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# HE MADE US FAMILY JESUS IS STILL WITH US

Pastor Mark Driscoll — Matthew 1:18-25 — December 09, 2012

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*The biggest opportunity in the world is to be a part of God's people, God's family, his church and what he is doing.*

*There are some amazingly faithful people that have made this into a vibrant growing family.*

*I just couldn't look at anything without actually seeing that God was telling me that he loved me.*

*If Jesus is ultimately important, then the people who love Jesus are critically important to us as well.*

## MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Merry Christmas, Mars Hill! Merry Christmas! Yes, I said Christmas. I know you're not supposed to say Christmas, so I'll say it again. Merry Christmas! This is our Christmas series. In my state, the People's Republic of Washington, on the same day recently legalized drug use and gay marriage, and here's my deep conviction: If I can marry a man while smoking a joint, I can say, "Merry Christmas."

So, Merry Christmas, Mars Hill, yes. And this is our Christmas series. "He said it again. I feel like he's gonna do it— yeah, he's going to do it again." Merry Christmas! This is our Christmas series, "He Made Us Family." There are a lot of places you go to and they won't say "Merry Christmas" because they try to take Christ out of Christmas. Christmas is about Christ, it's about Jesus Christ, his birth.

Early in the church's history, God's people didn't know when Jesus was born because the Bible doesn't tell us when. It tells us where and how. And there was a pagan holiday called Saturnalia. We

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had a few days off, so we just turned it into Christmas, and that's what we did.

And now, today, people are trying to take Christ out of Christmas. They'll go to Xmas, which is just the Greek for Christ, so, oh, that didn't work. So then it's, "Happy Holidays, Happy Holidays." Yeah, like there are so many holidays during December. There are so many amazing holidays during December. I went on the Internet because everything there is true, and I found out that there are some other holidays during the month of December.

So, December 2 is Fritter Day. Fritter Day, I like fritters, but— Now, December 5 is National Ninja Day. Some of you say, "I didn't see that coming." It's because it's Ninja Day. If you saw it coming, it couldn't be Ninja Day. December 16 is Chocolate Covered Anything Day, which, if there was a holiday that I was hoping would gain more traction, that would be it, because anything with chocolate is awesome, because you can suck the chocolate off and ignore the rest. Oh, that all of life were like that. December 18 is National Wear a Plunger on your Head Day. December 23 is Festivus, for all of you *Seinfeld* fans. And some will say, "Oh, but what about Saturnalia, the great pagan holiday." Well, there were two guys that were gonna celebrate it, but then the *Twilight* movie came out, and they decided to take the month off and just keep watching the movie instead. That's their pagan celebration.

So, let me just say that this is not "Season's Greetings" or "Happy Holidays." In fact, for us, it's all about a holy day, our holiday is the birth of Jesus. So, we're just taking a month, we're going through the first few chapters of Matthew. We're looking at the fact that God came into human history as part of a family, and Jesus, he's the one who makes us family. So, today we're going to continue, and we're going to continue in Matthew 1:18–25. If you've got a Bible, go there, and we're going to look at the fact that Jesus is still with us, alright?

And here's what I would just tell you: Say, "Merry Christmas." All these companies where you can't say Christmas, they take Christmas off the website, their employees can't say Christmas—I'm saying it all the time. I go to the bank, "Happy Holidays." "No! It's Jesus' birthday! You're going to hell, but he can save you! I don't care how long the line is. Everybody's buying gifts, I've got the best one of all. You don't have to be kindling. Happy birthday, Jesus, right?" We're gonna talk about Jesus all month and we're really excited to make sure that Christmas is about Christ, amen?

## MARY

And so we're going to open the Bible, we're going to look at his family. Join me, Matthew 1:18. We're going to start with Mary. You like Mary, Jesus' mother, Mary? You're supposed to say yes, okay?

Matthew 1:18: "Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way." Let me just stop right there. So, there are lots of stories about Jesus. Most of them, many of them, are just wrong. Somebody,

educated beyond their intelligence with more degrees than Fahrenheit, will write some convoluted book about Jesus' birth or his life, or he didn't die, or he got married and ran off to France or something crazy. Back to my pot-smoking original point, these people will come up with various conjectured opinions about Jesus that are wrong, and they're fictitious, but they're profitable, because the media loves, loves anybody who seems credible and says something crazy about Jesus.

But here's what the Bible says: "Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place this way." Not a whole bunch of other ways, this way. This is how God came into history. "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."

We'll unpack all of this and we'll look at Mary first. So, she's a young woman, okay? Do we have any teenage girls? Teenage girls, okay? Mary was probably a teenage girl. How many of you girls are not ready to raise God? You're like, "Raise God? I can't even drive a stick shift." Mary is as young as twelve. Twelve. She's probably, at the oldest, in her early twenties. In that day, you could be betrothed by twelve or thirteen years of age.

Now, I know some of you are thinking, "Well, that's very young. That's very concerning," because today we don't get engaged. If we do get engaged, it's not until we're late twenties, pushing thirty. People are waiting longer than ever to marry, and so some of you would say, "Oh, they were too young." Well, maybe you're too irresponsible and immature. Just something to consider. I just throw it out as a possibility for your prayerful consideration. You're welcome.

"Is he going to do this for the whole sermon?" "Oh, he's just warming up. It's horrible." "Why did you bring me?" "I don't know, it was entertaining." Okay, so— "I was hoping you'd get saved, and get a job, and marry me." Okay, no— Yes, okay.

