

Sunday, December 15, 2024 Advent Sunday Morning Worship Sermon
「His name is Immanuel」 Pastor Takaaki Inoue
Isaiah 9:1~6, Matthew 1:18~24

❶ 【Joseph's Suffering】

The story of Jesus' birth is written only by Matthew and Luke. In the Gospel of Luke, the "Annunciation to Mary" by the angel Gabriel is written, but in the Gospel of Matthew, the "Annunciation to Joseph" is written by an angel who appeared in a dream.

"Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they were together, it was revealed that she was conceived by the Holy Spirit. (verses 18~20) The reason why "Joseph's husband" is written here is because according to Israeli customs at that time, they were legally considered "husband and wife" even during the betrothal before they were together. Joseph was righteous. In the Bible, a "righteous person" is a person who keeps God's commandments. Joseph was a believer in God. Joseph is informed that his fiancée, Mary, has been conceived by the Holy Spirit. So Joseph decided not to reveal it and to cut ties with him secretly. Why did Joseph make this decision? If you have faith, you should believe that it is conception by the Holy Spirit, and you should protect and protect Mary. But where is the evidence that we have been conceived by the Holy Spirit? Like the Japan folk tale "Princess Kaguya", if you are born from glowing bamboo, you will know that it is not of this world. But Maria's belly is not glowing. We must judge only by Mary's words. If she is lying, Mary must be punished according to God's righteousness. But Joseph knew that Mary was not that kind of person. After much deliberation, he came up with an answer: "Don't make it public, but cut ties secretly." To not reveal it means to hide God's work and not to have anything to do with it. Joseph is torn between reality and faith. I'm not sure. Paul wrote, "Everything that is not based on conviction is sin" (Romans 14:23). Not only the conception of Mary, but also the work of the Holy Spirit (God) and the work of man in modern times?

❷ 【God's word gives us confidence】

When Joseph decided to divorce, an angel appeared to him in a dream that night and said: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take your wife Mary, for the Son of Mary's womb was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Maria gives birth to a boy. Name him Jesus. for he will save his people from their sins." (Verses 20~21) Dreams were a means of "God's announcement" at that time. After this, Joseph was always told the word of God in a dream. The angel told Joseph, "Do not be afraid to receive Mary your wife." We can see that Joseph was afraid. Faith is a struggle against unbelief, and it is something to be feared for. Joseph "awoke from his sleep and received his wife, as the angel of the Lord had commanded"

(verse 24). "Sleep" is a word used in the Bible as a symbol of unbelief, and "stay awake" means to believe in God's word. Therefore, Joseph awoke from the sleep of confusion and awakened to faith. What gave Joseph faith was the word of God. With the word of God, Joseph turned his judgment upside down and began to walk forward with courage. It feels like the fear has been swept away.

●In the book of Nehemiah, there is an astonishing account that the people returning from Persia listened to Ezra's reading of the Book of Law (the Pentateuch of Moses) for six hours. "He's... Read it aloud from dawn to noon. And all the people listened to the book of the law." (Nehemiah 8:3) Moreover, during the reading and during the explanation afterwards, the people stood and listened. You may wonder if such a thing is possible, but in the Orthodox Church, people still worship while standing, sometimes standing for five hours. This is probably where the habit of "standing up" when reading the Bible was born. Even now, when he reads, he says, "Stand respectfully." The book of Nehemiah says that this continued for seven days. This is the root of the Holy Assembly. As a result, the people spent a quarter of their day reading the Bible, and a quarter confessing their sins and praying. In other words, it has changed.

There is a book called The Nameless Pilgrim. In it, the story of an alcoholic unit commander appears. He often made mistakes with alcohol. When I was depressed, a monk came up to me and said, "Read the Bible," and gave him the Gospels. "The Gospels contain the Word of God Himself, so they have the power to make us holy. So, if you don't understand it after reading it, don't worry. Please, if you don't know, don't know, just keep reading with enthusiasm. One saint said that even if you don't understand the Word of God, the demons will be horrified by what you read. ... And St. John Chrysostomos says that the spirits of darkness are terrified even of the ark in which the Holy Gospel is stored, and will never violate it." He read the Bible as he was told, and eventually the desire to drink disappeared, and eventually he hated alcohol. This is a true story.

God's Word has the power to sanctify, faith, and change man. From then on, Joseph became a follower of God's word at all times. Joseph was a righteous man, but he abandoned his righteousness and changed to a way of life that chose the word of God alone as the righteous one. I believe that Christians have to give up their own righteousness. There is only one righteous person, Christ. We must not judge ourselves, but use the words of the Lord Jesus as the basis for our judgment. That's how we reshape the circuitry of our heads. It is a shift in values. The circuitry of the head is created by the repetition of the same thoughts. We read the Bible over and over again and memorize it. Let's read the Bible.

③ [God is with us]

Matthew describes this event in the prophecy of Isaiah: "Behold, a virgin conceives and gives birth to a son, whose name is Immanuel. This name means that God is with us." (Isaiah 7:14) was fulfilled by Jesus. A long time ago, when the city of Jerusalem was besieged by enemies, the prophet Isaiah said to King Ahaz, "Be assured that God will protect Jerusalem, and if you are unsure, ask for any signs." I said. But Ahaz did not ask for a sign because he could believe in God in such a situation. To such an unbelieving Ahaz, God unilaterally gave a sign. That was "a virgin conceives and gives birth to a boy." In the same way, Matthew says that Mary's conceiving and giving birth to Jesus is a sign that God will protect and save the world. The event of Christmas is an event in which God is with us, despite our unbelief and sinfulness.

●A mother lost her eight-year-old daughter to leukemia. One night, a young nurse read a book to the child who couldn't fall asleep after lights out. The nurse was still at the bedside for nearly 30 minutes next to the child, who began to sleep quietly. After the death of the child, the mother said: "When she opened her eyes that night, the nurse was still by her side, and she was really happy that many people read to her just to put her to sleep," she said.

Christ did not come to this earth only on an "errand." He was not a person who left as soon as he put his child to bed, but a person who valued being with his children. He spent 30 years with the people of Nazareth to teach them that love is "together." Christ is the One who eats with us, weeps with us, struggles with us, bears sins with us, suffers with us, dies with us, and rises with us. The Gospel of Matthew encloses the beginning and the end with the word "together." It is a great blessing to be with us.