

S e r m o n s o n
Matthew

The Birth of Jesus

Matthew 1:18-25

With Study Questions

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Matthew 1:18-25

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 (Matthew 1:18-25).

Gospel Emphasis

When I first started reading through the gospels I thought I would find numerous tips on Christian living. I was hoping that through the direct instruction of Christ I would become a more wise and righteous person. I figured to find the type of instruction we see in Proverbs. Things like

In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise (Proverbs 10:19).

The taming of the tongue! That was the kind of instruction I thought, and still think, I needed. Of course the gospels do contain instructions in righteous living, but I quickly found that instructions on how to be a good person really weren't the emphasis or theme of the gospels. Over and above instructions in righteous living, there was one prominent topic I saw in the gospels.

We see this prominent topic continually brought to the fore during Jesus' instruction of His followers and in Jesus' confrontation of the Jewish leaders. This topic was and is the conflict of the ages. The issue in the gospels is not (so much) what is right or wrong. The issue was, and is, who is Jesus? The issue is found in the question Jesus will ask later in this gospel.

"Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" (Matthew 16:13b)

Throughout the entire gospel of Matthew we will observe the unfolding story of Christ the King and His kingdom. That is what this gospel is about. It is about Jesus, the King who has come. It is about His kingdom. In order for this gospel to make sense, we must never lose sight of that context. A clue to the point of the entire gospel is found in the opening verse.

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham (Matthew 1:1).

Why are David and Abraham mentioned?

Abraham

Mankind is given a great redemptive promise of a glorious King and His kingdom. This is first seen in the Bible directly after the fall of man (Genesis 3:15). The promise of the kingdom is then more fully explained in God's covenant (promise) with Abraham. We learn there that it is an eternal kingdom (church) that will have God's protection and will be a blessing to all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:1-3).

David

King David is promised that the King of this kingdom will sit upon his throne (Acts 2:25-31). David's throne typified the absolute and complete authority Christ would have over all the earth (Psalm 2; Ephesians 1:20-23).

A Gospel about the King

In Matthew we read of the genealogy of the King, the birth of the King, the announcement of the King by John the Baptist, the preparation of the King in His being tempted by the devil, the instructions of the King at the Sermon on the Mount, the signs and wonders of the King with His many miracles, the warnings of the King as He confronts His detractors, His instruction on the nature of His kingdom in the parables, the judgment of the King—both historical and eternal—in the Olivet Discourse, the sacrifice of the King on the cross, and the great commission of the King.

Since the law is what God commands of us and the gospel is what God provides for us, it only makes sense that the emphasis of the gospels would be the person and work of Christ over the work of men. Having already discussed His genealogy, we now turn to His birth.

A Virgin with Child

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 (Matthew 1:18).

They were betrothed—a solemn promise of marriage but not yet actually married. Unlike today, where engagements are broken with relative ease, the betrothed was regarded as the lawful wife even though they were not yet fully united. Mary was with child. She knew it was of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:26-35) but obviously Joseph did not.

Why a virgin birth? This subject alone could be the topic of many sermons. A couple of brief comments should give us an idea of the significance of a virgin birth. Similar to other miraculous births (Isaac, Jacob and Esau, Samuel) it was a sign that the power to save was something God alone provides. But unlike the other miraculous births where the women involved were barren, Mary was a virgin; so one can also make the argument that the sin of Adam did not extend to Jesus.

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned (Romans 5:12).

Jesus, it is argued, was not included among the men who were cursed through Adam.

Just Joseph

Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly (Matthew 1:19).

Joseph is no doubt conflicted over this matter. The law of God regarding sexual sin was taken much more seriously then than in the church today. Joseph clearly had great affection for Mary and chose to avoid a route which would have brought her greater disgrace. Nonetheless, he would not ignore or wink at her apparent sin. The marriage was off. As we'll see in the following verse, this was likely due more to Joseph's faithfulness to God than disdain for Mary.

A Dream of Comfort

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" (Matthew 1:20).

Mysticism has always sought to work its way into the church. Christians look to some supernatural significance to our dreams. And where our dreams may be telling, regarding what we spend our time thinking about, we must understand that the type of prophetic dreams we read of in the Bible, as Calvin instructs,

...differ widely from natural dreams; for they have a character of certainty engraven on them, and are impressed with a divine seal, so that there is not the slightest doubt of their truth.¹

Joseph had a fear of taking Mary as his wife. This fear was likely the fear of God rather than of men. When the angel addresses Joseph as the son of David, Joseph would be reminded of the great history of God's covenant promise – a covenant promise that saw similar (though not exactly) miraculous births.