So, she's a young gal, probably in her twenties. She lives in a small rural town. I've been there. There's only one well, meaning it couldn't sustain a large population. Dozens of people, maybe hundreds. They're fishermen, farmers, far away from the big city. Think small town, two thousand years ago.

The people there were, in large part, poor. This was not a rich community. It means that her home was, most likely, according to the archeological digs, about the size of a parking stall where we would place a vehicle today. A portion of that home was designated to the animals, so you're thinking very humble circumstances. Mary walking to the well to get water for her family, that's the kind of life that she is living. That's the kind of life that she's living.

But, she's coming up on her big day. She's—we hear the word here, and it's a foreign word to us—betrothed to be married. Now, what does betrothal mean? Well, it's somewhere between engagement in our culture and marriage. It's more legally binding than engagement, but it's not as legally fulfilled, I should say, as a consummated marriage.

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Let me articulate it this way. According to the Bible, marriage is two things: covenant and consummation. Covenant and consummation. Betrothal is the season when you are covenanted, but have not yet consummated the marriage, and it was a legal state to where you were legally married, but had not yet finished the marriage proceedings to where you have a marriage ceremony, and you consummate your marriage, and then you live together as husband and wife. And it was legally binding. It was legally binding, and so she is betrothed to a man named Joseph.

Now, Joseph is a young man, and he is likely in his teens or early twenties as well. The odds are good that they grew up together knowing one another. You think about it again: small town with dozens of people, maybe one hundred tops, not a lot. There are not a lot of children, and the children grow up together and they know one another. If you're from a small town, you know how this works.

So, they likely grew up together, they likely knew one another very well, their families knew one another, they worshiped in synagogue together. These are kids who, in every way, have known in their hearts for a while that they're going to be together. It's like when I met Grace at seventeen, I told her within two weeks, "I'm going to marry you and spend the rest of my life with you." You reach a point where you just know, "That's who I want to be with. That's who I'm going to be with." And so this is this joyful season of her life where she is betrothed. That means that her covenant is in place, her consummation is on the horizon, and her wedding is under preparation.

## TOO MUCH OR TOO LITTLE

Now, let me say this about Mary: Catholics make too much of her, and Protestants make too little, okay? I grew up Catholic. For those of you here, welcome, my name is Father Mark, I hope you enjoy our mass. We'll have Communion in a moment. It's all very legitimate, okay? I grew up Catholic, and in the Catholic tradition— and some Catholics are Christians who love Jesus, and I wasn't one until I met Jesus at nineteen.

But, in the Catholic Church, I believe too much is made of Mary. I remember as a little boy praying to Mary. "Hail Mary, full of grace." If you're Catholic, you just know where to go from there. Walking into church, there would be statues of Mary, and she would be lifted up, in an exalted, venerated position. That's too much. That's too much.

Certain popes have called her co-mediatrix and co-redemptress. Co-redemptress, meaning she aids in the process of salvation along with Jesus. Co-mediator, that she also helps mediate between us and God. I think it's 1 Timothy 2:5 that says there's only one mediator between us and God, the man, Christ Jesus, and there's no footnote that says, "And his mom."

So, Catholics make too much of Mary, too much of Mary. I believe it grieves the heart of Mary. I know that Mary, right now, she's in the kingdom of God with her Son who's ruling and reigning. And I believe that when people pray to her or give glory and honor to her, I believe that grieves her,

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because she, right now, is worshiping her Son.

That being said, Protestants tended to make too little of Mary. “Oh, we don’t want to talk about Mary. That’s what the Catholics do.” Well, Mary’s in the Bible, amen? And she is presented, arguably, as the most godly woman, maybe the most godly person in the whole Bible after Jesus. I mean, she is godly from beginning to end.

There are stories of women like Esther, and Ruth, or Rahab that they were not godly women and then they became godly women. The portrait that we have of Mary is she was a godly little girl, and she grew up to be a godly young woman and a godly older woman. There’s no indication of rebellion or unbelief. I mean, she is presented in the most godly, encouraging, exemplary way in the Bible.

What I believe is that Mary is more timely than ever for all women, but especially young women, and particularly single women, because she lives a life of holiness and chastity before marriage and fidelity in marriage. She’s an amazing, amazing woman. I think Martin Luther was on to something when he said, “Mary should not be our object of faith, but rather our example of faith.” That’s my paraphrasing of Martin Luther. She’s not our object of faith, because Jesus is our object of faith, but she’s our example of faith. She was a woman of great faith, and you’ll see that as the story unfolds in Matthew. And I would encourage you to read the additional account in the opening chapters of Luke’s Gospel.

Here’s what she wasn’t doing, ladies. She wasn’t using her single years as an excuse to drink, to date losers, to sleep around, to live with her boyfriend, to rack up credit card debt, and do things that dishonor God. She’s a great example. Instead, she spent her life preparing for a future that she was unaware of. And isn’t it true that things still work like that? You and I, we don’t know what the future holds. Mary did not know what her future held. She was not aware of her appointed position to be the mother of God on the earth until it was time.

So, here is my question for all of us, but particularly for you women, especially you single women. And again, I would say for those single women and those younger women like my own fifteen-year-old daughter, my hope, my prayer, my father’s affection for you is to, by the grace of God, follow in the example of Mary. And if you have sinned and done things you regret, her Son forgives sin, her Son cleanses from sin, her Son will help you to be like her, by the grace of God.

