

# Homily 5 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

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*St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of retaining spiritual teachings and the significance of the Virgin birth in fulfilling God's promises.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 7:14

**Topics:** "Christian Living", "Spiritual Growth"

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## Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the fulfillment of prophecy in the birth of Jesus, emphasizing the importance of reflecting on spiritual matters after Communion rather than being consumed by worldly distractions. He highlights the significance of the Virgin birth and the name Emmanuel, signifying God among men. Chrysostom encourages believers to imitate the obedience and righteousness of Joseph, Mary, and other faithful individuals in the Bible, stressing the need for personal virtue and repentance. He warns against relying solely on the prayers of saints and advocates for active participation in acts of charity and selflessness to receive heavenly rewards.

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## Transcript

Matthew 1:22-23.

Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the Prophet, saying, Behold, a Virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a Son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel.

I hear many say, While we are here, and enjoying the privilege of hearing, we are awed, but when we are gone out, we become altered men again, and the flame of zeal is quenched. What then may be done, that this may not come to pass? Let us observe whence it arises. Whence then does so great a change in us arise? From the unbecoming employment of our time, and from the company of evil men. For we ought not as soon as we retire from the Communion, to plunge into business unsuited to the Communion, but as soon as ever we get home, to take our Bible into our hands, and call our wife and children to join us in putting together what we have heard, and then, not before, engage in the business of life.

For if after the bath you would not choose to hurry into the market place, lest by the business in the market you should destroy the refreshment thence derived; much more ought we to act on this principle after the Communion. But as it is, we do the contrary, and in this very way throw away all. For while the profitable effect of what has been said to us is not yet well fixed, the great force of the things that press upon us from without sweeps all entirely away.

That this then may not be the case, when you retire from the Communion, you must account nothing more necessary than that you should put together the things that have been said to you. Yes, for it were the utmost folly for us, while we give up five and even six days to the business of this life, not to bestow on things spiritual so much as one day, or rather not so much as a small part of one day. See ye not our own children, that whatever lessons are given them, those they study throughout the whole day? This then let us do likewise, since otherwise we shall derive no profit from coming here, drawing water daily into a vessel with holes, and not bestowing on the retaining of what we have heard even so much earnestness as we plainly show with respect to gold and silver. For any one who has received a few pence both puts them into a bag and sets a seal thereon; but we, having given us oracles more precious than either gold or costly stones, and receiving the treasures of the Spirit, do not put them away in the storehouses of our soul, but thoughtlessly and at random suffer them to escape from our minds. Who then will pity us after all this, plotting against our own interests, and casting ourselves into so deep poverty? Therefore, that this may not be so, let us write it down an unalterable law for ourselves, for our wives, and for our children, to give up this one day of the week entire to hearing, and to the recollection of the things we have heard. For thus with greater aptness for learning shall we approach what is next to be said; and to us the labor will be less, and to you the profit greater, when, bearing in memory what has been lately spoken, you hearken accordingly to what comes afterwards. For no little does this also contribute towards the understanding of what is said, when you know accurately the connection of the thoughts, which we are busy in weaving together for you. For since it is not possible to set down all in one day, you must by continued remembrance make the things laid before you on many days into a kind of chain, and so wrap it about your soul: that the body of the Scriptures may appear entire.

Therefore let us not either today go on to the subjects set before us, without first recalling what was lately said to our memory.

2. But what are the things set before us today? Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying. In a tone worthy of the wonder, with all his might he has uttered his voice, saying, Now all this was done. For when he saw the sea and the abyss of the love of God towards man, and that actually come to pass which never had been looked for, and nature's laws broken, and reconciliations made, Him who is above all come down to him that is lower than all, and the middle walls of partition broken, Ephesians 2:14 and the impediments removed, and many more things than these done besides; in one word he has put before us the miracle, saying, Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord. For, think not, says he, that these things are now determined upon; they were prefigured of old. Which same thing, Paul also everywhere labors to prove.

And the angel proceeds to refer Joseph to Isaiah; in order that even if he should, when awakened, forget his own words, as newly spoken, he might by being reminded of those of the prophet, with which he had been nourished up continually, retain likewise the substance of what he had said. And to the woman he mentioned none of these things, as being a damsel and unskilled in them, but to the husband, as being a righteous man and one who studied the prophets, from them he reasons. And before this he says, Mary, your wife; but now, when he has brought the prophet before him, he then trusts him with the name of virginity; for Joseph would not have continued thus unshaken, when he heard from him of a virgin, unless he had first heard it also from Isaiah. For indeed it was nothing novel that he was to hear out of the prophets, but what was familiar to him, and had been for a long time the subject of his meditations. For this cause the angel, to make what he said easy to be received, brings in Isaiah. And neither here does he stop, but connects the discourse with God. For he does not call the saying Isaiah's, but that of the God of

all things. For this cause he said not, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of Isaiah, but which was spoken of the Lord. For the mouth indeed was Isaiah's, but the oracle was wafted from above.

