

# A Divine Man

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Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Good morning, everyone. Let me invite you to have that passage in Matthew open in front of you. And it might be worth having Isaiah 7 as well open as we turn to God's words this morning.

But as we start our Christmas, our run up to Christmas today, let me tell you about this man called Matthew, the man Matthew who wrote this gospel. Little known fact about him is that he wasn't always known as Matthew.

In fact, in a previous life, he was known as Levi. Now, Levi was a Jew and Levi was a tax collector.

So his job was to collect money from his fellow Jews and give it to the Romans who were the despised occupying force of the day.

And you can imagine, given the nature of that job, what he does for a living, because there was corruption and bribery going on absolutely everywhere, it was a very lucrative profession.

[ 1 : 0 9 ] And so if you add all that up, the two defining features about Levi's life, the two defining features, if they are number one, that you have sold out to the enemy.

You are the definition of a turncoat. And defining feature number two is that you are most likely very rich. You can imagine like one of those good old Western films that we all love, that if Matthew, Levi were around today, he'd be the kind of guy that would walk into a bar and the music would suddenly stop and everyone would clench their fists, glare at them and say, son, you've got some neck showing your face in here.

So Levi is that kind of guy. In fact, it was so despised that apparently the Jews didn't just view tax collectors as traitors. They viewed them as murderers.

So you can imagine the utter horror when Jesus crops up in the scene and he doesn't just take an interest in Levi and his tax collector friends.

He wants to know them. Actually, he calls Levi to be his disciple, to be his follower. And it's likely Jesus then that gives Levi his new name, Matthew, signifying his new start in life.

[ 2 : 2 8 ] Matthew, his name means, one of you knew this, that name means gift of God. Works in two ways. It's what Jesus is to Matthew, that the one who stepped into this man's life out of the blue, out of nowhere, and the one who brought forgiveness and newness of life, despite Matthew's, Levi's, horrendous life choices.

Let me just say, if that's you here today, maybe you're feeling you've made some horrendous life choices. Maybe you're here today and you're thinking, why would anyone want to know me?

Matthew would invite you into his gospel and say, think again. Think again, because that was me. It's who I was. It's why I've written this gospel, because people, outsiders like me, who thought we had no chance before this God, he came in the person of Jesus and showed us grace.

And it's what Matthew and his gospel are to the church. They are a gift from God. As Matthew reflects on Jesus' life, as he looks back on it, he writes this gospel so that his fellow Jews will know who this man Jesus is.

And so here is the key word in Matthew's gospel that comes up time and time and time again. If you're going to read it in your own times, look out for this word. As Matthew reflects on the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, it's the word fulfillment.

[ 3 : 55 ] Fulfillment. It's as almost as if Matthew looks back on Jesus' life and everything that happened, and there's a light bulb that goes on in his head and in his heart, because he understands that the things that happened in Jesus' life were not random events that took place in a strange place in a far-off distant land.

They're the very fulfillment of everything that God said was going to happen. And here's what I was thinking this week. You know, you've got authors today who revel in the element of surprise.

You know, you heard that line? The author revels in the element of surprise. Matthew is the opposite. He's an author who revels in the element of unsurprise.

This happened exactly like God said it would. And so the question that I want us to explore over these next four weeks is what is it that Matthew sees as being fulfilled?

What is it in the birth of Jesus in particular that Matthew sees God was good to his words? Come with me to Matthew chapter 1 and to verse 18. We'll jump into the first of these today.

[ 5 : 08 ] And let me harness the momentum that Pete built up with the kids talk and tell you what underwhelmed me massively this week. Do you get any idea what your name means? I wonder if you were playing that game when Pete was up doing the thing.

Do you know what your name means? Right? I wonder if we went around the room, we'd have some cracking backstories as to what people's names mean. But I'll tell you what underwhelmed me massively this week.

I'll pick it up with my parents in three weeks' time. Graham apparently means grey outbuilding. That's what it means.