But, here’s my question for you: women, are you preparing today for whatever God may have for you tomorrow? When Mary realizes, “I am going to give birth to Jesus Christ,” it’s not like she started obeying God, started worshiping God at that moment. She had been for her whole life. Every indication is that she has been godly from her youth.

Now, let me say this to all of us, but particularly the ladies: we have no idea what tomorrow holds for you, but prepare yourself today for whatever tomorrow might bring. She was worshiping God, she was studying Scripture, she was obeying the Lord, she was maintaining chastity. And here’s what she

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thought: “I’ll marry Joseph, we’ll be poor, we’ll live in obscurity in a small rural town. I’ll stay home with the kids and fetch water from the well, and he’s going to be a carpenter, working hard to put food on the table. Nobody’s ever going to know about us. We’re nobodies in the middle of nowhere.” She didn’t know, but she prepared herself for whatever the Lord had for her.

Some of you are waiting for the Lord to reveal the future so that you can then be motivated to prepare for it. That’s not how he works. It requires faith. Walk with the Lord, prepare yourself, by the grace of God, to be godly, and then whatever the future holds, you’ll be ready for it, amen? That’s Mary, okay?

## JOSEPH

We’re looking at Jesus’ family. We’re looking at the fact that Jesus comes into a family and he makes us family. That’s his mother, Mary. Let’s look at his father, Joseph. And here’s why I’m doing this. Some of you would say, “Pastor Mark, we’re familiar with the Christmas story.” Let me say to you, many people are somewhat familiar with the Christmas story, but haven’t really investigated. We know bits, and pieces, and details, but I want us to walk through and reconsider. And just as they welcomed Christ into their family, during this season, I want us all to welcome Christ into our family.

And I know some of you don’t know Christ, and you don’t know the biblical story of Christ. You only know a few scant details of the Christmas story. And it’s my great honor and privilege to teach you. And I don’t want to assume that we know things that we don’t, and even if we know them, I want us to be able to articulate them to others, tell our kids, our family, our friends, our neighbors, our coworkers about Jesus Christ and the story of Christmas.

That’s his mother, Mary; here’s his father, Joseph. Matthew 1:19–20. “And her husband Joseph, being a just man.” That means he’s a good man, a godly man, a noble man, a humble man, a Spirit-filled man. He’s a loving man, he’s a kind man, he’s a faithful man. He’s the kind of man that you would want your sons to be like. He’s the kind of man you would want your daughters to marry. That’s Joseph. Men, may you all be just men. By the grace of God, may we all be just men. We don’t know a lot about Joseph, but if that’s all we know, that tells us everything that we need to know.

“Being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.” We’ll unpack that. “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.’”

So, the situation is this: Joseph has worked very hard to prepare himself for marriage, because marriage, according to the Bible, is for men, not boys. This means that he has taken a job. This means that he has moved out of his mother and father’s home. This means that he has taken responsibility for himself. He’s worshiping God, he’s paying his bills, he’s living his life. Even though he’s a young man, he’s a grown man.

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See, there is a myth in our culture. We'll say things like, "When I get older and wiser." Friends, you can get older and more foolish. If you're young and humble, you can be wise. Joseph is a man who has maturity and wisdom. He's not excusing adolescence and immaturity as many young men do. He's not freeloading off his parents, he's not looking for a good time. He's trying to make a good legacy. He's looking for a wife, not just a date. He's looking for a family, not just a pleasure.

This young man has taken upon himself a great responsibility. He now is ready to be married. This means that Mary's family approves. They've looked at him, and gotten to know his character and his work ethic, and "we approve." This means that the congregation of God's people, of which they are a part, has approved. This means that Joseph has presented himself as a worthy man. This is a lot of responsibility and effort, men, is it not?

Let's say he's sixteen, or eighteen, or twenty years of age. Does that not make it all the more amazing? And he's chosen Mary. He's probably known her since they were kids. He may have loved her since he was a little boy. See her in synagogue, see her in town, that's Mary. His heart was inclined toward her. Perhaps one of the great motivations that he had to mature, and to grow up, and to take responsibility was so that he could get as many years with Mary as his wife as he possibly could, which meant that there was incentive for him to take responsibility and to carry himself as a man at a very young age.

And he's done it. He's made that bold, courageous move of asking for her hand in marriage, and receiving her blessing and her parents' blessing. So, now they are legally covenanted together as husband and wife, and there is a date set for their wedding. And everybody knows that their wedding is coming; it's a small town.

Mary's making all the preparations, and sometimes their wedding celebrations could last upwards of a week, and it was feasting, and celebrating, and it was more of an eastern tradition. I mean, you ladies that have gotten married, you know what this looks like. You ladies that are preparing for marriage, you know what this looks like.

It's the most hopeful season of your life, and then Joseph gets the most devastating news: she's pregnant. "Mary? I see her sing to the Lord every Sabbath. She's memorized huge sections of Scripture. I thought she was the godliest girl I'd ever met. I have been praying, and waiting, and striving for years. She's pregnant? I'm still a virgin. I have not laid hands on that woman. We have not yet consummated our covenant. She's pregnant?" And this was two thousand years ago in a very conservative, rural town, where everyone probably was Jewish. That makes it particularly scandalous and devastating.

Now, what's Joseph going to do? Men, what would you do? He decides that he will divorce her quietly. Because they were covenanted together, to cancel the betrothal season and to nullify the forthcoming wedding, it actually required legal action and divorce. Joseph is looking at being

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divorced before he's married.

