

Lesson 2: The Miraculous Birth Of Our King Matthew 1:18-25

Memory Verse: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, ‘God with us’” (Matt. 1:23).

Text: ¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. ²⁰ But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. ²¹ "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins." ²² So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ²³ "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us." ²⁴ Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, ²⁵ and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS.

Monday

Every conception is a special gift of God (e.g. Ruth 4:13); and every birth should be a celebration of the “marvelous” and “wonderful” working of our Creator (e.g. Ps. 139:13-14). In my own life, I’ve had the joy of experiencing three very special births. Eve and I had been trying to have a child for well over a year, maybe 18 months. I hadn’t made it a particular matter of prayer, but I was just waiting. Eve went into the doctor for some kind of appointment and they took a blood test. When the doctor came back He said, “By the way, you’re pregnant.” We were thrilled and excited, and more than a little nervous. Then two weeks later we had a miscarriage. Even though we knew our child was with the Lord, it broke our hearts. After that, I started praying intensely. God heard my prayers and in less than a month Eve was pregnant again with Noah. We bathed him in prayer from the time we knew until the time he was born. And what a wonder this precious gift from God was! For months, I could barely take my eyes off him.

We thought it would be nice if we had kids about two years apart, so we started trying again, and Eve became pregnant almost immediately with Drew. Once again, it was not a particular matter of prayer. But then, there was a terrible scare. We cried out to God and begged Him for the life of our child, but there was only despair in my heart. Eve went to the doctor without much hope, but when he did the ultrasound, there was our little baby, safe and sound. I learned my lesson, and O how we prayed for Drew after that. When he was born, I literally fell down and wept with joy. Fortunately, there was a nice cushy chair behind me. After that, came Emma, the sweetest little girl on the face of the planet. (And yes, that is a completely unbiased opinion.)

But of all the children that God has ever blessed this world with, and of all the births there have

ever been, none is more important or beautiful than the one recorded in Matthew 1:18-25. Here we have a very simple and straightforward account from the perspective of Joseph of one of the most significant events in the history of our world, the virginal conception and birth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

John MacArthur notes in his commentary on Matthew that religious polls taken over the course of the last few decades show “a marked and continuing decline in the percentage of church goers who believe in the virgin birth and therefore in the deity of Christ.” MacArthur then makes this statement, “One wonders why they even bother going [to church], or why they want to be identified with a person, who, if their judgement of Him were correct, had to have been either deceived or deceptive about His own identity. It is clear from the New Testament, as well as other historical records, that Jesus, His disciples, and all of the early church held Him to be none other than the divine Son of God, born of a virgin.”¹

This is an excellent insight. Though Matthew doesn’t directly discuss the significance of the virgin conception of Christ, it has been historically and intuitively understood as a key to the full deity and full humanity of Christ. The Son was and is God, and through the infinitely mighty and yet quiet working of the Holy Spirit, He added humanity to His nature (Phil. 2:7-8). As fully God, the Lord Jesus was able to pay the eternal penalty for sin (Matt.1:21), for which humanity in and of itself could never atone. As fully man, the Lord could be our all-sufficient representative and substitute. The virgin conception was at a very minimum a powerful and necessary testimony to the Son’s unique nature. But it goes deeper, I think. The implication of Scripture is that the Lord’s conception was also a necessary means to the Son’s becoming fully human and yet without sin and thus to successfully fulfilling His mission. (Paul certainly hints at this in Romans 5:12-21.)

So let us embrace and rejoice in that miracle. Let it be a cause for both wonder and celebration in our hearts, as we study this text together this week.

Tuesday

Today we begin looking at verses 18-25 of Matthew chapter 1. I want to just share some thoughts about the initial coming of Christ from this text. The first one is this:

1. The Lord was conceived by the Holy Spirit (v. 18). Verse 18 says, “Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.”