Boring. Functional. And the irony is that six months ago I painted an outbuilding in our home. Grey. But my name means grey outbuilding.

No doubt some cheeky monkey out there will say how fitting. But in our day, a name may well have some significance. We do this all the time, don't we, with children. Sometimes we name other things in our lives.

[ 6 : 08 ] Names perhaps carry a significant meaning. But in the Bible, names always carry significance and meaning. Always. And you'll see if you've got the text there that Matthew gives us two names in this passage.

Two names that I think, as I've kind of wrestled with it this week, two names that are the key to understanding what Matthew sees as being fulfilled in the life and birth of Jesus. And the first thing to see about these two names is that they are two names with some serious background.

So come with me to verse 22. This is what Matthew writes. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet. Now, the question is, who is the prophet?

Because Matthew is thinking about the prophet Isaiah, the verses that we had read earlier. This man called Isaiah, this man who God sent to his people as his messenger, who is on the scene in Judah, circa 700 BC, call it that.

And what's crucial about that time is it's a time when the kingdom of Israel, those 12 tribes, are divided into the north and the south. Ten in the north, two in the south.

[ 7 : 23 ] Judah's in the south. His people are rebellious. His borders are threatened. And his king in Jerusalem is sitting there all the while unconcerned.

And yet the one thing that God's people do have, because they've got a ton of stuff that is not in their favor, yet the one thing that they do have is the promises of the covenant Lord. His word.

Of how he will defeat the enemies of his people. Of how he will bring his people to a place of rest. Of how he will raise up a king who will come from David's line, who will usher it in, and who will be his king, and whose reign will be forever.

And so King Ahaz, with all those promises in his back locker, with all the history of Israel, he looks at the enemies who are on the horizon. And make no mistake, they are big, bad, and scary.

He looks at those enemies, and he's got a choice. And it's key that we see this choice, because we're going to come back to it at the end. The choice is, will he live by faith and God's promises, or will he live by sight?

[ 8 : 34 ] Will he live by faith, or will he live by sight? And so Isaiah goes to him and says, don't be afraid of your enemies. Don't be afraid of them. They might look big, bad, and scary to you.

But understand that the Lord is no domesticated God. The Lord is the one who is all-powerful. The Lord is the one who is all-knowing.

And because he is the one who knows the end from the beginning, we need to understand, remember who the Lord is. He's telling you that these two nations on the horizon, who are threats to you, and who are making insults at you, they will soon be in the course of history, two smoldering stubs.

And to prove the point, let me ask you here today, I guarantee you that you've never heard of King Rezin of Aram. Have you? But I can guarantee you that you're sitting here today, all these years later, and you've heard of the baby who is to be born of this virgin.

It's exactly what God's point is. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, I will not put the Lord to the test. Now that sounds pious, and you think, well, sounds plausible enough that he wouldn't want to test God.

[ 9 : 48 ] But actually, you look underneath it, and what he's saying is a way with your sign. A way with your sign. And Isaiah says, have it your way.

Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Emmanuel. Now, what are we supposed to make of this sign?

That God himself is going to arrive on earth to dwell with his people, having been birthed through an untouched female womb.

Now, it's so above our capacity to fathom. It's so above our comprehension. It's so above our understanding. This is something that only God can do.

And I think that's exactly the point. This isn't about Israel getting their act together, although they are called to repent and put their faith in the Lord. This is about God being the Lord.

[ 10 : 50 ] This is only something that God can do. And I think that because of that, this is the reason that it divides its hearers in this day and in our day.

Because Ahaz probably thought this was a load of nonsense. But to the faithful believers in Israel, in Isaiah's day, down the ages, through the horrors, despite their failures as a people, those who are faithfully clinging to the promise that God will do this, this is a wonderful source of hope.

that God will come, that God sees, that God knows, that God will make good in his promises. And he will come. He will come to dwell with us.

And this child who's going to be born, if you flick on a few chapters in Isaiah, Isaiah chapter 9, he will be wonderful counselor. He will be mighty God.

