

8. Spiritual Themes in Matthew 1:18-25

1. "Do Not Be Afraid" – A Biblical and Spiritual Theme

A version of **"Do not be afraid"** or **"Fear not"** appears hundreds of times in the Bible, marking some of the most pivotal moments in salvation history:

- The angel tells **Mary** the same thing in **Luke 1:30** ("Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God").
- **Joshua** receives this command in **Joshua 1:9** as he takes on the mantle of leadership.
- **Jesus reassures His disciples** in **Matthew 14:27**, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid," as He walks on water.
- Even in **Revelation 1:17**, Jesus declares, "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last."

What does this mean spiritually? Fear is one of the greatest obstacles to faith. Joseph is faced with an overwhelming situation—his betrothed is pregnant, and the child is not his. The **cultural consequences** could be disastrous. But the angel tells him: **God is doing something greater than your fear—trust Him.**

For us, the message is the same. **Faith often requires trust beyond what we can see.** Fear is the instinct to withdraw, to control, to protect ourselves. But "Do not be afraid" is God's call to **step forward in trust, knowing that He is with us.**

2. The Meaning of Emmanuel: "God With Us"

The angel tells Joseph that this child will be called **Emmanuel**, meaning **"God with us"** (Matthew 1:23, quoting Isaiah 7:14). This is profound because:

- **It fulfills prophecy** – Isaiah spoke of a child who would be a sign of God's presence among His people.
- **It reveals who Jesus is** – Not just a messenger from God, but **God Himself dwelling among us.**
- **It reassures us today** – No matter where we are, **God is truly present** in our lives.

How Radical Was This Idea?

In both **Jewish** and **Greco-Roman** thought, the idea that **God would fully enter human life** was **groundbreaking.**

- **In Jewish tradition**, God was understood as **holy, transcendent, and set apart.** While God dwelled among His people in the **Tabernacle** and later the **Temple**, there was always **separation**—only the high priest could enter the **Holy of Holies** once a year. The thought that **God Himself would take on human nature and live among ordinary people** was a **radical shift.**
- **In Greco-Roman culture**, gods were often **distant, indifferent, or capricious.** The gods of Rome and Greece might intervene in human affairs, but typically **for their own purposes.** The idea of a God who **enters suffering, walks with people, and sacrifices Himself for love** was **unheard of.**
- **Other surrounding cultures** (Egyptian, Persian, North African) often associated deities with **rulers and dynasties.** Pharaohs were divine, Persian kings ruled as God's agents,

and people were expected to serve the gods, not the other way around. But the idea that **God would come humbly, born as a child among common people, living fully as one of them, was revolutionary.**

Spiritual Meaning for Us Today:

God is not distant. He is here. Faith is not about reaching up to God—it is about receiving the God who has come down to us.

3. The Name Jesus (Yeshua) and Salvation

While Emmanuel means “God with us,” the name Jesus (Yeshua/יֵשׁוּעַ) means “Yahweh saves.”

The angel declares, “**You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins**” (Matthew 1:21). But what exactly does that mean?

What Are We Being Saved From?

Many people—then and now—expect **salvation** to mean freedom from **external problems**:

- The **Jews expected** the Messiah to save them from **Roman oppression**.
- Today, many assume **salvation** means **God fixing our circumstances—making life easier, more comfortable, or more successful**.

But Jesus came to do **something deeper**.

4. The Connection Between “God With Us” and “God Saves”

At its core, **sin is not just breaking laws—it is the breaking of relationships**:

- **With God** – We were created for **full communion with God**, but sin separates us.
- **With others** – Sin leads to **division, injustice, conflict, and broken communities**.
- **With ourselves** – Sin fractures our own sense of **identity, causing guilt, shame, and inner turmoil**.

This is the **fundamental human problem**—and it is what **Jesus came to heal**.

A Major Theme for This Bible Class: What Exactly Did Jesus Come to Save Us From?

Spoiler alert: It probably isn’t what you think.

Yes, Jesus came to save us from sin—but **salvation is not just about avoiding hell or getting to heaven**.

- **Not just forgiveness, but restoration.**
- **Not just escape from consequences, but transformation.**
- **Not just a ticket to heaven, but the renewal of every part of our lives—here and now.**

This is the **theme we will keep returning to** throughout this class:

- **Jesus doesn't just save us from something; He saves us *for* something.**
- **For wholeness. For relationship. For the kingdom of God.**

So, as we continue exploring **Matthew and the Gospels**, this is the **lens we'll be using**:
What exactly did Jesus come to save us from? And what does that mean for us today?

Final Reflection: What Does This Mean for Us Today?

Matthew 1:18-25 isn't just a **historical story**—it's a **personal invitation**:

- **Do not be afraid** – Whatever fear you're facing, **God is calling you to trust Him, just as Joseph did.**
- **God is with us** – No matter how dark or uncertain things feel, **we are never abandoned.**
- **God saves** – Jesus didn't just come to **teach**; He came to **redeem, heal, and bring us back to the Father.**

This passage is the foundation of **everything that follows** in the Gospel—every **miracle, teaching, and act of mercy** is built on this truth:

God is here, and He is saving us.

Looking Ahead

As we go deeper into this study, we'll keep **returning to this question**:

What exactly does Jesus save us from? And how does His salvation transform our lives today?

Other Points for Personal Further Study (Not Covered in Class)

These are additional themes related to Matthew's infancy narrative that are worth noting, but they will not be explored in depth during class:

1. **The Role of Women in Matthew's Infancy Narrative**
 - Matthew subtly emphasizes **Mary's obedience** through **Joseph's actions**, whereas Luke provides a more direct focus on Mary.
 - Mary, as a **marginalized young woman**, fits into Matthew's theme of **God working through the unexpected.**
2. **The Presence of the Holy Spirit in Matthew's Infancy Narrative**
 - The **Holy Spirit plays a major role** in Jesus' conception (**Matthew 1:18-20**).
 - This introduces the Spirit as a **major character** in Matthew's Gospel, later seen at **Jesus' baptism** and in guiding **His ministry.**
3. **The Political Tensions at Jesus' Birth**
 - **King Herod's paranoia and violence** show how **Jesus' birth was immediately seen as a threat** to worldly rulers (**Matthew 2**).

- Matthew foreshadows **Jesus' ultimate clash** with political and religious authorities.

4. **The Role of Angels in Matthew's Gospel**

- Matthew has **more angelic encounters** than any other Gospel: **Joseph's dreams, the Magi's warning, and the angel at the resurrection.**
- Angels serve as **messengers of protection, guidance, and revelation** throughout the narrative.

These points can provide **additional insights for personal reflection** and deeper study beyond what will be covered in class discussions.