This is a very simple and yet extremely startling statement. The reason that it’s startling is precisely because it is so simple and direct. One commentator says, “Though this verse does not by itself prove divine authorship of the book, the very fact that the account of Jesus’ divine

¹ MacArthur, p. 12.

conception is given in but one simple statement strongly suggests that the story was not man-made. It is not a characteristic of human nature to try to describe something so absolutely momentous and marvelous in such a brief manner. Our inclination would be to expand, elaborate, explain, and give more detail. But the Holy Spirit just gives us the fact in one sentence.”²

As an attorney that practiced criminal law and spent most of my days pouring over false statements and testimony, working constantly to discern the true versus the false in every witness, I can tell you that certainly a human fabrication would have tried to do much more. So I note this for you as just a startling fact. The Bible is constantly written in a way that simply screams “TRUTH,” whether it is showing all the warts of our heroes, refusing to soft pedal difficult sayings or, as here, describing the astonishing in very straightforward, non-elaborate language.

We see here that the Lord’s mother was Mary. We don’t know much about her except that she was a poor and yet godly, sensitive and submissive young woman. She had a beautiful self-sacrificing spirit, that is put on display for us in the Gospel of Luke. The name Mary, or more properly Maria, is a Greek name from the Hebrew Miriam. Her name, interestingly enough, means “obstinacy.” Mary, however, was anything but obstinate. In the Gospel of Luke, we read that the arch-angel came and announced God’s plan to bless her and give her the unimaginable privilege of raising the Messiah. God was going to do it, though, in a way that could potentially wreck Mary’s entire future and destroy all her earthly security. Further, it could and probably did bring great reproach and a life-long stigma against Mary in an area that was undoubtedly her greatest strength, her purity and faithfulness. Rather than being obstinate, though, she simply said, “Let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38).

The verse tells us that Mary was betrothed to Joseph. Betrothal in that day was much more serious than engagement in our culture. The betrothal in Jewish culture was a legally binding arrangement sealed with vows before witnesses and requiring an actual divorce for it to be broken. It was followed by a period of separation, in which the wife continued to dwell in the house of her father. And though the couple was legally “espoused” after the betrothal, sexual relations and living together under one roof were not permitted until after the actual marriage ceremony. In fact, the whole point of the betrothal period was to prove the purity and chastity of the wife; and according to Old Testament regulations, unfaithfulness in a betrothed woman was punishable by death (Deut. 22:23-27).

Before they “came together” (a euphemism in Greek), Mary “was found with child.” The phrase “with child” in the original language means literally “to be pregnant,” or “to have a child in the womb.” The verb “was found,” is passive and it indicates someone discovering something accidentally or stumbling across something. Evidently, Mary never told anyone about the angel’s announcement to her, and her potential problems were compounded by the fact that immediately

² *Ibid* p. 15.

after the angel’s announcement Mary went to Judah and spent three months away from home at the house of her cousin, Elizabeth (Luke 1:39, 56). So when she returned pregnant, everyone in her own household and small town would naturally assume the father could not possibly be Joseph, but was someone she had met and had relations with while away. Mary, however, didn’t try to defend her situation with any pre-emptive sharing. She simply kept things to herself and was apparently content to let the chips fall where they might when she started to show. She decided to let God work out all the potential mess. What a testimony to her faith!!

The preposition translated “of” in “of the Holy Spirit” in the NKJV is variously translated “from” (ESV) and “by” (NAS). “From” is best. The word, in this context, indicates the specific and immediate source or cause. It precludes any thought or possible conclusion that the Lord’s conception was due to any other intervening cause, human or otherwise, or that it was in way “natural.”

What is the significance of the virgin birth? _____

What does this mean for you personally? _____

Put yourself in Mary’s position for a moment. How would you have handled the situation? Could you have handled it the way she did, waiting and watching? _____

Wednesday

We saw yesterday in verse 18 that the Lord was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Today I want us to see another thought flowing from the text. It is this:

2. The Lord was divinely protected in the womb (vv. 19-20, 24-25). Verse 19 begins by telling us that Joseph was a “just man.” The word “just” here doesn’t simply mean “righteous” in human terms or according to human definitions of morality. It is a statement about who Joseph was positionally before God. He was a believer. He knew God. God knew Him. He had faith in the promises and in the Coming One. They lived in a covenant relationship with one another. Joseph’s faith had been credited to him for “righteousness” as it was to Abraham, his father, before him.

