

I Believe

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
(Genesis 1:1 ESV)*

*And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.
(Hebrews 11:6 ESV)*

*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God,
that you may know that you have eternal life.
(1 John 5:13 ESV)*

Conceived By The Holy Ghost, Born Of The Virgin Mary

February 28th, 2021

Matthew 1:18-25

Luke 1:26-35

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone, and Merry Christmas! I know it's not actually Christmas but today we are going to be looking at two Christmas passages – so I hope you have your Bibles with you and you are able to open them now, first of all to Matthew 1:18-25. We are jumping back into our series on the Apostles' Creed and we are working our way through the middle section of the creed dealing with the person and work of Jesus. As I mentioned a couple of weeks ago 70 of the 110 words of the Creed have to do with JESUS and that makes sense because JESUS IS THE GOSPEL. Jesus is the Good News! Jesus is what and who we need to know and believe in and trust and follow in order to be saved – amen?

Amen!

So every detail of his life MATTERS.

It matters how he came into this world, it matters what he did here and it matters how he left here and so all of these details are narrated very carefully in the New Testament and they are

summarized, very succinctly here in the Apostles Creed. The line we are zooming in on today is this one:

“I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; **Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary...**”

That’s what we’re looking at today and as you will see, that line is summarizing what is narrated for us in Matthew 1:18-25 and also Luke 1:26-38. We’ll look at both passages this morning and then we’ll talk about what we’ve seen and how we should respond. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, 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.²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife,²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus. (Matthew 1:18–25 ESV)

Flip forward now in your Bibles to Luke 1:26-38. Bible scholars sometimes say that Matthew tells the story of Jesus’ birth from Joseph’s perspective while Luke tells the story from Mary’s perspective and I think it would be difficult to disagree with that. So hear now the Word of the Lord from the Gospel of Luke:

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from 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. And the virgin’s name was Mary.²⁸ And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!”²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.³⁰ And 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 bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to 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 And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

³⁵ And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. (Luke 1:26–35 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

So – we’ve got TWO spotlights here – two inspired and inerrant passages of Holy Scripture shining a light on this very important doctrine: the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. As I said, everything about the person and work of Jesus MATTERS. His whole life IS THE GOSPEL. Sometimes as contemporary Christians we get kind of lazy in our thinking and reading and we shrink the Gospel down to the bare basics. We sometimes talk as though the Gospel is JESUS ON THE CROSS. And certainly that is the CLIMAX of the GOSPEL or the CORE of the Gospel – but if we focus ONLY on the cross we actually ROB the cross of its meaning and power.

Lots of Jewish men died on Roman crosses in the 1st century AD – but only ONE of those Jewish men has the power to save your soul – so there are some things we’ve got to know about Jesus and it all starts right here at the moment of his conception. So let’s slow down and zoom in. What are we supposed to be SEEING in this remarkable story?

What Should We See?

Well, first of all, I think we would want to say that the birth of Jesus is clearly SIGNALLING an important turning point in redemptive history.

1. The birth of Jesus signals an important turning point in redemptive history

Bible readers are going to see that because the Bible itself conditions us to expect that. In Genesis 3:15 right after the fall God announces to the devil, in the hearing of Adam and Eve that a BABY WILL BE BORN who will reverse the fortunes of fallen men and women. God says:

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and **her offspring**; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” (Genesis 3:15 ESV)

God promises that a **BABY WILL COME** – born to a woman – who will **CRUSH** our adversary and restore us to our rightful place and purpose in the world.

That’s the Gospel! In seedling form.

So right from the beginning the Bible tells us to take seriously the **BIRTH OF BABIES** – and so Bible readers do. A new work of God is generally signalled by the birth of a special baby.

We think of course of the story of Abraham and Sarah. That entire narrative is built around the promise of a miraculous child; a child born to Abraham and Sarah in their extreme old age.

And then we think of **BEAUTIFUL** baby Moses who was marked off by God as the **REDEEMER** who would lead his people out of slavery. Hebrews 11:23 says:

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict. (Hebrews 11:23 ESV)

Miraculous **BABIES** are a sign that **SOME PURPOSE OF GOD** is about to be enacted.

