
The Birth of the King

Matthew 1:1-25

Introduction Happy holidays! Seasons' greetings! Spend, buy give, receive!

Advent season...

Nativity displays are like carvings and statutes – they freeze things in a moment of time. But they are almost never filled with true flesh and blood pain and suffering that the birth of Christ is full of. I have yet to see a nativity scene at the moment of birth with no attending doctor, no lovely maternity ward, just a feeding trough for cattle. What about a nativity scene at the moment when Mary or Joseph are cleaning a crappy diaper? Where is the scene of the babe and mother and father packed up on a donkey hurrying to Egypt? Where are long bladed, hard eyed soldiers slaughtering every male baby two years and younger?

It is curious thing to me that we do this constantly with the life of Jesus. We imagine, draw, paint, flannel graph scene after scene with a sense of glowing wonder that largely ignores the often brutal realities the gospel writers are narrating. We are most prone to this in the nativity stories.

Let's think carefully about the realities of the advent story.

Jesus was born as a part of God's solution to sin. The glory in the narrative of Jesus' birth is *in the fact that He was God with us and came to die a sacrificial substitutionary death to redeem His people.*

Jesus was born into fallenness and the curse. Now hear me, he had no sinful nature and never sinned, nevertheless, he was born in a normal, human body. He went through the normal, non-sinful struggles of humanity.

Jesus was born into a lowly, simple, poor, hard life. The very narratives themselves are intended to cause us to wonder, not at the loveliness of it all but at the unending hardness of it all.

The Ancestry of the Messiah

(v.1-17)

¹ The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. ² Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³ and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, ⁴ and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵ and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶ and Jesse the father of David the king.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, ⁷ and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, ⁸ and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, ⁹ and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, ¹⁰ and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, ¹¹ and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

¹² And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, ¹³ and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, ¹⁴ and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, ¹⁵ and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, ¹⁶ and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

¹⁷ So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

A Record of Royal Paternity

The book opens in way that says, “This is a book of beginnings.” The phrase *biblos geneseōs* may echo the Greek name for the first book of the Bible, the book of Genesis.

Three important personages from the Old Testament:

Abraham – the father of the Covenant people. Abraham’s descendents form a unbroken line of father to son until the true promised son is born. Isaac was the first fulfillment.

David – the king over the Covenant kingdom. David unified and built the kingdom of Israel in fulfillment of the promises of a kingdom.

Jesus – the messiah who fulfills the people and the king. Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of the promise of a son. He is ultimate king who will fulfill the promise to David of a Son on the throne forever.

All connected by family lineage, from father to son down through the ages.

A Record of Sovereign Purpose

This genealogy illuminates purpose in the Israel’s history. The genealogies of the Old Testament serve to show that God is at work to bring about His purpose. Father to son to grandson down through long years are not just accidents. They are a trail along the mountains of God’s purposes from His eternal decrees in the past to the final summits of future glories.

A Record of Divine Providence

This is record of the providence of God moving in time, space and history towards the purposes He has determined. God's powerful providences bring about what He has purposed. God's providence works out each step along the way. He works in the minutiae, in the details of the events of history. This is a great comfort to us when we struggle with the difficulties of our lives.

In God's providence He put some interesting women in Jesus' genealogy. Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba ("Uriah's wife" [1:6]) were all Gentiles. But probably, more to the point in the context, they were women who were under suspicion, rightly or wrongly, of illicit sexual relations (see, Genesis 38; Joshua 2; Ruth 3; 2 Samuel 11, for each one respectively). Though Mary was not a Gentile, she did experience the stigma of a conception out of wedlock, shrouded in suspicion among those who did not believe the story of a virgin birth.

Matthew is connecting these in the Biblical record for his Christian readers. Remember that Mary was among the believers, living in John's home. She had a place of honor among them. We are being reminded that Christian women who suffer as believers have a goodly heritage before them.