And so what Joseph decides to do, because he's a godly man, and a humble man, and an honorable man, he doesn't want to be with her, but he doesn't want to destroy her. He doesn't want to be with her, but he doesn't want to shame her. He doesn't want to be with her, but he doesn't want to punish her. You see that, men? He's not getting vengeance. He's not ruining her reputation.

There were provisions in the law, Leviticus 20 and I think it's Deuteronomy 22, that said that even during betrothal, if someone should commit adultery, it was punishable by death. Now, that clause of the law was very rarely enacted, but it did mean that he had the legal right to potentially kill her, and instead what he wants to do is protect her, though he doesn't want to be with her.

Then something amazing happens. Joseph goes to bed, probably staining his pillow with tears. He's a devastated man. And the Bible says that an angel showed up and spoke to him during his dream and told him that what was about to happen with the conception and birth of Jesus was from the Holy Spirit.

And what Joseph receives is miraculous. It's a revelation. An angel comes. Angels are divine beings, created by God. They don't inhabit human bodies, physical bodies. They're spirit beings. They exist for the two functions of messengers and ministers. They speak on God's behalf and they serve on God's behalf.

And so an angel comes to explain to Joseph that the Holy Spirit, that God himself has done a miraculous, supernatural thing, that the laws of nature are in pencil, not pen, that God can show up and do things that otherwise could not be done. Friends, this is why we believe. We believe that God can give sight to the blind, we believe that God can give hearing to the deaf, we believe that God can, if he so chooses, even raise the dead. And we believe that God will do that for all of his people at the end of time forever.

We believe in the miraculous, we believe in the supernatural. And I know some of you would say, "This seems very uncommon and unusual." By definition, that's what a miracle is. That's why we call it a miracle and not a Tuesday. It doesn't happen all the time. It's very unusual. An angel shows up, says that a miracle has occurred, says that Mary is going to give birth to a son, but she has not sinned.

## **GOD'S SCRIPT**

Here's my question for all of us, but particularly for you men. Men, will you love and lead the family God has given you, even if it's not the one you envisioned? This was not the family that Joseph envisioned. This is not the family that Joseph envisioned. His vision of his future: "I'm a virgin, she's a virgin, that means she's not pregnant, we don't need to alter the dress, nobody's whispering during our ceremony, there are no questions about her integrity. We get married, we live a simple life, an obscure life, the middle of nowhere, people don't talk about us."

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Let me say this, men: most of the time, the script you have written for your future and family is different from the script that God will hand you, and you have a decision to make. Will I read the script that he has handed me, or will I abandon this woman and go find another and hand her my script? Men, be very careful the vision you have for your family. Make sure that you are loving, glorifying, honoring, following the Lord, and that if he should hand you a script that is different than the one you have written, that you go with his plan and not yours.

This was not Joseph's plan, because had Joseph been meeting with his life coach and putting together his seven-year plan— "Where do you see yourself in seven years, Joseph?" "Well, I see myself with Mary. She's got a very great reputation and our son is adored, and no one really knows who we are, and we live a quiet, simple, country life."

"Well, Joseph, how about you marry a single mother? How about even though she's godly and sinless insofar as her sexual activity is concerned, everybody's going to think she's a tramp? And your wife's going to have a really bad reputation, which is admittedly hard in a small town, right? And your son, well, they're going to say horrible things about him, and you're going to be the laughing stock of the town because everyone's going to think it's a joke that your wife cheated on you and then told you it was the Lord, and you're gullible enough to believe it and raise somebody else's kid."

And that's what happened. The gospels tell the story that some come to Jesus when he's older and they throw out this phrase: "At least we know who our father is." It's a way of saying, "Your mom has slept with so many men, you don't even know who your dad is." Jesus says a great line. He says, "Your father's the devil," which is a great line. I just—bazinga. That's a good one. That's a good one.

But men, would you agree that this is not the plan that Joseph had envisioned for his life, and his wife, and his family, and his son, but he accepted, as Mary accepted, God's plan for their life. For you single men, don't overlook the single mothers. For you single men, don't take the path of least resistance, take the path of most glory to God. For you single men, don't write a script in pen, make sure it's in pencil.

Will you love and lead the family God has given you, even if it's not the one you envisioned? "Had I known that she would be like this, I would have not signed up for a lifetime. Had I known that the kids would be like this, I would not have signed up for a lifetime. Had I known that they would get sick, or I would get sick, had I known what their extended family would be like, had I known the sins in their past that have haunted us in the present, had I known that they would betray me in this way or fail me in this way, I never would have signed up for a lifetime of this."

And Joseph says, "That's fine. It's going to be hard, but I trust the Lord, and his vision for my family is my vision for my family." And let me say this—let me say this to you men. I feel inclined to the Holy Spirit to press this point home. If God should give some of you men a difficult family, it's not a burden, it's an honor because God has entrusted to you a great responsibility for the woman and

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children that he loves very dearly. And perhaps he didn't give it to another man because he wasn't sure that his daughter would be loved well and that his children would be raised well.

Now, had Joseph taken this as a burden, he would have become embittered against the Lord. "Why such a difficult lot for me?" Instead, he took it as a divine assignment from the Lord, a great honor from the Lord. "Someone needs to love Mary and someone needs to raise God. Sign me up." I want you men to know that sometimes God sends the best men on the toughest missions, and just because God has given you a difficult family does not mean that he has any way burdened you. He has blessed you with a tremendous opportunity. I appreciate that Joseph received it in that way. He doesn't say a lot, he just does a lot. That's Jesus' father, Joseph.