We think too of the story of Samson – the most famous of all the Judges. He was a miracle baby. Judges 13:2-5 says:

There was a certain man of Zorah, of the tribe of the Danites, whose name was Manoah. And his wife was barren and had no children.³ And the angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, “Behold, you are barren and have not borne children, but you shall conceive and bear a son.... and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.” (Judges 13:2–5 ESV)

And then again when the story moves out of the period of the Judges and into the period of the prophets and kings – we get another miracle baby. Baby Samuel born to poor, BARREN, persecuted Hannah.

And then once more, just before the birth of Jesus – so as to signal the close of the Old Testament – we have the miraculous birth of baby John the Baptist – to his barren mother Elizabeth in her extreme old age – are you seeing the pattern?

Miraculous BABIES signal the moving of God to save.

So that's the first thing we should see. The birth of Jesus is like a FLARE thrown up in the pages of the Bible indicating that a turn is coming – a new direction in the redemptive purpose of God. Hallelujah!

The second thing we should see here in this miraculous birth narrative is that Jesus Christ is TRULY GOD and TRULY MAN.

2. The birth of Jesus communicates that the Christ is truly God and truly human

Think of some of the other ways that Jesus could have come into the world. He could have descended from heaven as a full-grown man right down into the courtyard of the temple to preach his first sermon. That would have been dramatic!

He could have done that and HAD HE done that there would have been no doubting his Divinity – but there would have been plenty of reasons perhaps to doubt his true humanity.

Or he could have been born as a baby to BOTH a human mom and a dad. Like every other prophet or character in the Bible. He could have done that and HAD HE DONE THAT we certainly would never have doubted his humanity – although we may have had reason to doubt his Divinity.

And so – God devised a rather brilliant plan. Wayne Grudem says here:

“God, in his wisdom, ordained a combination of human and divine influence in the birth of Christ, so that his full humanity would be evident to us from the fact of his ordinary human birth from a human mother, and his full deity would be evident from the fact of his conception in Mary’s womb by the powerful work of the Holy Spirit.”¹

Are you seeing that? That’s why the Bible is so careful in terms of how this narrative is worded:

“the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 1:18 ESV)

“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.” (Matthew 1:20 ESV)

And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.” (Luke 1:35 ESV)

These details are PAINSTAKINGLY preserved in the original narrative BECAUSE it is the combination of these particular details that perfectly COMMUNICATES the true humanity and true divinity of Jesus Christ. And without that – we are not saved!

Al Mohler says here:

“Indeed, without such a birth there is no gospel! A Christian who doesn’t believe in the virgin birth is in eternal peril, for the one in whom he believes is not the One who is testified in the Scriptures.”²

The Bible says that we are saved because of who Jesus IS. He IS a human being. The Word TOOK ON FLESH and dwelt among us. That matters! And it matters that he is God! Because only God can save us! The whole POINT of the Old Testament is that we can’t save ourselves. All our MERELY human SAVIORS – themselves need to be SAVED. Think of Samson, think of Saul, think of David. They all point to Jesus – but none of them were Jesus. They were JUST MEN. But Jesus is truly God.

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction To Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 530.

² R. Albert Mohler, *The Apostles’ Creed: Discovering Authentic Christianity In An Age Of Counterfeits*, (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2019), 42.

That is the Jesus that SAVES and so God ORDAINED and DESIGNED the DETAILS of his BIRTH to COMMUNICATE and to HIGHLIGHT these essential aspects of his identity and nature.

Thirdly, we ought to see here that the birth of Jesus represents a new start and a new creative work of God.

3. The birth of Jesus represents a new start and a new creation

Again – the details are incredibly significant. Listen to what the Angel says to Mary:

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.” (Luke 1:35 ESV)

The beginning of the incarnation story is meant to remind us of the beginning of another story – the CREATION story.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.² The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. (Genesis 1:1–2 ESV)

So in the beginning you had this dark, watery, empty space and the Spirit of God moved and hovered over it all – and there was LIFE! Now again, inside the body of the Virgin Mary, the Spirit of God hovers and MOVES once again and there is LIFE!

