

GOING DEEPER STUDY NOTES (December 3, 2023)

FOR PERSONAL OR GROUP STUDY

What do you hope for? Some of us hope for lofty things: a radical change in our circumstances, a lottery jackpot, the rebirth of a love or friendship lost, a dream vacation, world peace. Some of us hope to simply make it through the day, a momentary relief from a constant pain, a kind word, a warm meal, a soft bed. What do you hope for? It is tempting to give up hope when all we see is the current situation we are in. It is tempting to give up hope when we believe the lie that we are all alone, that everything depends on us, on our strength, our abilities, our efforts, our intellect and determination.

That first Christmas God's people had every reason to abandon hope. The deck was stacked against them. Rome was in control. Rome exploited them by brute force. Only a limited number had power, comfort, and control. Even they hoped for something that could not be taken from them by the next battle, the next Caesar, the next harvest, the next financial crisis.

The miracle that occurred that first Christmas brought a different message, and a different kind of hope. God's decision to invest Himself personally, and directly, in this world, and more importantly in the people He had created, brought a Hope that was definite, real, guaranteed. Christmas tells us that our future is not uncertain, random, or meaningless.

The immediate circumstances did not change with the arrival of the world's Savior. Rome was still in temporary control. Pain and disease were still present in every life. Poverty and need a constant companion for many. And yet something dramatically changed with that One birth we celebrate at Christmas. When Jesus appeared He brought with Him power above all power, and love beyond all love. At Christmas we sing, "Do you see what I see?" When we see, really see, the miracle of Jesus we find Hope that is not vague or uncertain. We discover we are not alone ... God is with us. We trust that no matter our current circumstance ... God's love and power are ours. We see the pain and trouble we are now in differently. Our troubles are temporary, our future, eternal. Do you see what I see?

Do You See What I See? Hope (Matthew 1:18-25) ESV

¹⁸ Now 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. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel' (which means, God with us). ²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus."

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. What does this passage tell us about: Mary? Joseph? God?
2. What was Joseph told about the child Mary was carrying?
3. How did Joseph respond to the angel's message?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. "Before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit?" What does that mean? Is it important?
5. What does it mean, "he resolved to divorce her quietly"? v.19
6. What does "he will save his people from their sins," mean?
7. What does it mean, "they shall call His name 'Immanuel.'" v. 23

WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO YOU?

8. What do other people you know put their hope in? Share.
9. What is something you hoped for as a child? What do you hope for now? Have your hopes changed? Explain.
10. If you had been Mary or Joseph, what would you have done?
11. How is Christian hope different from other kinds of hope?
12. In what ways are you finding it difficult to place your hope fully in God? Do you believe God is with you, "Immanuel"? Discuss
13. Has Christmas changed your understanding of the world? Has Christmas changed what you put your hope in? Do you live differently because of the hope of Christmas? Discuss

As you spend time praying, remember that prayer is meant to be the most natural part of your day. Prayer is a conversation: talking to God, and listening to God. Reflect on the miracle of Christmas. Ask God to help you trust Him more each day. Ask God to help you live understanding He is with you wherever you go and whatever you do. God is Immanuel, with us. He came at Christmas because He loves you and He loves me.