



Series: Advent: A Thrill of Hope
Date: December 5th, 2021
Speaker: Spence Shelton, Lead Pastor
Text: Matthew 1:18-25
Title: When God Interrupts Your Life

Grand Opening of Mercy Northeast Today! (*Pastor Spence preached in-person at Northeast and was livestreamed to Providence Road*)

Good morning, Mercy Church! Hey, I want to say good morning to our Providence Road campus. My family attends there at Providence Road and we love you guys. But we wanted to be here this week to celebrate the grand opening of our Mercy Northeast campus. People have been praying for this day for 5 years. I'm SO encouraged by it.

Our vision as a church is to see a gospel awakening in Charlotte that is carried to the ends of the earth. That's been our vision since day one when we launched Mercy Church six years ago in the Levine Senior Center in Matthews. Today represents a significant step the Lord is allowing us to take in seeing that vision become a reality. We believe that **a step towards awakening will come when churches are not JUST adding people but reproducing themselves in communities** so that there is a healthy gospel-centered church within ten minutes of everyone. So, we are about gospel multiplication here at Mercy.

That happens a couple of ways for us. Sometimes it is **training up and sending out a church planter** to start a new local church. In fact, that's the church we are trying to become. One that is built for church planting. I believe in it like crazy. Not surprising, after all I planted this church a few years ago. That's why well over 10% of our tithes and offerings go back out the door to church planting efforts here in Charlotte and around the world. It's why we supported two of our own who went to plant a church here in Charlotte this past summer, and why next summer we are sending one of our best – Allan Warihiu – to plant a church in his home city of Nairobi, Kenya. Because we believe in church planting! That's why 1/3 of EVERYTHING you give during advent is going to international missions. Advent Challenge: let's give financially to the mission of God through the local church. If you've never given, I hope you will pray and join us in that! Do it online or here.

Another strategy that we are trying out to help Mercy become a multiplying church is **opening Mercy Northeast as a campus of Mercy Church**. We are now one church that gathers for worship in two locations in our city. This concept isn't new to us, but I want you to hear the how and why for us. Our two campuses (Northeast, Providence Road, and a 3rd we intend to launch in Union County) represent three areas where many Mercy members live and work and have community. They've been driving 40+ minutes to church which may be ok for them



but makes it hard to invite their neighbors. By planting a campus of our church where our people already are, they can invite much easier.

We also believe this helps us stay relatively small enough as a church to know and care for one another. The bigger you're gathering, the harder it is to know one another. So, this is how we can continue to reach people and at the same time still feel and function like a church family. Starting Point is happening right after the service so that we can talk about that. It's a short orientation to our church that our pastors and staff lead so stick around for that!

We also believe this strategy creates ministry **opportunities for future church planters**. If Mercy is going to plant churches, we gotta create a training culture and this helps us multiply those kinds of roles. In fact, I am even trying to see **my role** through those lenses. I preach about 60% of the time here. I'm the lead pastor and responsible for the teaching ministry of Mercy Church. I believe the pulpit drives the church, so our two campuses are going to sit under the same lead pastor teaching. We are leveraging video streaming so I can preach live to our church as we gather in two locations. My family is at Providence Road so that's where I'll be most of that 60%. And then, starting in January a good portion of that other 40% of the time will be our pastors and pastors in training here at Mercy. By having two campuses we have two opportunities

for others to preach. Which helps us hear God's word from multiple voices. So, this isn't a one man show and helps us train future lead pastors. I could go into how this is an efficient and effective way to allocate resources, but I've been talking on this way too long now.

So, with ALL of that said, **we are trying it out**. It's good for the church to be courageous and creative to keep pushing the mission forward. But we gotta also be humble. It's God's church and God's mission. And we are trying to play our part to accomplish his mission. We are going all in, but we'll see how it goes.