He will be everlasting father. He will be prince of peace. And he will enlarge the nation. I take it that just means others from all over the world are going to come to know this child and everything that he is.

[ 12 : 13 ] This child king will defeat his enemies and he will save their people from their sin. So do you see how these two names come with some serious background?

Those random things that come with some serious background and some serious history. And so what Matthew observes is happening in the birth in Bethlehem is that these two names with some serious background become two names that have come to the foreground.

So in our story, here are Mary and Joseph flicking it onto Matthew 1. Here are Mary and Joseph. Here are this young, poor, engaged couple from this little backwater town of Nazareth.

Now, you read the Gospels and Nazareth is a town that people joke about. You hear Nathaniel, what good could come from Nazareth? It's a town that carries with it a stigma of thinking there's nothing that goes on there.

And yet this couple are from Nazareth. Now, you've got to understand that OK Magazine and their engagement aren't phoning them up and saying, can we do a full piece spread from your wedding? Okay, Mary's not climbing the corporate ladder.

[ 13 : 26 ] Joseph's not just completed his 15th Iron Man. The world are not standing up to attention when this couple come on the scene. Matthew's not bringing them to the surface saying, let's toast the success of Mary and Joseph in who they are.

What is it Matthew draws our attention to? And I love seeing this this week and really, really seeing it in all these years of reading this passage. What is it that Matthew draws our attention to about them?

It's not their success. It's their faithfulness. It's a wonderful lesson for us today. What is it that the Lord's interested in? What does God want from his people? It's not that we would up the game.

It's that we would be faithful. We'd be faithful to him. That we would follow his word. We would cling to his promises and stake it all on him. It's their faithfulness that Matthew draws our attention to.

Luke records Mary's Magnificat, her song of praise. It's clear that she knows God's promises. And Matthew, he focuses on Joseph.

[ 14 : 35 ] From David's line, he's a faithful to the law kind of man. Did you see that description there? He's a, I want to do the right thing by Mary kind of guy. These are faithful people.

And I wonder whether they're the kind of representing, as it were, exactly the faithful kind of people that God's promise in Isaiah all those years before was for. Nothing going for them.

Nothing going on in their lives. And yet they're walking day by day in faith that God would deliver on this promise. And yet we need to appreciate, and here's what I want you to know as well, they were faithful people, but they ain't gullible people.

You see that in their reactions, it takes an angelic appearance to both of them individually to convince them that this is true. Joseph is about to end it with Mary when he finds out. Now what's the point?

The point is that what C.S. Lewis called chronological snobbery, that just because we exist in 2021, we look back on this and think that somehow we're a lot more sophisticated, that we wouldn't have fallen for anything like this.

[ 15 : 42 ] People in this day aren't gullible. Mary and Joseph know how, this audience, her first reading this gospel, know how the birds and the bees work. Right? They know that this isn't how it goes down.

They know that there's only one way for a woman to get pregnant, and that ain't happened. They're not gullible people. Matthew emphasizes that this pregnancy, do you see it?

What's the Holy Spirit doing? This is the virgin birth. And maybe at that point, I don't know, maybe I've lost you. You know, the virgin birth, is that up there with Bigfoot, the Loch Ness Monster, and that guy in the red suit comes this time of year?

Is it nonsense in your eyes, I wonder? And it's really right, and you've got to hear me right in this. It's good that we think long and hard about the plausibility of the Bible.

And what you find, and I find this in my own life, when you really begin to research this, and there's some cracking resources I can recommend to you if you want to think more about this, this stuff historically really stands. It really stands.

[ 16 : 48 ] And it's important that we understand that our faith is not blind. Our faith is trust based on evidence. But Leonard put me to you, if you're struggling with this one, lovingly, that if there is an all-powerful God who created the world out of nothing, is this really all that hard for him to do?

Well, you see, that's exactly it. I mean, I don't believe there's a God who created the world. I don't believe in miracles. Well, let me ask you again to think about it. And maybe think about the fact that you probably live your life in the light of more miraculous stuff than you think you do.