Take a few moments to meditate on the statements about of Joseph recorded in our text for this

week. Let's ask the questions, "How was Joseph's 'righteousness' demonstrated in this passage of Scripture?" "What are the character traits of a 'just man' that we see here?" Record your answer below:

Do you see these character traits in your own life? Why or why not? _____

The qualities of Joseph that I saw, which reveal His just heart and right relationship to God, were these:

1) He had a commitment to mercy. The normal reaction of a man in Joseph's position would be one of vengeance and spite. But it is very clear that Joseph's first thoughts were not about personal retaliation, but about how to handle matters in the right way and in a way that would shield Mary from as much harm and reproach as possible. This is agape love at work, pure and simple.

2) He had a commitment to personal purity. It is very clear from verse 18, that Joseph had been pure and faithful to God in his relationship toward Mary. Premarital sex was not an option for him, even with his beloved. And it is also clear that he expected and depended on the same commitments from her. Their betrothal was evidently one based on affection, as is clear by his reaction, and still they were careful not to "come together." How different this is from the standards of our day and time? And yet, how true it is to the heart of God, who blesses us with the beauty of sexual relations, and only requires that we treasure His gift in the confines of marriage.

3) He had a commitment to peace. I note this from the phrase in verse 20, "And while he thought about these things." It seems clear that Joseph was not a man to fly off the handle and make snap decisions in anger. The word in the original language is ἐνθυμέομαι (enthumeomai), and it means "to ponder" or "to reflect on." Joseph, when faced with an utterly heartbreaking and devastating situation, as far as he knew at the time, took time to reflect. Further, he did so from the standpoint of wanting to do what was best for Mary. This is a marvelous display of the fruit of God's Spirit at work in the life of a man.

4) He had a commitment to the word and promises of God. This is evident by the angel's statements to Joseph in the dream. Joseph could readily understand and believe the message, because he had been prepared beforehand by the hope declared in the

prophets. What prepared Joseph's heart? Knowing and believing God's word.

5) He had a commitment to obedience. Verses 24 and 25 shows an unhesitating and unswerving obedience to the Lord's command on the part of Joseph. He doesn't need explanations. He doesn't need reinforcement in some kind of test, like a Gideon or a Hezekiah. He simply obeys the vision, and he does so in a circumstance that must have been personally very difficult.

6) He had a commitment to God's glory over personal desire. This is plain from the fact that Joseph "did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son." Joseph was ready and willing to sacrifice personal desire, comfort and convenience in order to protect the integrity of God's work and plan. Because of Joseph's integrity and commitment to God's glory, there can never be any doubt as to the validity of the virgin conception and birth of the Lord.

All of these things, of course, show us the primary way that God protected the Lord in His infancy. He did so through the preparation and leading of His choice servant, Joseph, a man blessed with the unique and glorious privilege of raising the Son. What a testimony to this faithful man of God! Consider, if all of us men would pursue these kind of commitments, what a difference it would make in our homes, churches, work environments and individual hearts.

In this text the Father also protected the Son even more directly by sending an angel to appear to Joseph in a dream to tell him "do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." In doing this, God supernaturally answered all of Joseph's concerns, and no doubt did so in a way that was entirely unexpected. This wasn't a problem for Joseph, though, because of his faith.

I'm sure the dream lifted a great burden and brought joy to Joseph's heart. After the initial relief, I imagine that he was filled with wonder at the great honor and privilege he had been given by God. Imagine being selected by God to build and lead the home and family that the Messiah would be born into and in which He would grow up. It had to be both a very joyful and a very intimidating thought.