OK on to the Bible

Let's get rolling into our passage for today. Turn in your Bible to Matthew chapter 1. We'll be in verse 18 - the story of the coming of Christ is an incredibly powerful story drenched in hope. In fact, our whole theme around advent this year is *A Thrill of Hope*. It comes from the line in the song, "O Holy Night." It's one of my favorite Christmas hymns because it is so powerful in arrangement and the theology is so rich. And that line – "a thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn."

The weary world. I feel like the most common answer to, "How are you?" recently has been, "I'm just tired." But it's not good tired. Like after a workout. That's good tired. I'm talking



about soul tired. When a normal day makes your shoulders slump, and you feel like you gotta power through, but you know even when you go to sleep that tomorrow is coming with more of the same. That's **WEARINESS**.

And the hope of Christmas is that it's not just another day dawning. But a new day. A new and glorious day. One we can REJOICE in. One that allows you the possibility of hoping again. Hope is tricky right. It's only a thrill of hope if we let ourselves hope. Some of you have been burned by hope (waiting for healing, waiting for marriage, waiting for a child). So now you are waiting for the disappointment. You don't want to hope because hope disappointed is more painful than never hoping. Never hope, never get disappointed.

And to that weary soul comes the announcement of a new and glorious morn. Christ bursts through the darkness of sin carrying with him adoption papers saying you have a father who has won the victory over your sin and suffering, and he has made an ETERNAL home for you with him. Where there is NO weariness. And my hope that I will be with Him in that day, gives me hope that he is with me in this day. His power to defeat sin. His strength to carry me in suffering. That HOPE unlocks the power of God in our lives. That hope is what we are making our home in this advent season.

18 The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way: After his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, it was discovered before they came together that she was pregnant from the Holy Spirit.

Our author Matthew is ready now, after 17 verses of genealogies, to talk about the arrival of Jesus. Last week Joseph Anderson did a great job preaching through the genealogy of Jesus. A passage that looks like a boring roll call at first but the more you study it the more you realize it is an incredibly rich summary of thousands of years of the faithfulness of God. And that's big coming into today. We need to have the proven faithfulness of God, that incredible track record, fresh on our minds as we read verse 18 because verse 18 is a VERY, VERY *bizarre* sentence. God interrupts Joseph's life. In fact, that's the title of today's sermon is: **When God Interrupts Your Life**.

I preached this text with that sermon title in December of 2019. And I'm bringing the same theme back to us today because three months after I preached it God interrupted all our lives. And I want to see if we've learned anything from the Lord's interruption. I know I have. So, the sermon title is the same, but the message has been refined by the fire of the past 2 years.



Matthew says, ok, this is how the savior of the world came. His mom was engaged to his dad. Everything is well and good so far. Joseph is a young aspiring carpenter. Gonna own his own business one day & have a family.

He's from the line of David which is a big deal to his people. It's the name recognition of a Kennedy or a Kardashian. And He's found a good girl from a good family & He put a ring on it. And engagement was WAY more official in their day than in ours. It was called the betrothal period where you were in effect married. Verse 19 is going to refer to Joseph as Mary's husband. Their lives are being joined together socially, financially, and the last step would be joining together physically after the marriage ceremony. This engagement was so official that to break it off you would have to go through divorce proceedings.

Well, before it was possible for Mary to be pregnant...IT WAS DISCOVERED that she was pregnant. So immediately all the people who discovered this pregnancy would assume that something has gone wrong. Mary & Joseph are supposed to be virgins. But a virgin can't be pregnant. So, somebody must have violated God's command not to have sex outside of marriage. And that's a big deal. But then Matthew adds that it was discovered she was pregnant BY THE HOLY SPIRIT! What?

19 So her husband Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly.

Joseph assessed the situation and decided that his fiancé being pregnant and the kid not being his...was not something he was trying to get into. Told my kids what I was preaching on at dinner table & my 9-year-old daughter said, "I bet joseph was like sheeeesh."