## JESUS

So, then we now have Mary, his mother, and Jesus' father, Joseph. Here is Jesus. Matthew 1:21–23: "She will bear a son." Now, that is echoing all the way back to the third chapter of the Bible. When Adam and Eve, our first parents, sinned, the promise, the prophecy of God was given through the first gospel, the protoevangelion, God declared that through the seed of the woman would come a Son, and he would be a Savior. And so, from sin entering the world, people have been waiting the coming of a son, and here he is.

"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus," which means God saves, "for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet." So, he goes back seven hundred years prior and he quotes Isaiah 7:14. "Behold, the virgin shall conceive." The virgin, that's a young, unmarried, chaste woman, "shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel." We see it on the Christmas cards, we sing it every year. "(which means, God is with us)."

Okay, first of all, who is Jesus? We find out right here. He is Immanuel, God with us. So, I want you to know, Mars Hill, Jesus' life did not begin in the womb of Mary. Jesus is eternally God, he's Creator God, he's without beginning or end. He's God. He's God, and he came down to be with us. He humbled himself, Creator entering into creation, and he came to identify with us, to walk among us, to seek us, to serve us, to save us.

Jesus Christ is Immanuel, God with us. Don't just sing the songs and enjoy the Christmas cards. Embrace the truth. Jesus is God with us, not one of many gods, God with us, the only God. And not only does the Bible declare this, Jesus himself declares this. Friends, Jesus emphatically, clearly, repeatedly, unapologetically, unashamedly declared himself to be God. Don't just reduce Jesus to a good therapist, a life coach, a motivational speaker, or a moral example. Jesus is God, and he's God among us, and throughout his life he kept saying that he was God and the only God.

The result was that they sought to put him to death. And on one occasion they came to Jesus, and they

were seeking to kill him, and he asked this very pregnant question: “Why do you seek to crucify me?” And they said, quote, “Because you, a mere man, claim to be God,” end quote. Why did Jesus die? Because he said he was God, because he kept saying he was God, and when he rose from death, conquering sin and death, that forever proves his claims to be true. Jesus is God. Mars Hill, Jesus is God. That’s the bedrock of all that we believe. That’s who Jesus is.

What did Jesus come to do? This is such a magnificent line. “He,” who? Jesus. There are no other saviors, there’s no other salvation, there’s no other name by which the Bible declares we must be saved. Other religions do not save, other philosophies do not save, other moralities do not save. I know it’s not popular, but it’s true. Jesus alone saves. He saves. He saves.

He saves from what? He saves from sin and death. He saves. Here’s the truth: we all need to be saved. My job is to tell the truth, your job is to make a decision. Jesus talked about hell more than anyone in the Bible. We are all, by nature and choice, sinners. It’s the one truth that explains the whole world and our lives. It’s so helpful, and it shows us the great need for a Savior, for a Savior. We need a Savior. We can’t save ourselves and we can’t save one another. We need somebody to come in and save us. Well, that’s Immanuel, God with us.

God comes down to love his enemies. God comes down to save sinners. It says he will save. This is before Jesus went to the cross, this is before Jesus died in our place for our sins, so it’s promising, it’s foreshadowing, it’s anticipating the death of Jesus in our place for our sins, that God would come and live without sin and that he would go to the cross and he would die for sin, and that he is Immanuel, God with us, that he is God for us, and that he will save his people from their sins.

Let me say this very clearly. If you don’t know Jesus, you are living in the path of the wrath of God. I don’t mind if you have a Christmas tree, send out Christmas cards, enjoy Christmas gifts, and sing Christmas songs, don’t miss Christ in Christmas. If you have not been saved from your sins, you are in grave, eternal, frightful danger. There is a heaven, there is a hell. You are a sinner. Good news, there’s a Savior. And in this season where we give gifts and receive gifts, let me just beg you, give your sin to Jesus and receive the gift of salvation. Have you done that? Will you do that today?

Some of you ask, “Are you trying to convert me?” Absolutely! That’s exactly what I’m trying to do. I want you to meet Jesus. That’s what I want. That’s why we’re here. That’s why they brought you. That’s why they didn’t tell you this was going to happen. And God loves you, and God seeks you, and God knows you, and he’s Immanuel, God with us. And I’ll tell you right now, if this is ringing true in your heart, Jesus is with you. He’s Immanuel, God with you, right now, saying, “Give me your sin, I’ll give you my salvation. How about we make that our Christmas exchange?”

And it says, “He will save his people from their sins.” Not all people are saved. Let me repeat this: just as all roads don’t drive to the same destination, so all paths do not lead to the same salvation. Jesus saves his people from their sins. Are you among Jesus’ people? Are you one of Jesus’ people? Is

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God your Father? Is Jesus your Big Brother? Are we your church family? Has God saved you? Are you saved? If not, today is the day of your salvation. Today is the day where you come to the Lord Jesus Christ.

There's Mary, there's Joseph, everything orbits around Jesus. And this is why, Mars Hill, I don't want you to just see him as a child. God became a man, but he grew up to be a grown man. He's not just the babe who had ten fingers and ten toes counted by his mother, he had ten fingers and ten toes nailed to a cross. He not only had his first breath, he also had his last breath. And he will save his people from their sins. This is why, for us who are Christian, there can be no holiday without him.