3. What then says this oracle? Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel.

How was it then, one may say, that His name was not called Emmanuel, but Jesus Christ? Because he said not, you shall call, but they shall call, that is, the multitude, and the issue of events. For here he puts the event as a name: and this is customary in Scripture, to substitute the events that take place for names.

Therefore, to say, they shall call Him Emmanuel, means nothing else than that they shall see God among men. For He has indeed always been among men, but never so manifestly.

But if Jews are obstinate, we will ask the, when was the child called, Make speed to the spoil, hasten the prey? Why, they could not say. How is it then that the prophet said, Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz? Because, when he was born, there was a taking and dividing of spoils, therefore the event that took place in his time is put as his name. And the city, too, it is said, shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city Sion. Isaiah 1:26-27 And yet we nowhere find that the city was called righteousness, but it continued to be called Jerusalem. However, inasmuch as this came to pass in fact, when the city underwent a change for the better, on that account he says it is so called. For when any event happens which marks out him who brings it to pass, or who is benefited by it, more clearly than his name, the Scripture speaks of the truth of the event as being a name to him.

4. But if, when their mouths are stopped on this point, they should seek another, namely, what is said touching Mary's virginity, and should object to us other translators, saying, that they used not the term virgin, but young woman; in the first place we will say this, that the Seventy were justly entitled to confidence above all the others. For these made their translation after Christ's coming, continuing to be Jews, and may justly be suspected as having spoken rather in enmity, and as darkening the prophecies on purpose; but the Seventy, as having entered upon this work an hundred years or more before the coming of Christ, stand clear from all such suspicion, and on account of the date, and of their number, and of their agreement, would have a better right to be trusted.

But even if they bring in the testimony of those others, yet so the tokens of victory would be with us. Because the Scripture is wont to put the word youth, for virginity; and this with respect not to women only, but also to men. For it is said, young men and maidens, old men with younger ones. And again, speaking of the damsel who is attacked, it says, if the young woman cry out, meaning the virgin.

And what goes before also establishes this interpretation. For he does not merely say, Behold, the Virgin shall be with child, but having first said, Behold, the Lord Himself shall give you a sign, then he subjoins, Behold, the Virgin shall be with child. Isaiah 7:14 Whereas, if she that was to give birth was not a virgin, but this happened in the way of marriage, what sort of sign would the event be? For that which is a sign must of course be beyond the course of common events, it must be strange and extraordinary; else how could it be a sign?

5. Then Joseph, being raised from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him. Do you see obedience, and a submissive mind? Do you see a soul truly wakened, and in all things incorruptible? For neither when he suspected something painful or amiss could he endure to keep the Virgin with him; nor yet, after he was freed from this suspicion, could he bear to cast her out, but he rather keeps her with him,

and ministers to the whole Dispensation.

And took unto him Mary his wife. Do you see how continually the evangelist uses this word, not willing that that mystery should be disclosed as yet, and annihilating that evil suspicion?

And when he had taken her, he knew her not, till she had brought forth her first-born Son. He has here used the word till, not that you should suspect that afterwards he did know her, but to inform you that before the birth the Virgin was wholly untouched by man. But why then, it may be said, has he used the word, till? Because it is usual in Scripture often to do this, and to use this expression without reference to limited times. For so with respect to the ark likewise, it is said, The raven returned not till the earth was dried up. Genesis 8:7 And yet it did not return even after that time. And when discoursing also of God, the Scripture says, From age until age You are, not as fixing limits in this case. And again when it is preaching the Gospel beforehand, and saying, In his days shall righteousness flourish, and abundance of peace, till the moon be taken away, it does not set a limit to this fair part of creation. So then here likewise, it uses the word till, to make certain what was before the birth, but as to what follows, it leaves you to make the inference. Thus, what it was necessary for you to learn of Him, this He Himself has said; that the Virgin was untouched by man until the birth; but that which both was seen to be a consequence of the former statement, and was acknowledged, this in its turn he leaves for you to perceive; namely, that not even after this, she having so become a mother, and having been counted worthy of a new sort of travail, and a child-bearing so strange, could that righteous man ever have endured to know her. For if he had known her, and had kept her in the place of a wife, how is it that our Lord John 19:27 commits her, as unprotected, and having no one, to His disciple, and commands him to take her to his own home?