And clearly, he wasn't convinced by the Holy Spirit explanation. Which makes some sense when you think about the time this is all taking place. The last account of God doing anything among his people was 400 years earlier when he scattered them around the Mediterranean because of their disobedience to him. They had been oppressed by the Persian empire. Most of their land had been taken with only Jerusalem and a few surrounding areas left. That was 400 years ago! America is only 250 years old. Think of how many generations had felt silence from God. I say that to help you zoom out a bit from your moment. **Maybe you've been waiting on God. And you need to know that God can keep HIS promises without keeping YOUR timeline.** God, I need this right now! God this guy I'm dating is the one. God's like...no he isn't. Everybody else can see it but you.

And now Mary you are saying that after 400 years God has finally done something and what he did... was he made you pregnant? Joseph doesn't believe it. But he doesn't want to



embarrass her... And He's got to be disappointed & devastated by this. He's seeing a future crumble. Talk about hope disappointed. Think about the life he had planned. God is interrupting it.

he knows that's going to come anyway later...so he decides to divorce her secretly. THAT IS JOSEPH WALKING IN THE WISDOM OF THE DAY.

- This is him being a righteous man. Man of faith.

20 But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."

In this dream...the angel is confirming Mary's story to Joseph, and he uses Joseph's lineage to connect this to the bigger plan of God. Joseph something bigger than you and YOUR plan is going on here. This is about me and my plan for my people. So, I need you to remember you are a son of David. God has always been with you and had a plan for you. So, I'm going to tell you the same thing I've told your bloodline time and again- don't be afraid. I'm doing something bigger than you.

- I told Abraham don't be afraid. You are going to have a child. And he laughed! But then he saw me provide
- I told Isaac don't flee to Egypt during the famine. Don't be afraid. I will provide water! And Isaac got scared but trusted.

- I told Jacob I will never leave you. He even wrestled with me once. I let him win because I'm a good dad but then I told him...DON'T BE AFRAID of your older brother! I'm doing something!
- SON of David – I'm doing something! Don't be afraid. My promises are the most certain thing in the world!
- And I draw this out to remind you sons & daughters in Christ– you can trust him. He's doing something.

21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

In fact, Joseph I'm going to go ahead and tell you what to name him. Name him Jesus. That's the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua which means "Yahweh saves." And this will be the one that saves his people...not from the romans or some other nation state...no he will save them from their sins. In other words, Joseph...he's the one. He's the one who will once and for all reconcile God's people back to God himself!

Then our author Matthew hits the Pause button on this moment and provides a little authorial aside to help us understand why this matters so much.

22 Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet:



23 See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel, which is translated “God is with us.”¹

He’s quoting Isaiah right here. When he repeats Isaiah saying the virgin will give birth to a son and he will be called Immanuel or “God with us” he’s not giving us Jesus’ middle name. Jesus didn’t have a birth announcement that said welcome to the world “Jesus Immanuel Christ.” Jesus was his first name. Both Immanuel and Christ were titles. Explaining who he was. In this case: Immanuel “God with us” is telling us about his very nature.

Matthew is trying to open our eyes to a staggering claim that has been central to the Christian faith for as long as it’s been around. There is a holy and divine mystery being put into words here that we must see. I want to try and show you what Matthew wants us to see about who Jesus is and then we’ll unpause to finish the narrative & talk about what we do when God interrupts our lives. Now listen the people I am most concerned about missing what is happening are long-time church goers. Because there is a chance you’ve just passively accepted who Jesus is instead of actively considered it. And a

¹ 14 Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel. -- Isaiah 7:14

faith you passively accept is twig-like faith. You can’t build on it. You need 4x4 faith. The kind that can weather the storm. L

Jesus is fully human

- You must see Jesus as human.
- Luke 2 says he *grew* in wisdom. Mentally he learned just like children learn. He wasn’t 8 months old saying substitutionary atonement like boss baby or something. According to Philippians 2 he chose to set that aside and grow up.
- The reason it matters is because Jesus’ purpose was to be a substitution for us. My kids are playing basketball right now. Only a player on the team can sub in. A dog can’t run in and play. That’s not a member of the team. Jesus became a member of the team so he could sub in for us. But instead of a game, he substituted himself as the one who takes our punishment for us. That’s why he had to be human. But Matthew wants us to see something else too.