## JESUS' FAMILY

Now, looking at Jesus' family. Matthew 1:24–25: “When Joseph woke up from sleep.” I love this. I think we have wrongly defined, in many regards, what a theologian is and does. I think Joseph is a great theologian. And some of you will say, “He doesn't say anything.” Oh, that more theologians were like that. Sometimes, this issue of faith gets so theoretical, so theological, so complicated and nuanced: “And what is Paul's definition of *pistis*, which is faith, versus James' view of the same concept? And how does this fit into Abraham and the example of faith?”

And I like Joseph. Here's what faith looks like for Joseph: “He did.” It doesn't go into an enormous inner dialogue: “And Joseph was considering all of the various words for faith in the constellation of meaning and how it's used in the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, and how it finds itself in the Midrash and the Talmud, and how it's used in secular literature within the ancient Greek civilization of the Roman Empire, and then he did a word study and he read seven books on it, and then he met with a counselor and therapist and he revised his life statement with his coach, and his seven-year plan of—”

Here's what it says: “He did.” Some of you think too much, do too little. Some of you say too much and do too little. Faith is an inward conviction that is demonstrated with an outward action. Now, might I submit to you that what Joseph is being asked to do is not easy, right? Marry the pregnant girl.

Just how many of you would be like, “That's where I tap out, right there. We didn't even need to continue with the punch list of duties.” Have a life in a small town, where your reputation, your wife's reputation, your son's reputation is destroyed. And raise God. Don't blow it, because we don't even know what's going to happen if you do, right? Don't drop him. I mean, there's just—there are a lot of variables here. We're just not sure what the outcome is.

Read it with me. “When Joseph woke from his sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.” Here's what I love about Joseph: he doesn't say a lot, but he does a lot. Some of you are like that. You're like, “You know what? I am not the world's greatest theologian, but if the Lord says

something, I just want to do it.” You’re a great theologian. So, often times, it’s just, “I trust the Lord. If he tells me to do something, that’s what I want to do, and by the grace of God, that’s what I’m going to do.” That’s Joseph, right? Don’t you love that?

Because here’s a guy—here’s what faith looks like for Joseph: toolbox in one hand, lunchbox in the other. “Mary, I’m going to love you and we’re going to raise Jesus. I’m going to go to work now, because we need to eat.” That’s faith. And this dignifies the professions. Let me just say, that as the son of a drywaller, a guy with a lunchbox and a toolbox is as pleasing to the Lord if he walks in obedient faith as a priest or a prophet.

Jesus didn’t come born of a priest or a prophet, but a guy who has a lunchbox in one hand and a toolbox in the other. And for the first thirty years of his life, Jesus goes to work with his dad, lunchbox in one hand, toolbox in the other, and he wasn’t wasting his time. He was worshipping the Lord through his work. All work, when done unto the Lord, is pleasing unto the Lord. It glorifies the Lord, it honors the Lord, and it’s worship. Work becomes worship done unto the Lord. I love Joseph, I love this picture. He doesn’t show up a lot, he doesn’t say a lot, but he does a lot. He does a lot.

“He took his wife.” Can you see it? At this point in the story—you may not know this, but Luke gives us additional information. Mary is four months pregnant at this point in the story. They get married a little while later. I don’t know, is she five or six months along? Here’s what she is: showing. Here’s Joseph . . . getting married.

“He knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.” Why’d he call him Jesus? He was told to. “Call him Jesus.” “Alright.” “What’s his name?” “Jesus.” “How do you know?” “The angels said it. We’re not going to vote.” Simple, humble, obedient, quiet working man.

Now, let me say something theologically, particularly for those of you who are Catholic in your history. How many of you have heard that Mary was always a virgin, never consummated her marriage covenant with Joseph? That comes out of the Second Council of Constantinople. I think it was in 533 AD, they got together and they declared Mary to be *semper virgo*, ever virgin. And even certain Protestant teachers like Luther and Calvin came along and said she was ever virgin, meaning she never consummated her marriage with Joseph.

That’s not true. That’s not true, but that is more of a religious ideology that says that sex is gross, so Mary never could have had a normal marriage with her husband. It’s not gross, it’s a godly, gracious gift when according to the Lord: chastity, marriage, fidelity. And what it says here is, “He knew her not.” It doesn’t say forever, but “until she had given birth to a son.” Meaning after Jesus was born, then they consummated their covenant and they had a normal, loving, intimate marriage.

The Bible says elsewhere that Jesus had mother, brothers, and sisters. Some of you are like, “Where did the other kids show up?” Well, I can tell you what, they weren’t all virgin-born. I can tell you that right now, because the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 is not, “And the virgin shall be with litter.” It says,

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“The virgin shall be with son,” one kid, okay? The other kids, they came in the normal way—normal way. So, Jesus had mother, brothers, and sisters. That means that Mary and Joseph had a normal, loving, intimate, healthy, godly marriage.

“And he called his name Jesus,” which means he saves his people from their sins. Now, let me say this, Mars Hill: this is a book that God wrote, it’s all perfect and true, and when seven hundred years in advance through the prophet Isaiah, God declares a virgin will give birth to a son, his name will be Immanuel, he’s God among us, and then Matthew makes that connection. Matthew is saying, “And here is the fulfillment of prophecy, because only God knows the future, only God declares the future, only God controls the future.”

Mars Hill, you can trust the Word of God. It’s altogether true and it’s all about Jesus. And God knew that he would send his Son born of a virgin, and here it is, all fulfilled, and Jesus is brought into the world. God enters human history through the womb of the humble servant, Mary.