How then, one may say, are James and the others called His brethren? In the same kind of way as Joseph himself was supposed to be husband of Mary. For many were the veils provided, that the birth, being such as it was, might be for a time screened. Wherefore even John so called them, saying, For neither did His brethren believe in Him.

6. Nevertheless they, who did not believe at first, became afterwards admirable, and illustrious. At least when Paul and they that were of his company had come up to Jerusalem about decrees, they went in straightway unto James. For he was so admired as even to be the first to be entrusted with the bishop's office. And they say he gave himself up to such great austerity, that even his members became all of them as dead, and that from his continual praying, and his perpetual intercourse with the ground, his forehead became so callous as to be in no better state than a camel's knees, simply by reason of his striking it so against the earth. This man gives directions to Paul himself, when he was after this come up again to Jerusalem, saying, You see, brother, how many thousands there are of them that have come together. So great was his understanding and his zeal, or rather so great the power of Christ. For they that mock Him when living, after His death are so filled with awe, as even to die for Him with exceeding readiness. Such things most of all show the power of His resurrection. For this, you see, was the reason of the more glorious things being kept till afterwards, viz. that this proof might become indisputable. For seeing that even those who are admired among us in their life, when they are gone, are apt to be forgotten by us; how was it that they, who made light of this Man living, afterwards thought Him to be God, if He was but one of the many? How was it that they consented even to be slain for His sake, unless they received His resurrection on clear proof?

7. And these things we tell you, that you may not hear only, but imitate also his manly severity, his plainness of speech, his righteousness in all things; that no one may despair of himself, though hitherto he

have been careless, that he may set his hopes on nothing else, after God's mercy, but on his own virtue. For if these were nothing the better for such a kindred, though they were of the same house and lineage with Christ, until they gave proof of virtue; what favor can we possibly receive, when we plead righteous kinsmen and brethren, unless we be exceeding dutiful, and have lived in virtue? As the prophet too said, intimating the selfsame thing, A brother redeems not, shall a man redeem? No, not although it were Moses, Samuel, Jeremiah. Hear, for example, what God says unto this last, Pray not thou for this people, for I will not hear you. Jeremiah 11:14 And why do you marvel if I hear not you? Though Moses himself and Samuel stood before me, Jeremiah 15:1 I would not receive their supplication for these men. Yea, if it be Ezekiel who entreats, he will be told, Though Noah stand forth, and Job, and Daniel, they shall deliver neither sons nor daughters. Though the patriarch Abraham be supplicating for them that are most incurably diseased, and change not, God will leave him and go His way, Genesis 18:33 that he may not receive his cry in their behalf. Though again it be Samuel who is doing this, He says unto him, Mourn not thou for Saul. 1 Samuel 16:1 Though for his own sister one entreat, when it is not fitting, he again shall have the same sort of answer as Moses, If her father had but spit in her face. Numbers 12:14

Let us not then be looking open-mouthed towards others. For it is true, the prayers of the saints have the greatest power; on condition however of our repentance and amendment. Since even Moses, who had rescued his own brother and six hundred thousand men from the wrath that was then coming upon them from God, had no power to deliver his sister; and yet the sin was not equal; for whereas she had done despite but to Moses, in that other case it was plain impiety, what they ventured on. But this difficulty I leave for you; while that which is yet harder, I will try to explain.

For why should we speak of his sister? Since he who stood forth the advocate of so great a people had not power to prevail for himself, but after his countless toils, and sufferings, and his assiduity for forty years, was prohibited from setting foot on that land, touching which there had been so many declarations and promises. What then was the cause? To grant this favor would not be profitable, but would, on the contrary, bring with it much harm, and would be sure to prove a stumbling-block to many of the Jews. For if when they were merely delivered from Egypt, they forsook God, and sought after Moses, and imputed all to him; had they seen him also lead them into the land of promise, to what extent of impiety might they not have been cast away? And for this reason also, let me add, neither was his tomb made known.

And Samuel again was not able to save Saul from the wrath from above, yet he oftentimes preserved the Israelites. And Jeremiah prevailed not for the Jews, but some one else he did haply cover from evil by his prophecy. And Daniel saved the barbarians from slaughter, Daniel 2:24 but he did not deliver the Jews from their captivity.

And in the Gospels too we shall see both these events come to pass, not in the case of different persons, but of the same; and the same man now prevailing for himself and now given up. For he who owed the ten thousand talents, though he had delivered himself from the danger by entreaty, yet again he prevailed not, Matthew 18:26-34 and another on the contrary, who had before thrown himself away, afterwards had power to help himself in the greatest degree. Luke 15:13-20 But who is this? He that devoured his Father's substance.