Jesus is fully God -The **son** will be called **God with us**.

- He has the power to cure diseases, he has command over nature, even power over death



- IF we believe the Jesus of Matthew 1 is the God of Genesis 1, then why would it be hard to believe anything else Jesus did? (**Connect to gen 1**)
 - Is it hard to believe he walked on water if he is the one who created water?
 - Is it hard to believe he fed 5000 if he is the one who created stomachs?

Right here at this point in the gospel...THIS is where you decide yes or no to Christianity. Christmas isn't about quaint traditions & some religious sprinkles on top. It's about God breaking into human existence on a rescue mission to save his creation from their sin. ****PAUSE HERE****

See he had to be fully God because only God could be perfect. if Jesus was only human, he would have been a sinner just like us. And a sinner could not be a sacrifice for another sinner. Because the sinner must die for his or her own sins. Only a SIN-LESS person could be a true payment for another sinner.

- It's like if I get a coffee stain on my shirt and say they can, I borrow your shirt? Well, if your shirt is stained, it's not gonna do me any good. Gotta find somebody with a clean shirt. Sin has stained all of us. Only God who is perfect can extend his perfection to us. And

because he is infinite, he has limitless stainless shirts to give to all.

Jesus is God's promise fulfilled.

That's why Matthew quotes so many prophecies. Each time he does he's saying Jesus is 'The Christ' the anointed one. Matthew's whole Gospel is a giant announcement that Jesus is the one history has been waiting on!!

- Jesus is the child of Eve who would crush the serpent's head.²
- Jesus is the offspring of Abraham & Isaac that will be a blessing to the whole world³
- Jesus is Abraham's lamb of God offered as a sacrifice for the sins of the world⁴
- Jesus is Jacob's ladder making a way for us to ascend into heaven to be with the father⁵
- Jesus is the "I AM" Moses met at the burning bush⁶
- Jesus is the final Passover lamb sacrificed to protect God's people from death.⁷
- Jesus is Moses' bronze serpent lifted on the pole So that all who look at him will be spared from the death their rebellion earned them.⁸

² Genesis 3.15; Galatians 4.4-5; Matt 1.18; Hebrews 2.14; 1 John 3.8

³ Abraham - Genesis 12.3,7; Galatians 3.8, 16; Acts 3.25-26 | Isaac – Genesis 17.19; Genesis 22.18; Romans 9.7

⁴ Genesis 22.8; John 1.29

⁵ Genesis 28.12; John 1.51

⁶ Exodus 3.13-15; John 4.26; John 8.58

⁷ Exodus 12; 1 Corinthians 5.7

⁸ Numbers 21.9; John 3.14-18, 12.32



- Jesus is the commander of the Lord's army Joshua followed into the battle of Jericho.⁹
- Jesus is the king God promised would sit on David's throne forever.¹⁰
- Jesus is the true Samson who had strength & was betrayed by his people, yet his story ends not in climactic death but in glorious resurrection!

I'M NOT DONE YET.

- Jesus is the faithful one the Psalmist said would not stay in the grave.¹¹
- Jesus is the one in Psalm 22 forsaken by God for the sins of others who cries out it is finished.¹²
- Jesus is the one the psalmist said was sitting at the right hand of the father.¹³
- Jesus is Isaiah's Immanuel
- Jesus is Isaiah's wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, and prince of peace.¹⁴

- Jesus is Isaiah's suffering servant despised and rejected and yet by his stripes we are healed.¹⁵
- He is Jeremiah & Ezekiel's descendant of David.¹⁶
- He is Daniel's 4th person in the furnace whose presence ensures that his people will not be consumed by the flames of the enemy. He's Daniel's messiah that will die for the for the sins of the world.¹⁷
- He is Hosea's son called out of Egypt.¹⁸
- He is the true Jonah who went into the grave and then came out after 3 days¹⁹
- He is Micah's ruler born in Bethlehem, Haggai's son of Zerubbabel, Zechariah's just & humble messiah riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, who would be rejected for 30 pieces of silver, and he is Malachi's messenger of the new covenant.²⁰

