

Date of sermon: 12/5/2020  
Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke  
Bible passage or verse: Matthew 1:18-25  
Title of sermon: **The Christmas Plunge**  
Series: Come Close - #1

**Matthew 1:18-25 - NIV:**

**18** This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: 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. commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. **25** But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

This is not a series on social defiance. That's not my heart -- at all. I very much support spreading us out and honoring the distance, and seeing the team spread out. I'm all over that. But when I think about God, He's not into social distancing either. In fact, He takes it to a radical, almost absurd position in that He comes close. He comes really close. And so, we're going to look at the Book of Matthew, this series, this season, not to counter the viral message, but to counter where sometimes our spirits can go when the enemy can seep in, and we can allow these walls that are being built to become a lifestyle. Where we begin to think that people are unsafe. And we place our safety above living significant lives. A lot of people say, "Well, stay safe! Stay safe!" Really? I wonder if that was a mantra of Jesus as He was going to the cross. I wonder if that was a mantra of the early church when they walked through two epidemics, 165, 230 something, where a third of all Rome was killed in every one of the epidemics. Was that their mantra? No. Come close. Because when you come close, you touch people. Just like God touched us.

If you would, turn in your Bibles to the Book of Matthew. Matthew chapter one is where we are going to be today. In 1978 there was a seven-year-old young man by the name of Martin Cherian. He was seven, and he was living in Canada at the time. And he slipped off the wharf and fell into the Prairie River in Canada. Where he slipped in off of the wharf, if you go upstream from where Martin fell into the river, there was a factory in 1978 that was spewing all kinds of sludge into the river, and there were dozens of people that came that were called that witnessed Martin slipping off of the pier. But no one jumped in to get him. Why? Well, they said that the water had raw sewage in it. They said that the water was putrid. They said that it was disgusting. And so, Martin died in a river of sludge. It's true, if you were going to get into that river, it would have made the Willamette River look like the purest thing you've ever seen. But they chose not to. How different it is. The record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham, who came to a putrid place filled with sin, sludge as thick as you could imagine you could walk on it. What does it teach us as we look at this passage? Well, the start of it is a weird text -- it's a lineage. It's genealogy. No one preaches genealogy. It's crazy, you stay away from this. You don't even read this stuff when you're reading through the Bible. And you're going through -- I know people, man, that skim over this genealogy and go, "Abraham, David -- verse 18 -- this is how the birth of Jesus." That's how you read through the Bible. I know! It's okay, don't be embarrassed! We're going to preach the genealogy tonight. We are. Why? Because there's gold in this. What does it teach us? It teaches us that God signs up for everything. He does. He signs up for everything. Not only the good stuff, but the bad stuff. What's the good stuff? Well, it's the prophecy. The record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Go down with me to verse 17 -- "Thus were the fourteen generations in all of Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to Christ." Now, why does Matthew tell us this? Because He wants you to trust Jesus. He wants you to trust Jesus! There were 55, over 55 prophecies, specifically about Christ fulfilling the messiah. There were 12 specific prophecies just about His birth and His death.

There were prophecies about His life. Where He was going to come from. That He would be the offspring of David. That He would be a nation blessed through Abraham's lineage. This is not just a genealogy. It's not. It's not a list of names. It's God telling you -- trust Him. It's God telling you -- "I want to validate." You know, one of the things that God always did with His prophets, and it's a good thing -- we don't do it a lot today. I had somebody come in -- oh, I don't know, six, seven months ago and give me all these prophecies. I think I told you about those. I said, are we going to hold 'em, and I wouldn't even put any stones in my pocket. But the reality is, I'm waiting for that person to come back through. Why? Because -- a number of the prophecies that this person gave to me haven't come true! Now -- just not even being rude -- would you trust this person if she came and gave you more prophecies? No! You wouldn't. Why? Because when you give prophecies that don't come true, you lose credibility! That's why God said, "I've signed up for everything." What is it? "To validate my son." You can trust Him. You can trust Jesus, because there were 55 separate prophecies about His life, there were 11 about His birth and death. They were about the nation that He would come from, the people that He would come from, the lineage that He would come from. Ah, but you can also trust Him because God signs up when we make a mess of things.