So that on the one hand, if we be careless, we shall not be able to obtain salvation, no not even by the help of others; if, on the other hand, we be watchful, we shall be able to do this by ourselves, and by ourselves rather than by others. Yes; for God is more willing to give His grace to us, than to others for us; that we by endeavoring ourselves to do away His wrath, may both enjoy confidence towards Him, and

become better men. Thus He had pity on the Canaanitish woman, thus He saved the harlot, thus the thief, when there was none to be mediator nor advocate.

8. And this I say, not that we may omit supplicating the saints, but to hinder our being careless, and entrusting our concerns to others only, while we fall back and slumber ourselves. For so when He said, make to yourselves friends, he did not stop at this only, but He added, of the unrighteous mammon; that so again the good work may be your own; for it is nothing else but almsgiving which He has here signified. And, what is marvellous, neither does He make a strict account with us, if we withdraw ourselves from injustice. For what He says is like this: Have you gained ill? Spend well. Have you gathered by unrighteousness? Scatter abroad in righteousness. And yet, what manner of virtue is this, to give out of such gains? God, however, being full of love to man, condescends even to this and if we thus do, promises us many good things. But we are so past all feeling, as not to give even of our unjust gain, but while plundering without end, if we contribute the smallest part, we think we have fulfilled all. Have you not heard Paul saying, He which sows sparingly, shall reap also sparingly? 2 Corinthians 9:6 Wherefore then do you spare? What, is the act an outlay? Is it an expense? Nay, it is gain and good merchandise. Where there is merchandise, there is also increase; where there is sowing, there is also reaping. But you, if you had to till a rich and deep soil, and capable of receiving much seed, would both spend what you had, and would borrow of other men, accounting parsimony in such cases to be loss; but, when it is Heaven which you are to cultivate, which is exposed to no variation of weather, and will surely repay your outlay with abundant increase, you are slow and backward, and consider not that it is possible by sparing to lose, and by not sparing to gain.

9. Disperse therefore, that you may not lose; keep not, that you may keep; lay out, that you may save; spend, that you may gain. If your treasures are to be hoarded, do not thou hoard them, for you will surely cast them away; but entrust them to God, for thence no man makes spoil of them. Do not thou traffic, for you know not at all how to gain; but lend unto Him who gives an interest greater than the principal. Lend, where is no envy, no accusation, nor evil design, nor fear. Lend unto Him who wants nothing, yet has need for your sake; who feeds all men, yet is an hungered, that you may not suffer famine; who is poor, that you may be rich. Lend there, where your return cannot be death, but life instead of death. For this usury is the harbinger of a kingdom, that, of hell; the one coming of covetousness, the other of self-denial; the one of cruelty, the other of humanity. What excuse then will be ours, when having the power to receive more, and that with security, and in due season, and in great freedom, without either reproaches, or fears, or dangers, we let go these gains, and follow after that other sort, base and vile as they are, insecure and perishable, and greatly aggravating the furnace for us? For nothing, nothing is baser than the usury of this world, nothing more cruel. Why, other persons' calamities are such a man's traffic; he makes himself gain of the distress of another, and demands wages for kindness, as though he were afraid to seem merciful, and under the cloak of kindness he digs the pitfall deeper, by the act of help galling a man's poverty, and in the act of stretching out the hand thrusting him down, and when receiving him as in harbor, involving him in shipwreck, as on a rock, or shoal, or reef.

But what do you require? says one; that I should give another for his use that money which I have got together, and which is to me useful, and demand no recompense? Far from it: I say not this: yea, I earnestly desire that you should have a recompense; not however a mean nor small one, but far greater; for in return for gold, I would that you should receive Heaven for usury. Why then shut yourself up in poverty, crawling about the earth, and demanding little for great? Nay, this is the part of one who knows not how to be rich. For when God in return for a little money is promising you the good things that are in

Heaven, and you say, Give me not Heaven, but instead of Heaven the gold that perishes, this is for one who wishes to continue in poverty. Even as he surely who desires wealth and abundance will choose things abiding rather than things perishing; the inexhaustible, rather than such as waste away; much rather than little, the incorruptible rather than the corruptible. For so the other sort too will follow. For as he who seeks earth before Heaven, will surely lose earth also, so he that prefers Heaven to earth, shall enjoy both in great excellency. And that this may be the case with us, let us despise all things here, and choose the good things to come. For thus shall we obtain both the one and the other, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ; to whom be glory and might for ever and ever. Amen.

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