He is the one and only GOD-MAN SAVIOR KING promised by God and Matthew is telling you and I to OPEN OUR EYES AND HEARTS AND WORSHIP in response to the coming of Jesus. Therefore we celebrate advent every year. To slow down

⁹ Joshua 5.14-15; Hebrews 2.10

¹⁰ 2 Sam 7.12-16; Matthew 1.1; 2 Peter 1.11; Luke 3.31; Rev 22.16

¹¹ Psalm 16.10; Acts 2.31; Acts 13.35

¹² Psalm 22; Matthew 27.39-46

¹³ Psalm 110.1; Mark 16.19

¹⁴ Isaiah 9.6; Luke 1; John 1; John 8.58

¹⁵ Isaiah 53.3-12; the entire New Testament. One example: 1 Peter 2.22

¹⁶ Jeremiah 33.14-15; Ezekiel 34.22-24; Luke 3.23-21; Matthew 1.1

¹⁷ Stone - Daniel 2.44-45; Matthew 21.44 | Daniel 9.26; Hebrews 2.9

¹⁸ Hosea 11.1; Matthew 2.15

¹⁹ Jonah 1.17; Matthew 12.40, 16.4

²⁰ Micah - Micah 5.2; Matthew 2.1-6 | Haggia - Haggai 2.23; Luke 2.27-32 | Zechariah - Zechariah 9.9, 11.12-13; Matthew 11.29; Matthew 21.6-9; Matthew 26.14-15 | Malachi 3.1; Luke 4.43



everything and marvel...for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn. SO, FALL ON YOUR KNEES AND HEAR THE ANGELS' VOICES. Oh, night DIVINE when Christ was born!

And God is telling Joseph: I know this wasn't your plan Joseph, but it's been MY PLAN for thousands of years. SO, YOU GOTTA TRUST ME JOSEPH! How did Joseph respond?

24 When Joseph woke up, he did as the Lord's angel had commanded him. He married her 25 but did not have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son. And he named him Jesus. -- Matthew 1:18-25

Simply put Joseph chose to trust the Lord's plan over his plan. When his life was interrupted in a big way, Joseph was able to look back at God's track record...and he trusted God's word to him. He chose to trust God even though it meant being misunderstood by his family and friends. He even went above and beyond what God told him to do to ensure there was no question that the child was indeed virgin born.

Some of the greatest moments in scripture began with God interrupting somebody's life. God comes to Moses and says go get my people. He comes to Samuel and says go anoint that shepherd boy David. He comes to Abraham and says sacrifice your son on the altar. He comes to Jonah and says go to Nineveh. He comes to the virgin Mary & says you will give

birth to a son. He comes to the wise men and says go to Bethlehem. He comes to Peter and says follow me and I will make you fishers of men. He comes to Saul and says stop persecuting me & instead preach my gospel. Each of these occasions something happened these people weren't expecting. But they learned in and trusted God at his word and he did far greater things in them & through them than they could have possibly imagined would happen.

God interrupted their lives, and he interrupts our lives too. Here's what I want you to see from Joseph's perspective on the birth of Jesus. As you marvel at God's faithfulness in the arrival of Christ, you will TRUST him when your life gets interrupted. Maybe he's even interrupting your life by you being here this morning.

CLOSING IN THE GOSPEL – Here's the crazy thing to me. The song O Holy Night was written in Southern France in 1843 by poet who wasn't a Christian. A local priest knew him and commissioned him to write a new song about the coming of Jesus. Takes him through the bible story. Clearly hoping this guy, in stepping into the advent season with him, would finally see Jesus for who he really is. What a wonderful interruption God brought into his life.

And yet, there's no record that he made a decision to follow Christ. Despite head knowledge, he lacked a changed heart. And I don't want that for you. God is after your heart. He



offers you forgiveness and new life. Don't go through
Christmas and still miss Jesus!