

CHRISTMAS 2022

Message 5

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Reading: Matthew 1:18-25

INTRO: In 2018 I began to go through the Christmas story in chronological fashion. I began with the account of the birth of John the Baptist as he was the forerunner of Jesus Christ and was born some 6 months before Jesus was born. So, to follow the birth of Christ in chronological fashion, we begin in Luke 1:1-80. Here we saw the angel's promise to Zechariah; and later his promise to Mary, and then Mary's visit to Elizabeth, the mother of John. After Mary was expecting she went to visit Elizabeth, who was also expecting.

Then, still in Luke 1, we saw the birth of John the Baptist. Let me just mention that after Adam and Eve sinned God promised a Redeemer. He would be the Christ, or the Messiah. Then a hundred years went by and no Redeemer, then 500 and still no Redeemer. That went to 1,000, then 2,000, then 3,000, and still no Redeemer. At about this time, King David came on the scene. Then followed years of kings, both in the northern and southern kingdoms. The prophets of Israel prophesied and many prophecies related to the coming Messiah.

But Israel's spiritual life declined more and more. And then when Malachi had written his book, the prophets fell silent altogether. God had stopped talking to Israel altogether. Then one day the lot fell on Zechariah, a priest, to offer incense in the temple, and there, in the temple, God once more began to speak to man. He first spoke to Zechariah. Then He spoke to Mary. And in today's message, He will speak to Joseph, Mary's betrothed.

In the last message we moved from Luke 1 to Matthew 1. Someone tell me what the first part of Matthew 1 is about? Well, it is the genealogy of Jesus Christ. Here His lineage is traced from Abraham to Mary and Joseph.

That brings us now to the record of Jesus' birth. We will look at Jesus' first coming from Joseph's perspective. So, consider this: God had prophesied in Isaiah 7:14 that a virgin would conceive and bear a Son and His name would be called Immanuel. That means He would be God with us.

We recently listened to a speaker from Germany who is with a mission that works in the Ukraine. He showed a picture of a boy around 13 years old. And his name was written beside where he sat and the name was Immanuel. They asked him if he knew what his name meant and he said he didn't. And they told him it means "God with us." We find that in the Matthew 1. Then they said, "Your name is written in the Bible." And he said, "What is a Bible?" So, they explained and showed him his name in the Bible and he asked if he could have that book that had his name in it. Let me add this thought, if you are a truly born-again Christian, your name is written down in a book in heaven. It is there right now.

Now let me ask you a question: How will God bring the Messiah into the world through a virgin? To all people that would mean that she has been unfaithful and according to the OT she should or at least could have been stoned to death. How will the Messiah be born of a virgin and she will not be stoned? Well, let us read how the birth of the Messiah began to be fulfilled from Mary's perspective. We find it in Luke 1:26-35.

26 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,

27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

28 And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!"

29 But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was.

30 Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

31 "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS.

32 "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David.

33 "And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

34 Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?"

35 And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.

Now we note that she was betrothed to a man named Joseph. Jewish betrothal is somewhat like an engagement in our culture. But at the betrothal the marriage covenant was made. To break such an engagement required a divorce, which the Lord allowed only in such a case. So, Joseph and Mary are betrothed but they do not yet live together and it is at this time that she became expectant. How will God handle this with Joseph? Or how will Joseph handle this?

Well, we will look at the record of Christ's birth from Joseph's perspective. We are in main point # 4 and subpoint B in our chronological look at the account of Christ's birth.

IV. THE BIRTH OF JESUS

B. The Record of His Birth (Matthew 1:18-25)

1. From Joseph's perspective

It is the Gospel writer, Matthew, who will give us the account of what took place at the conception of Christ from Joseph's perspective. Verse 18 says, "The Birth of Jesus Christ was as follows." And the full account is given in Matthew 1:18-2:23. We will be looking only at Matthew 1:18-25.

a. Joseph's dilemma

So, we begin by looking at Joseph's dilemma. We find it in verse 18.

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.