And we do not know a lot of Jesus’ early years. They’re called the lost years. Luke 2:52 tells us that Jesus grew in wisdom, and stature, and favor with men and God; that Jesus Christ was a godly, young child, a godly child, a godly teen, a godly young adult, a godly adult; that Jesus lived without sin; that he honored his mother, he honored his father; he studied the Scriptures.

He was, I’m sure, a very good big brother, amen? Can you imagine that? You’re Jesus’ little brother or little sister, you’re fighting, Mary walks in. “What happened?” Jesus is like, “Well, it wasn’t me.” We know that. We know that. I’m sure it was James’ fault. And so I want you to see that Jesus can relate to children, and children can relate to Jesus. Same with all the other life stages up to adulthood.

And God has identified with us so that we can identify with him. That means little kids can talk to Jesus about their stuff, and teenagers can talk to Jesus about their stuff, and young adults and adults can talk to Jesus about their stuff, and he understands because he’s been there. He’s been there.

## **JESUS IS STILL IMMANUEL, GOD WITH US**

And then Jesus does save his people from their sins. He goes to the cross, and he suffers, and he dies in our place for our sins, and he declares in triumphant victory, “It’s finished.” He breathes his last, and he’s buried in a tomb, and three days later he rises from death. This is what we’re supposed to celebrate on Easter, not some egg-laying bunny, which I’m not even sure how the biology works on that. It’s about Jesus’ resurrection, and so all of human history is about the coming of Jesus: B.C., before Christ; A.D., anno Domini, the year of our Lord. Our big holidays: Christmas is about the birth of Jesus, Easter’s about the resurrection from death of Jesus. It’s all about Jesus.

And ultimately, then, Jesus ascends back into heaven where he’s alive and well, and ruling and

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reigning, and right now Mary is worshiping her Son with the angels. And Jesus knew that when he departed, we could get the impression that we had been an orphaned family, so Jesus says in John 14 before he ascends back into heaven, “I will not leave you as orphans. I’m going to send the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity, and he will lead you and guide you, and he will teach you and convict you, and he will be with you.”

This is where Jesus says one of the final things he says in Matthew 28:20 after he rises from death. He says, “I will be with you always, until the end of the age.” Mars Hill, we are not an orphaned people, we are not an abandoned people. Jesus is still Immanuel, God with us. What that means is if you belong to Jesus and you’re one of his people that he has saved from their sins, Jesus goes home with you, Jesus goes to work with you, Jesus goes to the chemotherapy appointment with you.

It means that when we gather together as God’s people, Jesus is with us. It means that when we gather in Community Groups, Jesus is with us. It means that when we gather in Redemption Groups, Jesus is with us. And it even means when we’re all alone, and we’re suffering, and we’re hurting, and we’re frustrated, Jesus is with us.

And I just want to publicly thank Jesus for always being with us. When we started sixteen years ago in the living room of our home with just Grace and me and a handful of people, Jesus was with us. For sixteen years, as this church has grown by the grace of God, one thing has never changed, and almost everything else has changed. Jesus has always been with us, and this was the most fruitful year we’ve ever had.

In the grace of God, we grew by almost three thousand people. We baptized well over one thousand people. In the grace of God, we’re not just celebrating the birth of Jesus, we now have almost three thousand children under the age of ten, a bunch of other kids that Jesus loves and identifies with too.

This year, we were named the third fastest-growing and twenty-eighth largest church in America. We tend to go into urban centers, we tend to go after singles, we tend to focus on young men. And when the media shows up and they ask, “What’s the secret?” There is no secret. Jesus is with us. Mars Hill, Jesus is with us. He’s still with us.

And I just want to publicly praise God and thank you. By the grace of God, we got to plant four new Mars Hill churches this year, and Jesus is there. He’s there, he’s there. And this is our time of year where we reflect back on what’s happened this year and what we’re asking Jesus for next year, what we believe is his script for our life together as a family. And just as Mary and Joseph welcome Jesus and made room for him, we always want to welcome Jesus into this church family and make room for him.

I would ask you to pray, and care, and give, and serve so that we can hit the next year really strong and finish this year very well. We want to relocate Mars Hill Downtown into a big, epic building in what was previously the least-churched city in America. We want to relocate Mars Hill Everett into a

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permanent home. You can pray for a permanent home for Mars Hill Orange County and also for Mars Hill Federal Way, and in the grace of God, we'll open Mars Hill Tacoma and whatever else Jesus has for us. And so I want you to see that churches are like brothers and sisters, and when the family grows, it's really something to celebrate. And when people ask, "What is it all about?" tell them this: "Jesus is with us. He's never left us, he's never forsaken us. He keeps showing up and he loves us very well." Amen?

Father God, we thank you for sending your only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Lord Jesus, thank you that you are Immanuel, you're God, not just far away, distant, disinterested, God with us, always with us, with each of us, with all of us. Lord Jesus, I pray for those who do not yet know you. Maybe they're religious, or moral, or spiritual, or traditional. They know bits and pieces of the Christmas story, but they don't know the Christ of the story. I pray, Holy Spirit, that you would be with them right now and give them the kind of faith that Joseph and Mary had, the faith to trust and obey. I pray, Lord, that none would hear this message during this great season of giving without giving their sin to Jesus and receiving salvation. Lord Jesus, I pray for us all, that like Mary and Joseph, we would make room in our lives and our family for Jesus, even though his coming is always an inconvenience and makes life more difficult and more wonderful. Lord Jesus, I thank you for always being with this church family and I thank you that you're with us right now. Amen.