Thursday

So far this week we have seen that the Lord was conceived by the Holy Spirit and was divinely protected in the womb. There is a third thought we want to look at today. It is this:

3. The Lord's conception was filled with meaning (v. 21). In the angel's announcement to Joseph recorded in verse 21, we read, "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

Our English word "Jesus" is originally Latin and translated from the Greek term Iesous, Ἰησοῦς.

Iesous, in turn, is the Greek form of the Hebrew word, Yeshua, which is the contracted form of Yehoshua, יהושוע or יהושע (e.g. Josh 1:1; Zech. 3:1). The latter word Yehoshua means Yahweh is salvation. The shorter contracted term Yeshua, which was the Lord's name in Hebrew as He walked this earth, places stress on the verb in Hebrew. So His name with the appropriate stress means literally, "**He will certainly save.**"

So let's capture what the angel is saying to Joseph in verse 21. He says, "You shall call His name 'He will certainly save' (Jesus), for He **will save** His people from their sins" (emphasis added).

Now beloved, this is a powerful proclamation. It is a statement filled with promise, hope and committed love. And what is it that He will save His people from? It's not the political oppression of Rome, that's for sure. It's something far more personal and far more profound, "their sins."

"Sins" (ἁμαρτιῶν here), means: 1) to miss the mark, 2) to err, 3) to miss or wander from the path of uprightness and honor, to do or go wrong, 4) to wander from the law of God, violate God's law, 5) that which is done wrong, an offense, a violation of the divine law in thought or in act 6) collectively, the complex or aggregate of sins committed either by a single person or by many.

This is what the Lord Jesus does for us. This was His mission from the moment of His conception. He came to "certainly save" His people from the all the errors and violations of God's law that they would ever commit, from all their wanderings from the way of honor and righteousness.

There is another not so subtle linguistic statement going on in this verse, which Matthew's original readers would have immediately picked up. The phrase, "for He will save" puts the pronoun "He" in a very emphatic position in Greek (αὐτὸς γὰρ σώσει). All the intensity, therefore, is given to the person, "He ... He ... He will save." In other words, there have been a lot of men who bore the names "Joshua" or "Jesus;" and in bearing those names they gave a tacit testimony to the future salvation of the Lord, the salvation that was to come. But not this "Jesus." This "Jesus" does not simply testify the Lord's salvation, **He is Himself** that salvation. He is the One, who will do it. By His own work, by His own effort, by His own mighty strength, "**He will save** His people from their sins." This "Jesus" will be the real deal.

I think it's appropriate to spend some time this day reflecting on the mission of the Lord Jesus and His commitment to that mission. And I think it's appropriate to make it personal, because it is personal. If you are one of "His people," then Christ came to save you from "your" sins. That's why He was born. How then can we continue in them? How can we fail to confess and forsake our sins? What does it say about our commitment and love for Christ, if we refuse to do this, after He left glory and gave everything to save us? I pray that we will be a people who struggle mightily against sin.

In the space below, write out a prayer today, thanking Christ for what He has done, confessing and repenting of your sin:

Friday

There's one final thought I want to share with you this week from Matthew chapter 1, verses 18-25. It is this:

4. The Lord's virgin birth fulfilled prophecy (vv. 22-23). These verses say, "So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which is translated, 'God with us.'"

This is Matthew's second reference to what apologists call "the fingerprint evidence." In the Old Testament, there are several dozen major prophecies regarding the Messiah, who was to come and redeem His people. The predictions form a kind of fingerprint, that only the true Messiah would be able to match. In this way, the Jewish nation could rule out any imposters and validate the true Messiah, who would fulfill prophecies given hundreds of years beforehand.

Peter W. Stoner, a famous mathematician and the author of *Science Speaks*³ did the math and figured out that the probability of just eight prophecies being fulfilled by chance is one in one hundred million billion. That is a number millions of times greater than the total number of people who have ever lived on this planet. He said that if you took this number of silver dollars, they would cover the state of Texas to a depth of two feet. If you marked one silver dollar among them and then had a blindfolded person wander the whole state and bend down to pick up one coin, that would be the odds he'd choose the one that had been marked. In other words, it's just not possible for it to happen by chance, and the odds get exponentially worse when you calculate the probability of fulfilling say forty-eight prophecies by chance.