I'm not candidly huge into family history. The fact that I'm alive -- I'm ready to move on. I understand, I had a grandfather from Germany. Yup. So, there's possibility that Hitler's in my lineage. I understand that, you know, you can go back, and I mean -- but the bottom line is, lineage is good, but for a Jew -- I'm sorry, but genealogy and lineage was everything. Just was! It had to do with family name. It had to do with your place in life. It had to do with promises. And so, when you look at a lineage, there's a couple things that you're going to see. And if you were a Jew, it would just slap you in the face. Number one is that Jesus didn't come from a pure line of Jews. Well, if you're really proud of your lineage, you're not going to put that down. And by the way, this is not a full lineage of the genealogy of Jesus Christ. It's not a lie, it's just incomplete. So, in other words, the ones selected were there to make a point, is what Matthew's telling you. He didn't put every person in the lineage and genealogy of Jesus -- he put the ones he wanted you to, like, "WHOA, are you kidding me?!" Oh, ones like Rahab. Huh? You're gonna put a prostitute in your family tree? And you want to be a king, and you want to be trusted, and you want to be honored, and you're gonna be our Savior? Bad selection, Jesus. Oh, Ruth. Yup. Oh, she was noble. But Tamar? Ha! You don't put Tamar in your lineage! I mean, it would be like going, "Hey, did you know that Ted Bundy is in my family tree? Woo hoo! I've got a mass murderer!" Makes you wanna just come over to my house and have dinner, doesn't it? Good night! Jesus, what were you doing? Clean your name up a little bit! No. Jesus understands when He came to earth, He was jumping into a raw sewage treatment center. Yes, there's Tamar and there's Rahab and there's Ruth, and there's Uriah's wife. Huh? You gotta put adultery in your family tree? Yes. Why? Because the folks right here sitting here tonight, those watching online -- your family tree looks like this and some of you look like this. Some of you are Tamar, and some of you are Rahab. And some of you are Uriah's wife. And you might mistakenly think that Jesus came only for really clean people.

No, He came into, jumped in, to the raw sewage pit of your life, and He wants you to understand that the mess that you might have made doesn't offend Him. It doesn't put you away from Him. You don't become untouchable to Him. When Jesus is telling you, "This is my genealogy" -- He puts people in it just like you and me. His family tree wasn't pure. It had some unquestionable misfits, just like us. And God signs up for it, not just to love them, but to save them. To save them. Look at verse 21. This is such a great passage. Verse 21 says, "She will give birth to a son. And you are to give him the name Jesus because" -- here's the line -- "he will save his people." What did God sign up for? To save us. So much so that He calls us his. How unbelievable that God would call you His own. That He would cherish you, that He would love you, that He would identify with you, that He would consider you family. It's like Pastor Jeff said -- one of the best things in the world about being a part of a church is taking communion. Being a family. This is us! This is what Jesus is saying. "You are mine." And I've come to save you. To do that, verse 23, tells us that He's going to be Emmanuel. He's going to be Emmanuel. He's going to come and be God with us.

God's gonna come close. It's the only way that He can save you. God can't save you from a distance. He can't send a messenger. He couldn't rally up a troop of really good angels and say, "Hey, you guys go down and rescue them misfits and bring them all back up to Heaven!" No. He comes close. He jumps into the sewage pit. While we're all slimed up and sick and drowning, and the world watches, God says, "I'm going in." Decent people wouldn't do that. They might hire somebody -- "Hey, you know how to swim? Good, I'll pay you a thousand bucks to go save that kid!" "Hey! You're a police officer! That's your duty -- go save that kid!" "Hey -- you're a firefighter! That's your job! You go save that person!" Decent people might sit on their way and call somebody, but rarely are they ever gonna jump in. And on that day, Martin -- no one jumped in. That's not true of God. That's not true of God at all. He looked at the pit that you were in, and He goes, "I'm coming after you. I'm gonna save you."