For instance, take the creation of the world. You know, Stephen Hawking said, because there's a law like gravity, the universe can and will create itself out of nothing. You know, whilst there are elements of that that are true, it still doesn't explain why there's something and not nothing.

I remember sitting in biology classes at school and listening to the teacher explain the theory of evolution to me and finding her argument intellectually unsatisfying.

And that wasn't even beginning to scratch the surface of the why, let alone the how. Can I suggest that there's a truth in the slightly mischievous words of Glenn Scrivener who said, Christians believe in the virgin birth of Jesus.

[ 18 : 11 ] Atheists believe in the virgin birth of the universe, choose your miracle. And let me just recommend we're going to give this away, this book called Is Christmas Unbelievable?

by a wonderful lady called Rebecca McLaughlin who's researched these things and written it down for sceptics. Is Christmas Unbelievable? We're going to be giving them away from next Sunday, the couple of Sundays after on our callers service as well.

It's a wonderful book that you can take away but also just to give to people who perhaps struggle with this stuff. Is Christmas Unbelievable? But that the virgin birth happened is one thing.

Why it happened is quite another and it's probably the thing that Matthew wants us to focus on. Because the answer to mankind's sin problem and history is a long testimony to this, is never going to come from the human gene pool.

The saviour that we need needs to come from out with us so as to not be stained with our sin. And yet they need to be one of us if they are to stand in our place.

[ 19 : 23 ] And so the virgin birth, far from being a take it or leave it part of Christianity, it is one of the key building blocks of the Christian faith.

Here is Jesus fully God and fully man. Here is Emmanuel. Here is God with us.

God with us. Get your head around that one. I remember a friend of mine when he was young went to hospital for a major operation and he looks back on that time as the time when he found out that his parents really loved him.

He heard them say it. Sure, the years come by but it was at the operation. Looking back, he remembered that they were there when he went to sleep. They were there when he woke up and they never left his side the whole time during the operation.

What was it that convinced him that they loved him? It was their presence. Do you see how in the ultimate sense here is God showing a world and his people intent on sinful rebellion turned away from God running a hell-bound race.

[ 20 : 34 ] Here is God reaching down and saying this is not about you coming to find me because that would never happen because you love the darkness. This is about me because who I am coming to find you.

And despite us giving this God all the reasons to cast us off, despite us giving him all the reasons to cut ties because we love the darkness rather than him, God came seeking us.

that's what this screams that this God loves us and he's come after us. Jesus come to show us the Father. Here is Emmanuel and it's unfolding right in this little manger in Bethlehem.

But here's another question I asked myself this week back in Matthew 1. Why does the angel not say to Joseph, you shall call him Emmanuel?

You ever thought about that? It's a wee bit confusing to introduce another name at this point in the story. Why not just say you shall call him Emmanuel? Because then it would have been a lot more sense in a way.

[ 21 : 42 ] We would have known exactly what's going on. Where does this Jesus name come from? The more I've thought about it this week and I could be wrong, could be wrong, but here's a shot at an answer.

Because when you consider who this God is, holy, three times holy, majestic, radiantly perfect, the eternal one, the one all-knowing, the one all-seeing, the fact that he is with us as sinful people could potentially be terrifying news, could it not?

I know some of you have got WhatsApp groups for the street. Can you imagine a message that came in that WhatsApp group and said, big news, lying with us. How would that strike you?

It would strike you as cool news, it would strike you as big news, but it would strike you potentially as terrifying news, would it not? Imagine that in the street, lying with us.

Nobody's running out into the street grabbing a selfie with Simba, are they? They are locking the doors thinking we're not going out of there because we know the potential of the one who is on the street. I think that's why Matthew's quick to let us know here, but the angel said to Joseph that his name will be Jesus because God with us is wonderful news, it is potentially terrifying news, but God with us come to save us?