Of course, there are some prophecies that could never ever be fulfilled even by chance, such as being born of a virgin. After the Lord's genealogy, this prophecy is the second in a long list that

³ Peter W. Stoner, *Science Speaks* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969).

will be coming from the Matthew, one after another.

The reference is to Isaiah 7:14. In Isaiah chapter 7, the wicked King Ahaz of Judah is shaken to the core of his being along with the nation because of the threat from Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel, who have come up to make war on Jerusalem. God comes to Ahaz through Isaiah and tells him not to fear, “these two stubs of smoking firebrands” (v. 4). Their purpose would “not stand” and they “will be broken” (vv. 7-8).

God then gives Ahaz a great privilege. He offers the king the opportunity to ask for a sign that this word would come to pass. Ahaz, true to form, missed a great opportunity to benefit his people and in a wicked and hypocritical fashion refused to ask for a sign. His actions in truth amounted to disbelief in the Davidic Covenant and the promised Messiah, the promise which was being threatened by the northern nations (v. 6).

God, therefore, takes it upon Himself to give a sign, one which Ahaz would not have the benefit of ever seeing. The sign He gives is the above prophecy of the virgin birth of Christ, who would be called “Immanuel.” Before this child was old enough “to refuse evil and choose good,” (v. 16), the threat Ahaz feared would be over, and that of course, was fulfilled.

Now many have tried to find fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14 in the birth of Isaiah’s own son by his wife, but Isaiah 7:11 and 8:18 suggest by the Hebrew terms used that this will be a supernatural event far beyond the simple birth of a normally impregnated woman. Moreover, the Hebrew term *almah* in 7:14, never refers to a married woman. In fact, it is the perfect word in Hebrew to describe a “virgin” of marriageable age, who may or may not have been betrothed.

As an interesting aside, Martin Luther once offered a hundred Gulden in the 17th century for any person who could show that *almah* ever referred to a married woman in any instance in the Hebrew language, a woman such as Isaiah’s wife. To date, that money has yet to be collected from Luther, his estate or the Lutheran church. So we can confidently say that the word is not a reference to a married woman. Nor is it a reference to a woman of evil repute, who would become pregnant out of wedlock. The whole context of a supernatural “sign” connected with the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant in the birth of the Messiah completely rules that out. Logic demands, then, that it must refer to a virgin, as the Septuagint, and the ancient Rabbi’s understood it, and even more importantly, as Matthew, an inspired writer, understood it.⁴

This fulfillment of prophecy becomes, as I said, a major recurring theme throughout the Gospel of Matthew. What is the significance of this for you personally? _____

⁴ For a full discussion of this issue and various interpretations see Young, Edward, J. *The Book of Isaiah Vol. 1* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) pp. 283-291.

Does it bring comfort to you? If so why? _____

Let's take a moment to review some practical insights to be gained from this text. Here are a few that are important to me:

1. The righteous have a commitment to mercy and grace over personal retaliation (v. 19).
2. The righteous have a commitment to personal purity (v. 18).
3. The righteous have a commitment to peace, loving and caring for others even when betrayed (v. 19).
4. The righteous hear and obey the word of God (vv. 20 & 24-25).
5. The righteous embrace the glory of God even to the point of self-sacrifice (v. 25).
6. God is a God of miracles (v. 18).
7. God is ready and willing to save you from your sin (v. 21).
8. God's salvation is reserved for "His people" (v. 21).
9. God's purpose will never be defeated (v. 21).
10. God has an unwavering commitment to His word (vv. 22-23).

These aren't exhaustive. Spend a few final moments plunging the depths of this beautiful text. What are some other practical insights you see? How should they impact your life?