was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary," and in the Apostles' Creed, "Jesus Christ was... conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary."

If Mary had become pregnant from a man, the child born to them would have been a sinful human like them. This is cause and effect in action again. Sinful parents produce sinful children. Fathers pass on their original sin to their children, which has been happening ever since Adam and Eve started having kids (Rom 5:12; 1 Cor 15:22). This raises another issue of cause and effect. Sin causes death, which infects each and every one of us sinners. Death is unavoidable for sinners, and there is nothing we can do to change that.

God had a plan. He would send His Son into the world as a man without sin. A virgin would conceive without a human father, and the baby Boy would be no mere man, but the sinless God-man.

God first announced His plan of salvation when confronting Adam and Eve with their sin after the serpent-devil had tempted them. A woman would give birth to a Son and, even though it would come at the cost of His life, that Son would defeat sin, death, and the devil. **“I will put enmity between you [devil] and the woman, and between your offspring and her Offspring [Seed]; He [the Seed of the woman] shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel”** (Gen. 3:15). That is Bible’s first promise of the conception and birth of God’s Son, Jesus, into this sinful world.

The Hebrew poetry of Genesis three contrasts what happens to the serpent and the Seed-Son. The bruising of the serpent’s head is more consequential than the Son’s heel. The devil lost this battle. That Jesus’ heel would be bruised is the prophecy of His suffering and death on the cross; the cost of our salvation is infinitely large since it is God’s own Son who paid with His life. The price of redeeming all was immense: man’s sin not only caused his own death, but the corruption of all of God’s creation. The only sacrifice sufficient to redeem everyone and everything had to be from God Himself. Jesus Christ is true God, begotten of the Father from eternity.

Humans waited millennia for the promise of the Savior to be kept. As time progressed, God gave more details of His plan. Since sin is passed on from sinful human fathers to their children, God would bring His Son into this world without a human father; the effect would be a sinless baby Boy. Isaiah prophesied this, as quoted by the angel to Joseph. **“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel.”** “Mary was that mother mild, Jesus Christ her little child” (*LSB* 376:1).

Jesus had to be true man to take our place and be our substitute. Jesus received His human nature from His mother. We believe that “Jesus Christ [is] true man, born of the Virgin Mary.” Jesus wasn’t pretending to suffer and die on the cross. He really did, though without any of His own sin. It is hard enough for us to suffer and die, but Jesus did it with the full weight of all our sins in His own body. When we die with true faith, we know that our sin is forgiven and we are acceptable to God who is with us. Jesus died all alone, forsaken by God His Father, suffering with our sins as the ultimate sinner. (Being separated from God is a good description of what hell is.)

By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Isaiah the prophet foretold the virgin birth of God's Son. He also included its theological significance by giving the virgin-conceived Son a name, or title. **"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel."** Matthew helps us with our Lord's Hebrew names and titles. He explained the meaning of the name, **"Jesus," "He will save His people from their sins;"** the name "Jesus" is Hebrew for "the LORD/*Yahweh* saves." Matthew also explained **"Immanuel," "which means, God with us."**

God's Son came down from heaven, was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, and given the name Jesus because He became one with us as true man to be our Savior. At Christmastime we celebrate that God came to us as the man Christ Jesus. Why, then, did we sing earlier, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel" (*LSB 357:1*). Is Jesus with us to save us, or not? We sang the hymn from the perspective of Christians who celebrate each year at Christmas that God's Son was born, lived, died, rose, and ascended into heaven, "And He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead."

Jesus is Immanuel, God with us as the Baby conceived in the womb of Mary. Jesus is Immanuel, God with us and born into this world to save us. When Jesus ascended into heaven after His death and resurrection, He was not going away from us but remained with us. This is much more than being present in our thoughts or memories.

My father who died a year ago remains in my thoughts, but his soul is not here with me but in heaven with God. Our loved ones who died are no longer with us in this world no matter how much we remember them.

Jesus is different from them in a couple of ways. One, He is not dead, but alive in both body and soul. Two, Jesus is true God and man, and our loved ones are only human and not also divine. As true God, Jesus, even in His human nature, is everywhere all the time. As the only God-man, He is with us spiritually through His Word, and He is physically with us in His body and blood in the Lord's Supper. Jesus remains Immanuel, God with us to save and forgive us.

We are not praying for Jesus to become man again when we sing, “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” because He remains our God incarnate Savior for all eternity. We will celebrate that every year at Christmas until He finally comes in glory. We are praying that Jesus would continue to come in His holy Word and Sacrament to enliven our faith and forgive our sins. But most especially we pray that Jesus return in glorious light to ransom us from our captivity in this fallen creation and raise us to live forever with Him in heaven.

God had a plan, and He carried it out in the fullness of time.

**“Behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to [Joseph] 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:**

**‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son,  
and they shall call His name Immanuel’  
(which means, God with us).”**

Amen.