I remember one time being on a trip with Tyler, and we were in another country, and we were driving along, it was out, and it was just muddy as all get out, and it was raining, and it was just a mess. And we were passing somebody on a road that was really bearably passible for one automobile, and when we went past, our driver -- I think our rig was bigger -- and he took the center of that road, and that other poor individual went HUMP - right into the ditch. And it just buried that car in the ditch. We were stopped. And Tyler and I, we were like -- "Man, let's go help that guy!" We were jumping out, and this lady in the front of the automobile, she was furious! She turned around and goes, "You get back in here!" And Tyler was, like, "Dad, do I listen to you or her?" And I said, "Well, look at her fingernails. How scary are they?" She was furious that we wanted to get dirty. Furious that we were going to delay her trip. But the fact is, those people were never gonna get that car out of that place alone. And when God looked at you, He was more than willing to what? Offset the beauty of Heaven. He was more than willing to relinquish the peace of the triune relationship of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and He said, "We are going after them." God signs up for everything. And you ask the question, "So, what do I do with this?" You accept it. You don't prove it, you don't try and clean yourself up, you don't sit there and say, "Whoa, whoa, wait up, God -- I gotta get out of this slime pit because I've made a mess of my life." You can't do that -- you accept it. You accept how much the Father loves you even when you were a sinner.

Oh, my friends -- even today, when you sin, He puts His arms around you and says, "I'm gonna love you to wholeness; I'm gonna love you to cleansing; I'm gonna love you to healing." The Father jumps in. But ah, what else do you do with it? You imitate Him. You see, the story doesn't stop. It doesn't stop with the lineage. It goes to a crazy place. This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. His mother, Mary, somewhere in the vicinity of 16, 17, 18 years of age, was pledged to be married to Joseph. But before they came together, the unexplainable happened. She was found to be with a child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph was shocked, broken. Tragically broken that his wife would lie. He was a righteous man, and he knew that he had never slept with her. And so, Joseph was going to do something that no other man would have done. Every other man had a right to her dowry, and every other man had a right to the expenses, and every other man would have been protecting his own name -- and would have divorced her publicly so that everyone knows he wasn't the father of the child! So, he was going to divorce her.

What does God invite us to do? What did He invite Joseph to do? Sign up for everything. That includes, "I want you to stay engaged when you face the unplanned and the unexplained aspects of life. Yup, Joseph. Don't leave." He was struggling. I would've struggled. I mean, imagine trying to put all this together. You're dealing with the fact that your wife is pregnant, and in his mind, she's absolutely lying. That's the only conclusion that you can come to. I mean, not too many people, including myself, would think, "Oh! I know -- you probably got impregnated by the Holy Spirit, correct? Wow! Why didn't I think of that!" Of course not. The poor guy went home that night and turned and turned, didn't sleep a wink trying to figure out who he was gonna beat up the next day. He was a carpenter. Who was gonna come on the other end of his hammer? Why? Because she lied and she lied with somebody else. And what did God say to him? "Stay put." "Are you absurd,

God?" "Yes." Stay engaged when you face the unplanned and the unexpected aspects of life. He honored Mary. But not just honored Mary. He stayed with her when the Lord visited him. The Scripture tells us, "After he'd 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.'" Now, some of you might look at that and go, "Wow! What a relief!" Oh, really? How much faith does that take? How much faith does it take to follow God in the unexplained moments of your life today? It takes a lot for me. How much faith does it take to engage in something when it doesn't have a guarantee of a future? How much faith does it take to trust God that what He is going to give you is not going to crush you and ruin you? How much faith does it take to go to your mom and dad, who are pleading with you, "Walk out!" and tell them, "I'm taking her home." How much faith does it take to go tell mom and dad when you're 16 years of age, if it's today, and it's not the Holy Spirit, you know who you slept with, and it was wrong, and yet, you're pregnant. How much faith does it take if you're a young man? And you tell her -- "It's unplanned. It's not unexplained, we know. But I'm not going to abandon this child."