One can only imagine the devastation this will have caused to Joseph. Let me explain briefly Joseph and Mary's case. In Jewish weddings,

often the parents chose a partner for their son. About a year before the time when they lived together, the dad and the son would go to the young ladies' home and there the dowry price was set and the marriage covenant was made. They were now husband and wife but they did not yet live together.

The father and son then went back home and there they began to prepare a place for this couple to live. About a year or so later, the bridegroom went back to the bride's house and she returned with him to his father's house and here they were physically married and they began to live together.

We do not know how long before Mary's time Joseph found out that she was expecting. But it will have been after she was discovered to be with child. He is an excited man and he is at home preparing to bring his bride home and then he hears this most devastating news a bridegroom can hear.

Now our text says she was with child of the Holy Spirit. Joseph did not yet know that. He has on his hands a huge decision to make: What will he do with Mary? That she has been unfaithful cannot be denied.

b. The decision

In verse 19 we have Joseph's decision. It says:

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.

We note first that though they did not live together, Joseph was her husband. That is because the marriage covenant has been completed. We make our marriage covenants on the wedding day. Later we see that from this point on Mary is referred to as his wife. She was found with child before they lived together. Note second that Joseph is a just man. I have pondered this. The Lord found some

of the godliest people in a place that was far from Jerusalem. Would one not expect that He should find the godliest people at Jerusalem? This is how it is with many Bible Schools. Liberalism wants to start there. It is noteworthy that Jesus found a number of disciples in the Galilee area, where Joseph and Mary were as well.

Now let me ask this: What were Joseph's options with regard to Mary, or did he have any options? Let me just spell them out here without giving all the explanations. For anyone wishing those explanations, you can go to sermonaudio.com/mecl and check out our messages on divorce and remarriage. Here are his options in my understanding:

-He could accept her as his wife. But it would be a most humbling matter because it is already obvious that wrong has been done. Deuteronomy 22:13-21 requires a woman to be stoned in such cases, if the man detests her and charges her with shameful conduct. If he charges her and it is shown to be true, which would be easy in this case, she was to be taken to the door of her father's house and stoned to death. In my understanding, choice #1 is that he could accept her.

-Choice #2 is that he could have her stoned to death. When Matthew 1:19 says he did not want to make her a public example, I take this to mean he did not want to have her publically stoned. Other teachers give a different explanation.

-Choice #3 was he could divorce her. I won't make a long explanation here. It is my view that Deuteronomy 24:1-4 allows for divorce only in cases where it was proved that a young lady had been unfaithful before they began to live together as husband and wife. This passage does not command divorce, it allows for it by not condemning it. When a man took a wife and he discovered she had been unfaithful, Deuteronomy

24:1-4 allows him to divorce her instead of having her stoned.

Listen to Matthew 19:3-8:

3 *The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?"*

4 *And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,'*

5 *"and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?"*

6 *"So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."*

7 *They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?"*

8 *He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so."*

Notice the Jews said, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" And Jesus said, "Moses did not command, he permitted you to divorce your wives."

In my understanding, the only time divorce is ever permitted is in the case of unfaithfulness before the physical union of a marriage. After a marriage was consummated and the husband did not charge his wife with unfaithfulness, divorce is never allowed in any circumstance at all. Let me tell you what this does. It protects all children from ever experiencing the divorce of their parents. Think that through.

And because the Lord allowed divorce in such cases, Joseph now had the options of accepting Mary, or divorcing her, or having her stoned and he decided to divorce her and not make her a public example.

So, to bring the Messiah into the world through an unmarried woman, God chose a woman who was betrothed to a man, but they had not yet lived together. It was during the time of betrothal that the angel of the Lord came to visit Mary and told her she would bear the Messiah.

So, Joseph had three options and we go to verse 20 to discover Joseph's deliverance from making his own decision.

c. Joseph's Deliverance

It is after Joseph makes his decision that the Lord steps in. Verse 20 says this:

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.

How could the angel of the Lord tell Joseph to not be afraid to take to him Mary, his wife? In my understanding, a young man could choose to accept the woman. But if he detested her for it and charged her, and it was verified, then she was to be stoned.