He Will Save

"And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

Occasionally we see a verse that beautifully encapsulates the gospel; this is one of those verses. Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua meaning "Yahweh is salvation." What we have before us is a loaded sentence.

He Came to Save

First, this verse carries the implication of mankind's need to be saved. I am occasionally asked, "What is the nature of your relationship with Jesus?" My answer is "I am the sinner and He is the Savior." Any kind of relationship a person has with Jesus that misses this misses everything. He came to save. There are all sorts of relationships people have with Jesus. He is their friend, their teacher, their comforter, their sage, the one who answers their prayers. But when asked about the nature of our relationship with Jesus, the Christian's first answer must always be "He's the Savior of my soul."

To be saved involves emancipation from the guilt, pollution, power, and punishment of sin. But Christ does not merely save *from*, He saves *to*—to peace with God and the full treasury of the splendors of heaven.

But as it is written:

¹ Calvin, J. (1998). *Calvin's Commentaries: The Harmony of the Gospels: Calvin's Commentary on Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; Calvin's Commentaries. Albany, OR: Ages Software.

*“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,
Nor have entered into the heart of man
The things which God has prepared for those who love Him
(1 Corinthians 2:9).”*

He Will Succeed in Saving

This verse also implies a certainty in salvation. The word *save* is third person, singular, future, active, indicative. In short the angel is announcing that there is a person who, alone, will actively and successfully complete His mission to save His people. However people want to theologially slice up the Christian faith, this is non-negotiable. Jesus will succeed in His mission. Could anyone dare suggest otherwise? Unthinkable! Yet the gospel mission of Christ has continually been assailed by those who seek to diminish both His power and intent.

The verse teaches us that He will save His people. There is both certainty and specificity. Salvation is something Jesus will most certainly acquire for specific people—His people. The Christian faith is often presented as God doing His part and man doing his. Jesus throws the life preserver in the pool and we must merely grab it. Those who are savvy enough to know they’re drowning and have the presence of mind to grab the life preserver are saved. Jesus, it is proposed, sincerely wishes He could save them all but alas, He falls short of His desires. This verse, and hundreds like it, militates against that notion of Christianity.

What’s at stake here is our very perception of the power of the cross of Christ. Remember: He came to save us from our sins; not the least of which was faithlessness and rebellion against God. It is not as if God could depend upon our natural disposition. We can in no way boast of our cooperation in our salvation.

The Prophecy

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” (Matthew 1:22, 23).

God with Us

He is called *Jesus the Christ*, and here, *Immanuel*, which is translated “God with us.” When someone goes on a journey we may say “God be with you.” That is not what this means. Here we read of the recurring theme of Christ’s deity—**“God was manifested in the flesh” (1 Timothy 3:16)**. Since I spoke on this in great detail just recently I will not pursue it further than a quote by Calvin which succinctly explains the necessity of Christ being God.

But in Christ the actual presence of God with his people, and not, as before, his shadowy presence, has been exhibited. This is the reason, why Paul says, that “in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily,” (Colossians 2:9.) And certainly he would not be a properly qualified Mediator, if he did not unite both natures in his person, and thus bring men into an alliance with God.²

² Calvin, J. (1998). *Calvin’s Commentaries: The Harmony of the Gospels : Calvin’s Commentary on Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; Calvin’s Commentaries. Albany, OR: Ages Software.

Our King, our Savior, needed to be a man for it is men who sinned. He needed to be God that He might not sink under the infinite wrath of the Father's condemnation.

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 (Matthew 1:24, 25).

Verses like this make the Roman Catholic doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary unlikely. But let us be inspired by the obedience of Joseph who did what the Lord commanded even though it seemed contrary to what the natural course of action should have been.

We have thus far studied the humility of the King's genealogy and the (to say the least) controversial nature of the King's birth. Next we will examine the hornet's nest of His welcome to the human race.

Questions for Study

1. What is the emphasis of the gospels? Why do you suppose that is (page 1)?
2. Discuss the significance of David and Abraham in Christ's genealogy (page 2).
3. Review the unfolding message of the King in the gospel of Matthew (page 2).
4. Why is the virgin birth of Christ significant (pages 2, 3)?
5. Should Christians expect the kind of dreams Joseph received (page 3)?
6. Discuss the implications of the statement "He will save His people from their sins (pages 3, 4).
7. What does Immanuel mean? Why is this an important attribute of Christ (page 5)?