[ 23 : 10 ] That is incredible news. Let me quote Max Lucado, if our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator, if our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist, if our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist, but since our greatest need is forgiveness, God sent us a saviour.

And that's exactly what Jesus did all those years later as he goes to the cross to fulfil everything about his name. He saves us.

And at the end of Matthew's gospel, the risen and soon to ascend Jesus says, Behold, I am with you to the end of the age.

You see, this gospel is bookended by God's presence. Words true in a new and greater way by God's indwelling spirit living in the lives of his people.

And we've got to understand that in him, in Jesus, we can also say, having been reconciled to our heavenly father through our faith in who this Jesus is and what he's done for us.

[ 24 : 17 ] We can know God with us, yes, but God for us. God for us. And this is the wonderful news of the gospel that's unfolding in Bethlehem.

Here is Jesus. Here is Emmanuel. And both of those wonderful truths, those wonderful names, so wonderfully converge in the baby in Mary's womb.

But back to Bethlehem as we begin to wrap this up. You know, after the angel appears to him in a dream and tells him about the name, Joseph's got a choice.

It's the same one that Ahaz had all those years before as he too is presented with this child. Will he live by faith or will he live by sight?

Now, make no mistake, we romanticize this often. For Joseph to associate himself with Mary and this child is to sign up for a life of ridicule. Right?

[ 25 : 17 ] Remember, this is an honor and shame culture. Remember, Nazareth is not a big place. Remember that people are people are people. Down the generations, people love to talk. So for him to associate with Mary is to sign up for a life of ridicule.

And there's a wonderful little parallel there, give you this for free, between the life of the father and the life of the son. Life of ridicule. But the easy thing to do here for Joseph would be do what?

Run. Bolt. Save your skin. Save your face. You take the sympathy. Let Mary take the hit. Let her take the shame. She can be on her own.

You might have a fighting chance, another career, another job. I don't know. But Joseph says, verse 25, he will have the name Jesus. And it's more than Joseph just doing the decent thing here.

It's him staking his whole life and his and his people's future on the identity of the one who is this child. He's leaning it all on the name Jesus.

[ 26 : 24 ] You know, just as we close, I remember when I first moved to Edinburgh trying to get my head around the local lingo. Found out that the locals here used this word, Ken. Okay, do you Ken?

Why I Ken? And I soon find out that Ken means to know. Right? But to say that you Ken a person here doesn't mean that you know them. It just means that you kind of know who they are.

And we know, don't we, that there's a world of difference between knowing somebody's name and knowing who they are and really knowing them. And the challenge I think this passage presents us with as we finish is do you know him as Jesus?

Not do you Ken him, do you know him as your saviour? You know what I love about this passage? I love the fact, again, I thought about it this week. Mary and Joseph say nothing.

They act, but they say nothing. In other words, this isn't about us upping our game. This isn't about us being the most spectacular people that God wants us to be. This is about us stepping out in faith and living our lives in light of everything that God will do to save us.

[ 27 : 31 ] And I wonder whether some of us here today have walked in here in the spirit of law thinking that we need to perform for our Heavenly Father. And this would say, no, this is not about us up in the game.

This is about Jesus. This is about who he is. And if you're here today and you're struggling with your guilt, come to him as the one who saves us. Come to him and know him as Jesus.

I'll praise the name of this God that he would do this for us. Let's pray. And so, our loving Heavenly Father, we just praise you for this time of year.

And just remembering the birth of Jesus. And I pray, Father, for some of us here today who are perhaps struggling in life, who are perhaps feeling guilty of their sin, who are feeling maybe like Matthew did at the beginning that we thought about, who are struggling with who they are.

Father, I pray through your Spirit that you would give us a fresh understanding of the one whose name is Jesus. Oh, Father, help us to live our lives in the light of who he is and what he's done for us.

[ 28 : 45 ] The wonderful Counselor, mighty God, Prince of Peace, everlasting Father. and it's in his wonderful name that we pray.

Amen.