God invites us to do exactly what He did -- stay engaged. And love others through the shame and the confusion of their story. You see, I think Joseph and Mary felt the shame, the public shame of trying to explain to everyone. I don't think going to the grocery store was an easy thing for Joseph. In fact, I would argue, I don't think the story ever went away. I think Joseph lived with it all of his life. I think people used words that I won't repeat to describe Jesus. And he stayed. And he loved his wife through it. Not only loved her, but he was honorable to her -- Joseph, son of David, you stay with them. Why? Because she's gonna give birth to a son who's going to save His people. Imagine trying to put that all together as an 18-year-old young man. Imagine trying to live an honorable and a righteous life. Imagine trying to run a business when people don't want to hire you anymore because, well, you have a story. No, God invites Joseph, "I want you to love others through the shame and the confusion of their story." And his willingness to publicly love her, and to take her home, I think is one of the most courageous moments of the Bible. I mean, in some ways I think it's probably second only to Jesus Christ, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross. But here's a man who said, for the shame of his entire adult life and his wife, and his son, he took her home, and he said, "I will remain faithful." Why? Because that's what God did. God invites us to sign up for everything, and to have courage in this tension-filled life. Look at verse 24 -- he took her home. When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him, and he took Mary home as his wife, but he had no union with her until she gave birth. He continued to be this unbelievable righteous man. He went to the store. He kept doing his business. How do we know that? He taught his son his business. He took him to the temple, even though probably at the temple there were people who may not have even wanted to bless and celebrate Jesus's bar mitzvah. Why? Because we know how it started. Oh, there were times that Joseph went down to the gate and probably a few times guys asked, "Have you ever figured out who the real father is?" Live with that all of your life. Oh, but he had courage. Why? Because he took her home. He was willing to be seen with her publicly. He was willing to honor her and to cherish her. He was willing to allow her to take his name. And she was willing to take his. He chose to love even though the stories every week mocked him.

What about you? Stay safe. Keep your reputation clean. Avoid shady people. What if they're in your family? What if the deeds of their life are embarrassing? What if their behavior is not becoming? How did he do it? I think he trusted God through it. I think he so trusted God and so took the word of God seriously that came to him that night that he said, "No matter what is said, no matter what happens, I know the truth, I know about the angel, I know what he said -- and the truth is going to be the one thing that steadies my heart. The truth is going to be the one thing that navigates my life. The truth is going to be the one thing that shapes the way I love people." What

does God do? He invites you. He does. And as the Father has come to us, He says, "I want you to do this to other people -- come close."

Some of us tonight -- well, we can identify with Rahab. We can identify with Uriah. We've lived that story. Oh, probably not too many of us in this room are prostitutes -- but you've got skeletons in your closet. And can you accept the reality that God jumped in to the sewer pit for you, and He loved you that much, and He didn't say "Clean yourself up," He said, "I will purify you." But a lot of us here are probably pretty clean, and you know what, we don't have a shady background, and we don't have a record, and we're pretty good. But -- do we have the love of Joseph? Have we accepted the call of God to come close to a dirty world? Let me give you a couple of tests that might just cause you to think. When you hear about a sin in another person's life, does it break your heart, or do you find yourself quickly calling somebody else to fill them in on the dirt of what happened? Do you make sure that other people know what someone did? Or do you weep the tragedy that they bought the lie of temptation and sin? Here's another one -- do you move towards messes, or do you stay away from them? After all, you have to protect your reputation. Do you willingly allow your life, your name, your reputation, your money, to come alongside of people who may have kind of a shady background, or do you -- oh, nope. Sleep in the bed that you made. Is it your mantra today to stay safe, or is your mantra today, live well?

There's a book called, *The Rise of Christianity*, written by a sociologist Rodney Stark. I recommend it. I have a number of times. I will at least 75 more times before I retire. That's a long way away, 'til I retire. He studies the first 300 years of the Christian life through the plagues and through the diseases when one-third of Rome was killed twice. And he identifies that one of the things that distinguished Christianity in the first 300 years was that they moved inversely, opposite of culture. What did he see? When they fled from the city when the plagues came, Christians moved in. Why? Because they understand -- that's what God does. He comes close. God never bought off on the idea, "stay safe." That's not His mantra! His is "Live well." "Love well." As the Father has come to me. I'll never cross a person's personal space. I will never knowingly cross all of the things of separation today. I think we need to respect them. The question is -- in your heart, has it become a lifestyle? Has it become a lifestyle for you? Have you enjoyed the separation? Have you cherished it? Have you made it a lifestyle? Because, my friends, as the Father has come to us, so like Joseph, we are to come close to others, even the ones with a story that is unexplained. A story that maybe won't play well. It just happens to be the story of their life. As the Father has come to you, so you and I are to come close to them. Let's pray.

*God, thank you for the joy and the privilege of being the body of Christ in these really challenging days -- they are. They're hard on people. Would you teach us how to come close even when we can't. Would you teach us how to love when people need distance. Would you teach us how to invest just the way you invested in us. Thank you for coming close, for changing us forever. And thank you for sending the church into the city to live the same way. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.*

God bless you. So good to see you! See you again next week.

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