

Wrexham Methodist Circuit – Advent Reflections 2025

Week four – Joseph’s story



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Bible readings: Isaiah 7: 10 – 16 & Matthew 1: 18 – 25

Reflection

Although it is Luke’s account of the birth of Jesus which we hear read during Christmas, we find here on the fourth Sunday of Advent Matthew’s account of the birth of Jesus. Here rather than Mary, as in Luke, we find Joseph taking centre stage. There is no annunciation to Mary by the angel Gabriel, she is already pregnant and Joseph is considering what to do. Mary and Joseph were engaged or betrothed and the only way that could be broken was through divorce which Joseph is considering. The alternative would be to subject Mary to the punishments the Law prescribed for adultery.

Yet an angel comes to Joseph in a dream to explain what has happened. The point of connection is the angel’s words to both Joseph and Mary, ‘Do not be afraid!’. To not be afraid does not ignore the difficult realities of life – rather the words invite us to know the deep peace of God even in the midst of the shadows that surround us.

Matthew gives us two names for the baby that is to be born, and they both have connections with the Old Testament. He is both Immanuel and Jesus. Immanuel is more a statement than a name. It means ‘God with us’ and refers to Isaiah 7:14; ‘Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.’

Matthew is emphasising a connection with the words of prophecy. The child who was to be a sign has come into the world. The Hebrew people made no images of their God, so Matthew is saying that the God who they dare not represent in any form is to come in human form, to share their life. This is not humankind seeking God in so many different ways, but rather God coming to us in his way and in his time. And this baby will not be a prophet, but ‘God with us’, which is the extraordinary and fundamental claim of Christianity from its very beginning.

The child is to be named Jesus, which means ‘the Lord saves’. It was a common name and has in it the remembrance of God’s saving grace throughout history and particularly in another person with the same name, in its Hebrew form, of Joshua.

Questions around the Bible passages

- Share a story about a time you felt that God was using you and your talents to accomplish something in the world.
- Have you every asked God for a sign? If not, why? If so, did you receive it? How did it change you? (Isa 7:11)
- How does the response of Joseph challenge or inspire your own faith?
- The prophet says the Messiah will be called Emmanuel, “God with us.” How does the name speak to you? (Matt 1:23)
- What does it look like for our churches to embody “God with us” through its witness and service in our troubled world?
- How can you carry the message of Immanuel into the new year?

Questions from ‘Gifted’ – The Methodist Church’s 2025 Advent and Christmas materials

1. Joseph’s response

- Joseph shows kindness, even when he’s confused.
- Can you think of someone who showed you care or love in a hard time? What did it mean to you?

2. Made with love

- What helps you believe that your life – and the lives of others – are a gift from God?

3. Names of Jesus

- Jesus is called “God saves” and “God with us”.
- Which of those names means more to you right now, and why?

Prayer

Gracious God, we thank You for guiding us through this season of Advent—a season of hope, peace, joy, and love. In our waiting, You have reminded us that Your promises are sure. In our doubts, You have shown us signs of Your kingdom breaking in. And in our longing, You have given us the greatest gift: Jesus, Immanuel, God with us. As we step into Christmas, fill our hearts with the hope that Christ brings, the peace that calms our fears, the joy that lifts our spirits, and the love that overflows to others. May we carry the light of Christ into a weary world, trusting that You are with us now and always, until the day when Your kingdom comes in fullness. Through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. **Amen**