

Look in Amazement and Take Great Comfort at Jesus's Coming (Matt 1:18-25)

1. God's wondrous providence on display for us to see (18)

“Now the birth of Jesus took place in this way,” is how Matthew opens the account of the birth of Jesus. Yet, in the genealogy of Jesus which he has just given a great deal has been said already. Verse 1, **“the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the Son of Abraham,”** tells us two things. First, Jesus is in King David's line, very important to a first century Jew who recognised the coming Messiah as having to come in the dynastic line. Secondly, Jesus is **“the son of Abraham.”** “Strange, you may say, I get the King David and the royalty part, but what is this about having to be a son of Abraham?” God's promise you will remember was initially given to Abraham, that in his seed the promised one would come. Matthew, you see in writing this account of the genealogy and birth of Jesus Christ wants to make it crystal clear to the Jews he is primarily writing to that this is the Christ, the one they have been waiting for.

“Now the birth of Jesus took place in this way,” is in my mind a very understated way to bring about the news that God is coming in the flesh. It is as if Matthew says, “ok without further ado, it simply happened this way.” Well in God's wondrous providence the salvation of all God's people since the creation of the world is going to hang in the balance and humanly speaking is going to rest on a thirteen year old girl and her teenage fiance. Wow! Are you telling me that this family line has been entrusted to a pair of teenagers? Are you telling me that this family which has been under

constant attack since the birth of Abel and then Seth has been entrusted to a pair of teenagers? Do you not see how much of an easy target they will be for Satan to come and attack? Would it not be better if this special baby was born to a family who are rich and are protected at all times, they would be much better prepared for any satanic attack, wouldn't they? No, Matthew tells us categorically, **“the birth of Jesus took place this way.”** We have seen this way of doing things from God before, haven't we? For example, go back to 100 year old Abraham and 90 year old Sarah waiting on God's promise to give them the child of promise, Isaac (Gen 15). This way and working of God should not surprise us.

Matthew gives us the event from Joseph's perspective, Luke gives us the event from Mary's perspective. Joseph's perspective is he is confused if not angry, the woman he is in the process of marrying is carrying someone else's child. A scandal awaits. Marriage took up to a whole year for young couples. The women were gradually eased into marriage and away from the dependence of their fathers and into the care of the new husbands. Joseph and Mary were about three quarters of the way to full legal marriage. They had passed the threshold whereby Joseph would have to divorce her legally. In verse 18 Joseph is still ignorant of what is happening, he is in the dark yet.

As we walk the Christian life how often do we find that God keeps us in the dark. The immediate future and long-term future are not disclosed to us. This is the situation for poor confused Joseph here. The love of his life is

pregnant and he is not responsible. Has she been unfaithful? No, God is at work. God's wondrous providence is about to shine upon these teenagers, and a message comes with it.

2. God's message then, and God's message today is "do not fear" (19-20)

Joseph, a "just man," our text tells us, or as the NIV states "a righteous man," or another NIV translation says he was "faithful to the law." So what did the law say about Mary's situation? Joseph, I am sure would have known full well what Deuteronomy 22:23-27 meant for his wife. If Joseph had so wished he could have taken Mary to the city gate to be stoned. Thankfully, Joseph was also a compassionate man. He decided not to shame her or expose her or disgrace her in public. But set about to divorce her quietly. Because the law had also provision for this. You can read this provision in Deut 24:1. Joseph, his situation humanly speaking looks terrible, more so for poor Mary. We see in Joseph a quality of "high standards," mixed with "compassion." A quality that is rare today. A quality that ought to be evident in God's people. A quality that is brought to its most perfect in Jesus Christ.

As Joseph "considered these things," or "reflected" on what has happened. His whole future gone in the blink of an eye, a cloud of fear and confusion. What is more staggering is the whole of God's plan of redemption humanly speaking hangs in the balance. This "hanging in the balance" is a

concurrent theme in the Scriptures, and proves to us that “nothing is impossible for God.”

God in his mercy does not leave poor Joseph pondering for too long, thankfully. Verse 20-21, **“an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’”** Do not fear to take Mary as your wife, she is going to be the mother of the Saviour of the world! You will legally take on this child as your own. Joseph, do not “shrink back” from this! Apart from the obvious immensity and scale of what angel said about Jesus coming to save his people from their sin. What is interesting also is the reference to Joseph as a **“son of David,”** and the angel’s instruction to **“call his name Jesus.”** Go back to 1:16, **“and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.”** Why is this important? By giving the name Joseph officially accepted the child. This gave the child the status of a descendent of David. Joseph is in the line of David. Do not fear Joseph, this baby has been conceived of the Holy Spirit. Do not fear this is God coming in the flesh.

3. Do not fear, because Jesus will save you from your sin (21)

Not only does the angel reveal the identity of the Jesus as been conceived by the Holy Spirit, but the angel reveals why Jesus is coming. **“He will save his people from their sins.”** Matthew records the angel’s words

emphatically, **“he and no other will save his people from their sins.”**

The incarnation is one great mystery how God became a man, how exactly does that work? They call it the “hypostatic union,” and we will not venture into that today. Thomas Goodwin expresses it well for us:

It was the Spirit who overshadowed his mother, and in the meanwhile, knit that indissoluble knot between our nature and the second person, and that also knit his heart unto ours.

In order to save, Jesus, had to experience. He had to experience what it was to be human. He had to experience birth, he had to experience growing up, he had to experience being a wee boy in order to save wee boys and wee girls. He had to experience all that we experience and be like us in order to help us. Nobody can ever point the finger at God and say, “you don’t know what it is like.” The point is God in Jesus does know what it is like, that is the point. He had to know what it was like in order to save us from our sin.

4. In fact, the person and work of Jesus was foretold long ago (22-23)

Matthew after recording the angel’s wonderful words to Joseph is now just itching to get a word of his own in here. You see, one of Matthew’s trademarks in his gospel is convincing you and I that all the things he is recording for us about Jesus has been foretold a long time ago. He is shouting from the rooftops, “It is all there in the OT, if you would only look.”

Look at verses 22-23, **“all this took place fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means God with us).** Matthew has shown us something the prophet Isaiah wrote seven hundred years before Jesus’s coming. Isaiah 7:14 is one of the most challenged texts in the whole of the bible. Why, well does the prophet actually say “virgin” or should it be “young woman” in its place. Even the Jews themselves who translated the Hebrew OT into Greek in 200 BC translated God’s words as “virgin.” All in all, through the eyes of faith, we see that the OT tells the story of which Christ is the climax. Issues over one word and its translational meaning does not alter the fact that this Jesus is the climax and the fulfillment of the whole of the Old Testament.

5. Therefore, look in amazement, and take great comfort at Jesus’s coming (24-25)

Indeed, Matthew wants us to both look in amazement at the coming of Jesus Christ. Indeed, we are to take great comfort in the coming of Jesus. Comfort, knowing our sins are forgiven if we are indeed believing in him and trusting in him. That is exactly what Joseph and Mary did as they were thrust through the providence of God into this extraordinary position. They obeyed. Jesus was born and grew into the man God intended him to be.