A Record of National Punishment

At its center is a record of the destruction of the Israeli monarchy by the punishing hand of God. From Abraham to David; from David to the deportation – why the deportation? Matthew is reminding them that the authority and the glory of the kingdom had departed. Even after the return from Babylon, the regency soon deteriorated into carnality and chaos. Evidence? Herod, the Tetrarch, sits on David's throne.

But why structure your whole genealogical record around a colossal failure and Divine punishment? Because it reminds us that the nation of Israel, that the kingly line of David, that the children of Abraham have all fallen short. And so, a people, a king and a Son are needed to finally and fully bring to pass the promises in God's covenants. And so, Jesus...

A Record of Fulfilled Promise

It culminates in the Messiah, the anointed One. He is the One who was promised and now comes to fulfill and complete God's covenants. It is helpful for us to remember that the word "Christ" in our Bibles is the translation of the word for Messiah which in the Hebrew and the Greek means, "the anointed one".

The Arrival of Jesus

(v.18-23)

¹⁸ 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.

Its Narrative Perspective

The infant narrative is written with Joseph as the central parent in the story. It appears to be written from his point of view. It explains what he was thinking and what was in his heart. Through his eyes, you see the terrible situation they are both in. You hear how he wrestles with it.

Its Scandalous Problem

What a scandalous problem arises as Joseph's fiancée turns up pregnant. Sometimes our way of thinking about this situation is so gilded over that we are missing a critical element. Here is a couple, who are not engaged (as we would express it). They are almost certainly planning the wedding ceremony and feast. It is a time of real joy, anticipation, hard work surrounded by friends and family. And she turns up pregnant.

Now, if they had been sexually intimate, it would have been no real surprise. But Joseph is absolutely certain that he is not the father. And though it is hard to imagine, he can only think she must have violated their betrothal vows somehow. In Luke's account, Mary knows before she becomes pregnant what is going to happen and how. In Matthew's account, we only know what Joseph knows. He has to decide what he is going to do.

Joseph does not want to marry a soiled woman but neither does he want to put her up for public scorn. Divorce (signaled by the phrase "put away" in some translations) was a Biblically and culturally appropriate step. But he was loathe to cause her any more embarrassment than she had already suffered. Matthew shows us a man who just and thus knows what is right and lawful. But he is also compassionate and merciful. So, he will divorce her quietly.

Its Angelic Personage

While still considering what to do, he sleeps. In the night watches, in a dream, an angel of the Lord appears to him. He has an important message for Joseph. He addresses him as the son of David, clearly linking him to the kingly line. There is no need to fear – take Mary as your wife. Yes, she is pregnant, but not by human means. She has conceived by the Holy Spirit.

The Bible clothes all this in mystery. God, through His Spirit causes Mary to conceive. The babe in her is the second person of the Godhead, the Son. The process of human conception was designed by God from the beginning so that this miracle is possible.

What amazing typology is imbedded in this and all birth texts. God, at the moment of His choosing, sends the Holy Spirit into a dead sinner and brings forth life. This coming to life is regeneration and resurrection. The Word as the seed bears the life that is the Holy Spirit is implanted into the heart. A miracle takes place within the design by God of the soul. Mysterious? Yes. Impossible? Yes. But God has made it humanly impossible so that only He can get glory.

Its Redemptive Purpose

The name of this child shall be Jesus, or in the Hebrew, Joshua. It means, “Yahweh saves.” It connects Jesus to the Old Testament leader who did not sin at Kadesh-Barnea, who served at Moses’ side, who led the crossing over the Jordan and the conquering of the Promised Land. So this name takes the life and work of Joshua and connects it to the life and ministry of Jesus.

He is to bear this name for this is what He will do. He will save His people from their sins. The “He” here is emphatic. He, Jesus, will save His people. Matthew then begins right away to emphasize that they should look to or look for no other. No one else can bring them the salvation they need and desire. He, yes He, and He alone will save His people. Note that the angel does not say, “Israel”. Now that may be how Joseph heard it. But so much more is intimated in the phrase, “His people”. And with a sort of wry smile to all the Christians who have read and will read this account Matthew sweeps widely across all the people groups.