So, verse 21 says:

21 "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins."

All of this led to Joseph's deliverance from having to make this big decision. If he believed the angel, his decision had been made for him. He was a just man, believed the angel,

and obeyed the voice of the angel. He would keep Mary as his wife.

The angel then told him that Mary would bear a Son. Let me just mention something I have not mentioned in some time. Mary's name in the Greek NT is Miriam. It can be spelled a number of different ways. I understand that that is the Aramaic way of saying "Mary." Aramaic is what the Jews spoke in Jesus' day. Well, the angel told Joseph that Mary would bear a Son. All throughout history, there have been times when God stepped down into man's domain. He does not do this often and He had not done so now for some 400 years. And here he stepped into Joseph's life. God was requiring something of both Mary and Joseph that is exceptional. And this frees the Lord up to enter their domain to inform them of what is happening.

Then the angel instructed Joseph to call this Son's name *Jesus*. Now the Greek word for this name is "Iesous." It comes from the Hebrew name, Joshua, and it means *Jehovah is salvation*. And why would He get this name? Because He would save His people from their sins. By the way, in Hebrews 4:8, the KJV translates this name as "Jesus" when Joshua is meant as the NKJV translates it.

Now notice that He is given this name because He will save His people from their sins. Now there is a question to be answered here: Does the phrase "His people" refer to the Jews, or to those who belong to Him by faith? Likely it originally referred to the Jews, but it includes all those who truly become Christians. We, those of us who Gentiles and are Christians, are also His people and He is in the process of saving us from our sins.

If that is so, here is what I then see. God sent His Son so that the lost would be saved. But His great interest is in delivering the saved from their sins. This speaks of the life-long process of the sanctification of the believer. When a person gets saved, before him

or her lie dangers of every kind. There is a sin nature in everyone who gets saved. And He wants to save those who belong to Him from the power of that entire sin nature. This is a huge job.

d. The declaration

We come now to a declaration in verse 22. It says:

22 So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying:

I have pondered these statements that say some thing like this: "Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled..." Seventeen times this clause occurs in the NT. Ten of those are in Matthew and seven are in John. And here is the question: Did God plan everything that would happen before He created the universe, and then in the course of history He has to manipulate things so that it will happen as He prophesied? As we go along in life, does He arrange everything to come out exactly as He had planned? Was everything predestined and it has to happen the way it happened and is still happening and will yet happen?

Let me put it like this, does this mean something like this: "So all this was done to make everything fulfill exactly what God had originally planned." Is that what is meant by, "So all this was done that it might be fulfilled...?" That means God predestined everything and He makes sure it will happen exactly that way.

Or did God make man with a free will and He knew beforehand what every person would do of his own free will? Think about it like this: Which is the bigger God, the One who made all people robots and He knew what they would do because He made them like that or He so manipulates what happens to make it happen as He had planned. And in the course of history,

He brings about this or that in order to make it all happen as He planned it in the beginning? And now it all has to happen like that because God is in control of everything?

Or is the bigger God the One who gave man a free will, and being omniscient, knew what every person would do in light of all the influences that person would face in life? This latter God is light years ahead of the former. It is nothing for God to know what will happen if He programmed everyone to do exactly what you wanted to happen. It makes God's omniscience something beyond man's imagination if God knows what every person who has a free will, will choose to do. Beyond that, if God preprogrammed everything everyone will do, then does God not become responsible for every sin man commits? Think it through.

On the other hand, if God preprogrammed everything and it is all predestined, why would He have to meddle with what is happening by doing things to make it come out as He had planned?

So how do we then interpret these statements? Here is how I would interpret this verse, "So all this was done that you might know that God, who made man with a free will, knew in eternity past what man would do. By the fulfillment of things prophesied by God many years earlier, you can be assured that God knows everything that is going to happen. Not because He preprogrammed it or predestined it, but because He is omniscient."

There is a lot of evidence that the Bible is the Word of God. I find the greatest evidence in prophecy. How can one prophecy the future and be 100% accurate? It can only be done in one way and that is if the One who knows everything can look forward into the future and tell you what will happen in the future. No human being can do this.

