Two Complementary Accounts of the Birth of Christ (Part 1)

Matthew 1:18-25

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**“Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be pregnant by the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, since he was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had thought this over, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a Son; and you shall name Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” Now all this took place so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet would be fulfilled: “Behold, the virgin will conceive and give birth to a Son, and they shall name Him Immanuel,” which translated means, “God with us.” And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took *Mary* as his wife, but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he named Him Jesus” (Matthew 1:18-25).**

Good morning! Today we are celebrating the third Sunday of advent. We are joyfully anticipating the arrival of the Son of God. As we commemorate this ever so important event in the history of mankind I believe it is important for us to take some time today as well as next week to unwrap the mystery of the incarnation of Christ. What I would like to do today is begin a 2-part message where we will read and study the two accounts of the birth of Christ as recorded for us in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. While we do this it will be important for us to also consider how each of these gospels record the event. Even though there are some differences in the way that each gospel reports the event, they nevertheless are consistent in the message they convey. The purpose of Jesus Christ being born of a virgin is the fact that He came to this earth as a supernatural act of God and that Christ has both a Godly as well as a human nature which helps us to identify with Him in His humanity. Today we will first look at the birth of Christ as recorded in the gospel of Matthew.

**Slide 2: The Gospel of Matthew**

Before we begin to analyze this passage more closely we first need to take a few moments to become more familiar with the Gospel of Matthew. In the New Testament we have four gospel accounts of the life of Christ, but each of those gospels has a particular purpose and way that it presents the life of Christ. The gospel of Matthew is written for the Jews, and we have many examples of evidence in the book that the purpose of the book is to prove to the reader that Jesus Christ is the long-awaited Messiah that was promised to them in the pages of the Old Testament.

The first piece of evidence we have is the genealogy of Christ that is found in chapter 1. Going all the way back to Adam the lineage of Christ was traced. What is interesting to note as you look through that list of people is that not all the names are men and there are some people mentioned who are not considered to be the pillars of the community. God shows through that list of ancestors that He worked through the generations to bring the promised Messiah to the people through them.

The second piece of evidence we have provided in this gospel that proves it was addressed to the Jews is the fact that Matthew cites many Old Testament Prophecies in his account of the life of Christ including His birth and death. If someone was writing an account of the life of Christ and was not writing to the Jews they would most likely not include these prophecies because the reader would not be familiar with them. Therefore, Matthew’s aim in his gospel is to provide evidence that Jesus is the promised Messiah that the Jews have been waiting for. Keeping this fact in mind as we move forward will help us to better understand why Matthew records the birth of Christ in the manner that he does.

**Slide 3: Matthew 1:18**

There are a few reflections of this passage that we need to take into consideration as we move forward with our study. The first fact of importance is that Matthew is clear to mention that Mary had become pregnant not through human relations, but through the Holy Spirit. This fact regarding Christ is of ultimate importance. As we have sung about so many times in our Christmas carols Jesus is the Holy Son of God who has come to bring salvation to all of mankind. To be the perfect spotless lamb of God Christ had to be without sin. By Mary being made pregnant through the Holy Spirit God brought about the birth of Christ through supernatural means.

**Slide 4: Matthew 1:19**

Next, Matthew records that Joseph intended to send Mary away quietly and break off his engagement to her. This was going to be a required thing for Joseph to do had the birth of Christ been by natural human means. According to the Old Testament Law if a woman was found to have been pregnant with a child outside of marriage this was considered a sin that had to be blotted out of the community. The woman would be taken out of the city gates and stoned to death. Joseph cared enough for Mary that he wanted to protect her from that harsh ending to her life. I have always found that to be a strong argument for the character we see in the life of Joseph. If he really believed that she had been made pregnant by another man and he still wanted to help her escape such an ending, this shows how much of a loving man he really was. He wanted to do the right thing in this situation, but he also wanted to help Mary. That is commendable!