This is clearly being presented to us as a NEW CREATION STORY!

That’s why Jesus is referred to as the new Adam, and the new creation and that’s why Paul says:

“if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17 ESV)

The birth of Jesus represents a NEW START for everyone who puts their faith in him. Ben Meyers puts it this way, he says:

“The first Adam led the human race astray. But here is a new Adam, a new beginning for the human family, a new ancestor who will lead us into life and joy.”³

You’ve heard me say this before, but there is a sense in which there are only two people in the Bible who matter. There is Adam and there is Jesus. Everyone else is just detail. No one else comes CLOSE in terms of their personal impact on your life. According to the Bible you are either IN ADAM or IN CHRIST.

Now we struggle to understand this as modern western people. We think of ourselves as individuals. We think that we are the captains of our own ship – well good for you. Unfortunately what you think about yourself is not actually determinative. Because you live in God’s world and he has wired it in particular ways. And he made human beings as essentially social creatures. We ARE families. We ARE tribes. We are connected.

So like it or not the iniquity of the father IS VISITED on the children and the children’s children – right on down the line. The Apostle Paul says:

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned (Romans 5:12 ESV)

So one man sinned – and because of that – sin and death spread from that one man to ALL MEN and we know that because all men sin. We all become who we are. We all live out the family story. We all run but none of us can escape the family curse.

That is HOW THE WORLD WORKS – and that is WHY the Gospel is such incredibly Good News because the Gospel of Jesus Christ BREAKS THE CHAIN! That’s what Paul says:

“For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:17 ESV)

³ Ben Myers, *The Apostles’ Creed: A Guide To The Ancient Catechism*, (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2018), 44.

“For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.” (Romans 5:19 ESV)

That’s the GOSPEL! That’s the GOOD NEWS, thanks be to God!

And that’s WHY the DETAILS of this narrative about the Virgin Birth are so incredibly important. If Jesus had been born to Mary AND JOSEPH – in the usual way then Jesus would have come out of the womb with the same broken and twisted nature that each of us has inherited from our father.

You see we all share the same blood.

We are our father’s children – and we all come out of the womb with a busted compass. We think it’s pointing true north, but its off by several degrees and so no matter how hard we try we all end up lost. We all fall short. We all get off track. We all SIN and end up in places we ought not to be.

That is the human story – APART from the person and work of Jesus Christ!

He comes – and in the manner of his coming – he creates a whole new opportunity for men and women. He is a human being. He is a man – therefore he can be the FOUNDING FATHER of a whole new family tree.

But he is no son of Adam.

He is only the Seed of the Woman. J.I. Packer put it this way, he said:

“Virgin-born, he did not inherit the guilty twist called original sin: his manhood was untainted, and his acts, attitudes, motives, and desires were consequently faultless.”⁴

Are you seeing that?

⁴ J.I. Packer, *Affirming The Apostles’ Creed*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 74.

Jesus IS THE BREAK IN THE CHAIN!

And so if you are in him – if you die to your old allegiance and are born again in him – then YOU ARE NEW CREATION. You are now FORWARD ROOTED in the coming Kingdom of God.

That's what the Gospel offers!

And all of that is promised – all of that is whispered – all of that is hinted at – in the carefully recorded DETAILS of the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ. Praise the Lord!

Now lastly, in terms of what we're supposed to see here, we're supposed to see in the birth of Jesus Christ the manifestation of God's personal presence with us on planet earth.

4. The birth of Jesus manifests God's presence in the world

Matthew's Gospel makes that explicit. He says:

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). (Matthew 1:22–23 ESV)

You see that's why we say that JESUS is the Gospel – everything about Jesus is the Gospel. Not just his death on the cross. YES HIS DEATH ON THE CROSS – and YES the empty tomb but the Virgin Birth is GOSPEL TOO. How it could not be? Listen IF GOD IS WITH US – what further NEWS do we require? If Jesus is GOD WITH US then ITS OVER, ladies and gentlemen! Because if God is with us and if God is for us then who can stand against us?