Its Fulfilled Prophecy

What is taking place fulfills prophecy on multiple levels. The quote here is from Isaiah 7:14. Ahaz the king of Israel is told through Isaiah the prophet that the birth of a son will be a sign to him that what God had promised in judgment would take place. In the Hebrew, the word can mean both young woman but particularly, a virgin. The immediate fulfillment is probably takes place in chapter 8:1-4 in the birth of Maher-shalal-hash-baz to Isaiah and the prophetess. Beale and Carson helpfully make the connections for us:

This same son is called “Immanuel” in 8:8, which is explained in 8:10 as “God with us,” accounting for Matthew’s linking the two portions of Isaiah together. In 8:18 Isaiah describes his two sons, Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz and Shear-Jashub (cf. 7:3), as “signs and symbols in Israel,” which description ties back in with the sign God promised in 7:11, 14. But in 9:1–7 the more distant future is in view, as exiles are once again restored to Galilee. Here, in 9:6, another description of the birth of a wonderful child appears, one who can be called “Almighty God,” “Eternal Father,” and “Prince of Peace,” who will rule from David’s throne and establish universal justice forever—prophecies that scarcely could have been fulfilled in a mere earthly king.⁵

So the ultimate fulfillment comes in the virgin birth of Christ, who truly is Immanuel, God with us.

In that this is a Divine initiative

God has moved in human history to bring about this moment. He is on the move along the pathway of prophecy to bring onto the scene the promised redeemer and ruler.

In that this is a virgin birth

God has sent His Holy Spirit to cause a human woman, a virgin, to conceive and bear a child. The prophecy as it is stated in the Greek is that of a virgin birth, not merely a young woman giving birth. That would be no special sign nor of any significance.

Now, is a virgin birth necessary? I believe so. Quite simply, the Bible indicates that the depraved nature and the condemnation from Adam is passed on from the father to his children. A virgin birth allows the union of the Divine and human without the corruption and condemnation of sin. From Mary, Jesus receives what is human. From the Holy Spirit Jesus receives the Divine nature. What a marvelous mystery this is! And how important it is that we hold fast to this important truth.

In that this is a crucial moment

Jesus may be the Lord's personal name, but He will be known as "God with us". What is a name in the Old Testament prophecy is fulfilled as an indwelling reality. This babe is, "God with us." All that the tabernacle and temple in the Old Testament signified as the dwelling place of God now is placed upon this babe. He, here on earth, is the new tabernacle, the new temple, the residence of God among men.

Conceived of a virgin, Jesus is both the messianic king and the embodiment of the divine presence among his people. Both of these themes will be significant in Matthew's Gospel, the first especially in these infancy stories and the passion narratives

The Acceptance of Joseph

(v.24-25)

Joseph gladly accepts the angelic message and acts on it.

His Immediate Obedience

For Joseph, the pondering was over. This issue is settled. He gets up and makes her his wife. His obedience was probably costly. It put his own reputation at risk. But God had made clear what his responsibility was and he accepts it with a sense of urgency.

His Insightful Sacrifice

What a careful insight by this godly man. In order that there be absolutely no question of this not only being a virgin conception but also a virgin birth, he has no sexual intimacy with his wife until Jesus is born.

Now think about that for a moment. We have already seen the godly mercy and compassion of a righteous man. Now we get a glimpse into a sacrificial self-denial that does not seem to have been commanded but certainly is wise. Married, but celibate for nine months. But not afterward. Jesus had lots of brothers and sisters as is attested to by Matthew and the other gospel writers.

His Important Response

No baby book needed here. From the first moment of conception, this babe had a name. Joseph gladly names Him, Jesus.

Reflect and Respond

What an amazing God we have here...

What godly people we have here...

How great our joy to truly know that Jesus was born to be our ruler and redeemer...

Notes

⁵ G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 4.