**Slide 5: Matthew 1:20-21**

He is then made aware by the angel that this was a miraculous birth and that he needed to take Mary as his wife and help her give birth to the child. Once he had been told this his mind was changed and he followed the instructions of the angel. We see that faithfulness of Joseph as well to follow the commands of the Lord without argument. It is important to note here, and I am not saying this because I am a guy, but I think that Joseph needs to be given a lot of credit here. He is taking in Mary and being obedient to the word of the Lord to raise a child that is not His. At this point I think it is appropriate to make the point that the life of each child that is born in this world is precious and needs to be protected. I know that we recently had Issue 1 pass in Ohio, which is basically allowing abortion on demand. In many of the advertisements supporting this bill we would hear women say that it was so hard to believe that Ohio did not allow for an abortion in the case of rape. Let me be clear, I am not trying to imply that rape is horrible or that those who commit such acts do not deserve punishment. What I want to say is that even the life of a baby that is the result of rape has value and should be protected. What has that child done to deserve the death penalty before they are even born? All life is sacred, and we learn from Joseph that taking care of a child that was not his showed his love for human life as well as his faithfulness to God.

**Slide 6: Matthew 1:22-23**

As we continue, Matthew cites a verse from the prophet Isaiah which comes from Isaiah chapter 7 verse 14. This verse shows that Matthew is trying to convince his readers that Jesus is that promised redeemer that was mentioned by God over 500 years before. The name Immanuel meaning God with us is crucial to the passage because we now see that the arrival of Christ on the earth is also the arrival of God in human flesh. This essential fact regarding Jesus must be remembered because His eventual sacrifice pays the penalty for our sins because He is God and therefore can pay the penalty having lived a sinless life. If Jesus were just a normally born child by natural processes then He could not have been the spotless lamb, and His sacrifice would mean nothing since He also would have inherited our sinful nature.

**Slide 7: Matthew 1:24-25**

As we conclude Matthew’s account of the birth of Christ we read that Joseph was gentle with Mary not having relations with her until after the birth of Jesus. We read that Mary was a virgin when Jesus was born, but we also eventually find out that Mary had other children after the birth of Jesus. He was her first born Son, but not her only son. We know this because the Epistle of James was written by a half-brother of Jesus as well as the Epistle of Jude. The belief by some Christians today that Mary remained a virgin her whole life is not supported by Scripture, and we must therefore not regard her as a holy being in the same way as we look at Jesus. She is an inspiration, just like Joseph, in that she took her role seriously and was faithful in following the commands of God. What we must not do is worship her as a deity or a special being who can help us communicate with God. Jesus Christ Himself intercedes for us with the Father and He is the Savior who has repaired the broken relationship we had with God after Adam and Eve’s rebellion.

**Slide 8: Applications**

Where does this lead us and how can this account in Matthew help us in our Christian walk today? I would like to leave you with a couple of thoughts. First, Joseph and Mary are an example to us of what can happen when someone steps out in faith and follows the commands of God. We see that this young couple from a poor village did what they were commanded to do and because of that faithfulness helped to bring about the salvation of mankind. We should not worship these people, but I do argue that we should learn from their example. Joseph took a huge risk by keeping his engagement with Mary and betrothing her even though she was pregnant before they came together. Having the need to travel to Bethlehem for the census allowed for Jesus to be born where He was prophesied to be born. God worked out all the details while Mary and Joseph did what they were asked to do. Paul reminds us of this in Romans 8:28 “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

Secondly, we need to remember that every word contained in Scripture is helpful for our growth and development in faith. Paul writes to Timothy these words “All Scripture is inspired by God and beneficial for teaching, for rebuke, for correction, for training in righteousness:” (2 Timothy 3:16). The account of Christ’s birth provided for us in Matthew gives us some important information that we need to have so that we better understand who Christ is and what His coming to earth means for mankind. As we will see next week when we review the account found in Luke we will be given complementary details that were not provided in Matthew to assist us with knowing how God orchestrated the coming of Christ. We can be assured that our faith in Christ is grounded in the truth. The Word of God is perfect, without error and we can trust it for our Salvation. As we prepare our hearts for the arrival of Christ let us keep these accounts in mind and encourage each other with these words. Let us pray.