## THE HERNANDEZ FAMILY

I'm going to share a testimony with you. It's awesome. We're a big church, fourteen locations, four states, thirty-some services, lots of people, but I want you to see what it looks like when Jesus is with us, and so I want to introduce you to a great family from Mars Hill.

Pastor Dave Bruskas: The Hernandez family, second-generation military family, both Jose and Gena lived in twenty-four different locations already as they've served our country, and the rest of the story is really incredible.

Gena Hernandez: Joey, gentle buddy.

Jose Hernandez: Go get him, mom. This is actually me inside the Aid Station I was working at. Always had to walk around with your weapon, always within arms reach. When we got back it took a long time—every time I woke up, I was reaching for my rifle. One of the times that Gena actually came up from her base to see me. "You will be in my heart and God will be in yours." See, so God's grace when we didn't even recognize him at the time. Being away from family, being away from everybody we pretty much knew, we pretty much had to grow together in our marriage by ourselves. A lot of personal issues, a lot of pride. It just felt like we were more roommates than we were husband and wife. Gena wanted most of my attention. She wanted help



inside the house, raising our daughter, and I was more caught up in fun, and going out, and just basically not being there. We met a lot of people who were guiding us down the wrong path. “Oh, you should leave. Oh, you don’t need this. Oh, you could do better.” Army moved us down to Virginia and the problems just continued, you know? You could change the scenery but the problems still exist. We never got around to talking about them. We were separated for pretty much that whole summer. It felt like if it doesn’t work now, it’s not going to work. We need to just split ways.

Gena Hernandez: Just constant arguing, constant conflict, and I think I just hit a point where I didn’t see any hope left in the situation.

Jose Hernandez: We had been going to counseling through social work. I mean, you name it, we talked to everybody.

Gena Hernandez: We posted a couple of things on Facebook, and an acquaintance of mine at the time actually messaged me on Facebook and kind of very randomly, “Can I pray for you and your husband?” And so, like, right there on Facebook, she types out this prayer and then she mentioned Pastor Mark’s *Real Marriage* series. So, I called him one night a couple days after that and I was like, “You know, I started watching this. I think we should watch it together.”

Jose Hernandez: It was—oof. I, honestly, if I had to be honest about it, I didn’t even think that church was going to be enough to save our marriage. I think I was probably thinking that this was just an excuse. By then, she had already went to Mars Hill Olympia, and she tried to stay in the back, and tried to not get noticed, and of course, she gets noticed. By the time we went, they had already known Gena and my kids. And of course I show up, and one of the first people is Pastor Steve, and he’s like, “Hey Gena. You know, how’s it going? Is this the husband?” You know? I’m just like, “How you doing?” He was like, “Hey Jose, how you doing?” You know? I was like, “I didn’t even tell him my name,” you know? You know, the military has a saying, “Suck it up and drive on,” where Jesus is saying, “You don’t have to suck anything up,” you know? “I love you no matter how bad you are or how good you are,” and that he’ll help us get through everything. Again, it just filled me full of hope. Jesus knows what he’s doing. It saved not only our marriage, but I think he saved us as individuals.

Gena Hernandez: I am, without Jesus, a failure as a wife, a failure as a mom, kind of a failure as a human being, but with Jesus, we’re just graced to be able to do so many great things, I think.

Pastor Dave Bruskas: So, you guys came to Mars Hill, met Jesus, and you got baptized. Tell me what that experience was like.

Gena Hernandez: Short of the birth of our kids, probably the most emotional experience that I've had in my life, really, and probably, I think, the closest moment we've had as husband and wife, truly. He was always a great father, now there aren't words. Seeing him pray with the kids, seeing him counsel the kids and talk the kids through things, instead of being such a strict authoritarian figure, is really just amazing.

Jose Hernandez: We start the day with praying. I wake up, you know, 4:45 every morning, Monday through Friday, and before I leave this house, whether I'm rushing, whether I'm not rushing, we sit together and we pray. I always like to pray over my wife. It seems—you know, some people would say, "Well, that's kind of redundant. You're praying every morning." Well, you know what, it's a new day, new obstacles, and we don't know what to expect, and we just pray for grace. When we started going to Mars Hill and we got involved with the Community Group, it was still—I didn't know who these people were. They seemed nice, you know? Let's put on the smile and see where it goes. And then Gena and I had an argument, and she called our Community Group leader's wife, and, like, just said, "Hey, this is what we're arguing about, you know? I can't take it anymore," and just kind of let it out. And next thing you know, you know, Sean and Ashley are over at our house and this is going on 11 o'clock at night, you know? So, obviously, our next Community Group, that was brought up. "How are you doing?" And again, that was the first time that I felt like I don't have to lie. I can talk about it because now it's our family, our spiritual family.

*One Week Later . . .*

Jose Hernandez: You walk past somebody who's not a Christian and, you know, you ask them, "Hey, how are you doing?" and they don't take you seriously, you know? "Oh, I'm good." When you walk past somebody in Mars Hill or a Christian in general, you know, you get that sense of they care. Even if there's nothing that they can do about it, you know, they'll offer their prayer. I mean, they just—they care. Finding Jesus let us know that, I mean, now you answer to somebody, now you're accountable. Getting put with the church, having a pastor, Community Groups, we better each other by staying together. He died for our sins, that there is a solution, and it's him.

[music]

*Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.*