The moment Jesus ENTERS the womb of the Virgin Mary, having been conceived by the Holy Spirit – it is OVER!

Behold he has made all things new!

And in a sense, he has brought us all the way back to the beginning. Or at least to the end of the beginning. Do you remember how the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden ENDED?

Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—”²³ therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken.²⁴ He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life. (Genesis 3:22–24 ESV)

That is the story of God NOT WITH US – but Jesus is the story of GOD WITH US. Jesus brings our story FULL CIRCLE! He comes down to lift us up. He does for us what we could never do for ourselves and he pays for what we have done in his body on the cross.

Why?

SO THAT WE CAN GO HOME!

So that we can go BACK!

That’s where the story ends!

Revelation 21 – at the end of your Bible – tells you the end of the story:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” (Revelation 21:1–4 ESV)

That's IT!

That's where it ends! It ends at the beginning! It ends back where Adam jumped the rails. It ends with us under our HEAD, OVER everything else and ENJOYING the presence and the beauty and the glory of God – FOREVER.

That is the End of the Gospel. And you can't get there without the Virgin Birth.

How Should We Respond?

So how should we respond to this Good News? Well we are almost out of time, but let me get you started with 3 quick ones. First of all, and I think instinctively, we respond with GRATITUDE!

1. With gratitude!

This one is instinctive – it was for the Apostle Paul. He said:

“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:24–25 ESV)

That's it, isn't it?

What more is there to say? If you understand what it is to be a son of Adam – if you understand what it is to find yourself trying your very best and still ending up lost and away from God, hurting others and doing damage to yourself – if you understand that – and you hear about THIS – then you don't need me to tell you how to respond – you just proclaim: “Thanks be to God for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!”

Cats don't need to be taught how to meow, donkeys don't need to be taught how to bray over the trough and truly born again people don't need to be taught how to be grateful for the grace of God in Jesus Christ. If you get it – then you get it.

Second one though, we need to be reminded of. When we understand the doctrine of the Virgin Birth we ought to respond with confidence.

2. With confidence!

Because there is no part of you now that hasn't been redeemed by Jesus Christ. There is an old saying that is actually traced back to TWO different early church Fathers – which probably just means that EVERYBODY was saying it at the time. The saying is this:

"What has not been assumed has not been redeemed"⁵

They said this to remind people that because Jesus took on human flesh then you don't need to be ashamed of your human flesh. It's the curse – it's sin that cannot enter the presence of God – not your humanness.

Do you know that there is already a flesh and blood human being in the presence of the three times Holy God right now?

It's true.

Jesus is in heaven right now in a human body. Flesh and blood. The incarnation is never undone. Jesus was born a human, lived as a human, died as a human, was raised as a human and ascended to the Father's right hand AS A HUMAN – did you know that? It's true.

And so – you – with all your humanness – can be fully and entirely redeemed by the person and work of Jesus Christ. If you are in Christ – you get to go all the way in. And:

“Since we have such a hope, we are very bold” (2 Corinthians 3:12 ESV)

And so we should be.

⁵ That is the version attributed to Athanasius. Gregory of Nazianzus said is slightly different.

Lastly, we should respond to this doctrine with JOY.

3. With joy!

God rest ye merry gentlemen – and gentlewomen – let nothing you dismay. Remember Christ our Saviour was born on Christmas day, to save us all from Satan's power when we were gone astray; O tidings of comfort and joy! Comfort and joy! O tidings of comfort and joy!

Do you remember that? O, my brothers and sisters, because of who Jesus is we can be certain of where we will be when all of this is over.

Therefore what cause have we to despair?

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (Romans 8:18 ESV)

Can you say amen to that, this morning, brothers and sisters? That wasn't a rhetorical question; I'm asking you: can you say AMEN TO THAT my brothers and sisters?

Amen. Amen and Amen. Thanks be to God. Let's pray together.