Sometimes when I speak to an unbeliever and seek to show that the Bible is the Word of God I ask, "Tell me, who will be our next prime minister?" Nobody can tell me and we are talking about something that will become known not too long from now. Who can prophecy things hundreds of years in advance? Only someone who knows everything.

And every time you read this statement, "Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet..." you can say, "That is the one and only omniscient God. He knows everything!"

e. The dedication (24-25)

We go on to verses 24-25. In verses 24-25 we learn how dedicated Joseph was to the Lord. It says:

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.

From verses 20-23 Joseph had been dreaming. The Lord came to him in a dream. Now there is a difference between a dream and a trance. My understanding is that a dream takes place when one is asleep and a trance happens when one is awake. In the book of Acts we have the account of a time when the Apostle Peter was at Joppa. And he was up on the housetop. They had houses with a flat roof. And while he was up there, he became very hungry and wanted to eat. And while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. And in this trance, he saw a vision of a large sheet descending and it had in it all kinds of creepy crawlies that were forbidden to the Jews to eat.

Then he heard a voice, and the voice said, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." And Peter said,

"not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean." Peter was a good Jew. Well, these creatures were drawn up and let down 3 times. Then Peter wondered what this vision was all about, and while he was wondering, some men came from a Roman centurion's house. These men said that Cornelius, a Roman centurion, had been divinely instructed to call for Peter.

Well, when that sheet with all manner of forbidden foods was let down before Peter three times, he said he had never eaten anything common or unclean. And the Lord told him that what He had cleansed was not to be called common or unclean. Peter got the message that he was no longer to consider the Gentiles common or unclean and he went to Cornelius' house. Well, the Jews did not enter the house of a Gentile either because it defiled them ceremonially. But Peter had learned and he went into the house and Cornelius got saved that day. From the account, though it does not say Cornelius also heard from the Lord in a trance, it seems he did because it happened while he was praying.

But Joseph, it appears, fell asleep. It may be that he had lost sleep over the news that Mary was expecting. Verse 23 of our text says, "Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife."

What does this mean, that he took to him his wife? Joseph then went and married Mary. We do not know how long before Jesus was born this happened. Some have speculated that Joseph was quite a lot older than Mary. We do not know. If it was the usual kind of wedding, then Joseph would have had to explain to his parents that he could not wait the normal length of time. He needed to marry her now. And then he would have had to explain what had happened and how the angel of the Lord appeared to him. And his

parents would have had to trust him in order to go ahead with the wedding.

Think for a moment what those parents would have had to think through. You see, Mary has already had to explain to her parents what happened to her. We would gather from all this that both sets of parents would have believed these accounts. How would God bring His Son into the world through a virgin? Well, here we learn how.

But what now of the community. What would they have said at the wedding? Were these things explained to them as well? You see, we asked this question: God had promised that a virgin woman would bear the Messiah but how will He bring this about? It is a complicated situation to deal with all the way around.

Did they think back to all the things that happened when Zacharias and Elizabeth were told of Elizabeth's miraculous conception? Did they recognize they were living in momentous days? Had it been noised about that Mary was expecting because of divine intervention? We do not know. What we know from this account is that Joseph married Mary soon after he received this news.

The one outstanding thing about the place God chose to have this happen was the area of Galilee. Nazareth is about the level of the lower end of the sea of Galilee, and almost half way across to the Mediterranean Sea. And from my studies I have concluded that the godliest Jews lived in the Galilee area. Here Jesus chose a number of disciples and here Mary and Joseph lived.

We considered the words before, "All this was done that it might be fulfilled..." What is interesting is that all of what happened before Jesus was born happened in the town of Nazareth which was in the area of Galilee. But when Jesus was born, He was born in Bethlehem. This

is near Jerusalem. And if the Lord tarries another year, we will see in the next message that the prophet Micah had prophesied that He would be born in Bethlehem. God is omniscient. He knows everything.

