

<sup>18</sup> *This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about<sup>[a]</sup>: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet<sup>[e]</sup> did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.*

<sup>20</sup> *But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,<sup>[f]</sup> because he will save his people from their sins."*

<sup>22</sup> *All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: <sup>23</sup> "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"<sup>[g]</sup> (which means "God with us").*

<sup>24</sup> *When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. <sup>25</sup> But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.*

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In addition to COVID-19, do not forget that we are also in the middle of the cold and flu season. That means at some point in time you will likely make a trip to the pharmacy to pick up some medicine to help you with coughing, sneezing, stuffy nose etc.... Which brings me to this guy: A bottle of Nyquil.

The label contains a picture of cherries. Thus, the impression is given that the contents of the bottle, when consumed, will taste like cherries. With all due respect to the Vicks corporation, I do not believe that any of their employees have ever tasted a cherry!

I have a theory as to why the deception. When my children are sick, Nyquil seems to help. On more than one occasion my children have protested, "Dad, not that stuff... it tastes horrible." Can you guess how I respond? "Look, it has cherries in it! How bad can it be?"

Several years ago, I had a discussion with an emergency room physician. He shared his view on treating patients (especially children). He emphasized the need for trust. He said, "If something is going to hurt, I tell the child, 'This is going to hurt'". He continued, "I tell them what I am going to do and why I am doing it so that they can trust me."

I have thought about that conversation a lot.

Our lesson for today is centered around a prophecy. A prophecy is any time that God reveals his truth and the consequences that will follow. God's prophecies are honest, accurate, and bless us.

### I. Honest

Matthew begins our lesson with these words, "This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about." Matthew highlights something. This is not just the birth of Jesus. Jesus is the *Messiah*.

The word *Messiah* is a technical term that is woven throughout the fabric of the Old Testament. The Messiah is God's answer to Adam and Eve when they fall into sin. God declares *war*. The Messiah will crush Satan's head. Satan will painfully bruise the Messiah's heel. Notice that God places no cherries on the label. He tells the truth.

The life and death of Jesus is the clearest image God gives us concerning sin. Scripture says, "*The wages of sin is death*". Do you wonder what that means? Look at Jesus as he moans in agony on the cross. He is executed for sin. Whose sin? Yours!

Thanks be to God; the life and death of Jesus is also the clearest image God gives us concerning his love. Scripture says, "*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son*". What does that mean, "*God loved me and gave his Son for me?*" Look at Jesus as he dies for your sins and blesses you with forgiveness!

God is honest with us. He does not teach us the commandments and then say, "*If you dishonor me or hurt your neighbor... it might sting a little bit!*" God reveals the truth of sin and the consequences that follow. God is honest with us. He reveals the truth of His Son the Messiah, and the consequences of looking to him in faith. "*Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.*" No deceptive cherries on the label. This is "God's honest truth".

## II. Accurate

The prophecies of God are not only honest, but they are also accurate.

Centuries before it would take place, the Old Testament prophets named Bethlehem as the place Jesus would be born. He would be born of a virgin. He would die by crucifixion. The Old Testament contains over 60 specific prophecies about Jesus. Every one of them is fulfilled.

A number of years ago a book was written that calculated the odds of one person in history fulfilling only 8 of the prophecies about the Messiah. The odds of being struck by lightning are 1 in 10,000. The odds of one person fulfilling 8 messianic prophecies is 1 in  $1 \times 10^{17}$ . (That is a 1 with 17 zeros behind it!)

There is a reason for all this. When God sends His Son, The Messiah, into the world, he makes him clearly distinguishable and certain. Look at Jesus! In the words of Matthew, "*God is with us!*"

## III. A Blessing

Finally, the prophecies of God are a blessing to us.

I have lost track of that emergency room physician. I am not sure what city or hospital he works in anymore. I do know that if I find myself in an emergency and I look up and see his face, I can trust him. If something is going to hurt, he will tell me. If something is bad for me, he will be honest. Most importantly, he is there to be a blessing to me.

Sometimes people have referred to churches as hospitals... "*places where sick people come to find healing*". If that is true, you can be confident of this: "*God is with us*". Matthew begins his Gospel with that promise to Mary and Joseph. Matthew closes his Gospel with a similar promise of Jesus. "*Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*" He will be honest with you about sin and grace. He will accurately lead you to salvation. He will forever be with you to bless you. No cherries needed. Amen.