Go over to chapter 2 for a moment. We'll begin in verse 1:

1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem,

2 saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

5 So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet:

6 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.'"

Well, Joseph was aroused from sleep, and then it says he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. Now I ask you, do you think he might have questioned himself, wondering if this was really just a dream and not the Lord? There are many things we are not told. What we do know is that he carried through. We read earlier that he was a just man and he was.

He did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and he took to him his wife. That means he married her and many things had to transpire before this wedding took place.

We go to verse 24 and here we learn about Joseph's dedication to the Lord. It says he took to him Mary, his wife, but did not know her until Jesus was born. Again, we do not know the amount of time between the marriage and the birth of Christ. But we learn an amazing thing here. Joseph and Mary lived a life for some time that I would dare say nobody has ever lived before, nor ever did after that.

I seek to be discreet in discussing such things from the pulpit. But let me ask married men, what kind of man can do what Joseph did here? What kind of woman and what kind of man did God choose to be the parents of the Messiah?

Let me mention something else here. I had an e-mail a while ago from a woman whose son had become discouraged with Christianity because of the many things he saw as wrong in the church and all the various Bible versions and such things. Now he was into the Orthodox Church because they had existed before the NT was written and they were the original true Church. They claim they are not Catholic. Well, in many things they are much the same as the Catholic Church. For example, they pray to Mary. But they do differ on the immaculate conception.

So let me mention a few things regarding the teaching of the Catholic church with regard to Mary. The Catholic Church holds to the immaculate conception. That is the doctrine that God preserved the Virgin Mary from the taint of original sin from the time she conceived. They hold further that she never sinned after that.

I am not sure why they hold to this teaching. Maybe it is in this way that Jesus could be born without a sin nature. My view is that Jesus had to be born of a woman, and could not be born of a woman and a man is because the sin nature is passed on through the man. Romans 5 gives evidence of this.

Further, the Catholics hold to Mary the ever-virgin. That is, she never bore any other children. Turn to Matthew 13. We'll read from verse 55:

55 *"Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas?"*

56 *"And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?"*

The Catholic Catechism says this about the teaching that Mary never had other children, and I quote from number 500: "Against this doctrine the objection is sometimes raised that the Bible mentions brothers and sisters of Jesus. The Church (meaning the Catholic Church) has always understood these passages as not referring to other children of the Virgin Mary. In fact, James and Joseph, "brothers of Jesus," are the sons of another Mary, a disciple of Jesus Christ, whom St. Matthew significantly calls, 'the other Mary.' They are close relations of Jesus, according to the Old Testament expression."

If that is true, if James and Joseph are sons of another Mary, who are the rest of those mentioned in Matthew 13:55-56, say, like his sisters? However, there is no evidence for what the Catholic Catechism says.

We go then to the last words of verse 25 which say, "And he (i.e. Joseph) called His name Jesus." What does the name Jesus mean again? Jehovah saves. In Luke 1:31, when the angel spoke with Mary, he said she should call her son Jesus. When the angel spoke with Joseph, he told him to call Mary's son Jesus. And after Jesus was born, that is the name they gave him.

CONCL: So, we conclude this Christmas message. We have been following the Christmas story in chronological fashion. For 4,000 years God's people had been waiting for the promised Messiah. And now for 400 years God had not said a thing to man

by giving new divine revelation. And everything began to move once more when the angel met Zechariah in the temple when he was privileged to offer incense. The angel of the Lord told Zechariah that now, in their old age, they would have a son. This was John the Baptist. He would be the forerunner to the Messiah. Now, at long last, His time to appear was near. Six months later the angel appeared to Mary, and she was told she would be the bearer of the Messiah. We do not know how much later, but when Joseph discovered that Mary was with child, the events we covered this morning took place.

And the end of this event is that Joseph went through with the final marriage procedure and took to him Mary his wife. What we learn later is that just before Mary was due, Joseph and Mary were required to go to Bethlehem because of the Roman census. And if the Lord tarries, we will look at the next event that takes place chronologically, and that will be another Christmas.

As for now, glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace; good will toward men!