

THE BIRTH OF THE KING

Matthew 1:18-25

When the fulness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law (Galatians 4:4).

Paul uses a rather non-descript phrase in this verse when he speaks of Jesus as being born of a woman. After all, everyone is “born of a woman.” The Old Testament uses this phrase as a way of describing all men.

*Man who is born of woman
Is short-lived and full of turmoil. (Job 14:1).*

*What is man, that he should be pure,
Or he who is born of a woman, that he should be righteous? (Job 15:14).*

*How then can a man be just with God?
Or how can he be clean who is born of woman? (Job 25:4).*

In Old Testament language, to be “born of a woman” was to be a mortal man, doomed to die. It was to be part of all of humanity. And yet, I think that there might be something more than this when we speak of JESUS being “born of a woman.”

You see, when we speak of HIS being born of a woman, there are echoes that go back even before writing of the book of Job. A promise that was given at the very dawn of history. Words spoken in a Garden named Eden over the forgotten core of a forbidden fruit. There was a questioning voice in the cool of the day and a panic-stricken attempt to hold in place a few feeble fig leaves and, in the midst of that historic scene, a promise was given.

And the Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly shall you go, and dust shall you eat all the days of your life. 15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.” (Genesis 3:14-15).

The promise is that One would come. He is known here by the cryptic title: “Seed of the Woman.” What makes that title so cryptic is that women do not have seed. Throughout the rest of the book of Genesis, we read of Noah’s seed and we read of Abraham’s seed and we read of the seed of Isaac and of Jacob, but there is no mention of the seed of the wives of those men. When used of humanity, the idea of seed was largely a masculine concept. The Greek term is *sperma* and corresponds to our English term carrying the same masculine concept.

Yet this promised one is called the seed of the woman. The rest of the prophecy shows us that this would be no ordinary man. He would do to Satan what a man does to a serpent. He would crush its head beneath His heel. He would overturn the works of the Serpent.

Jesus was that promised Seed. Why is he called by that designation? I think that at least one aspect is that He was born of a woman in a way that no other man has ever been born of a woman. It is because of the special circumstances of the virgin birth.

While Luke’s account tells the story of the birth of Jesus from the point of view of Mary, Matthew relates that same story from Joseph’s perspective. He moves directly into his narrative following the detailed genealogy.

1:18	1:19	1:20	1:22	1:24
Mary’s Situation	Joseph’s Deliberation	The Lord’s Instructions	The Prophetic Fulfillment	Joseph’s Obedience

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 1:18).

This passage tells us that Mary and Joseph had been betrothed. The Jews referred to this as the TENA’IM - the “Conditions.” On a certain day, Joseph and Mary would have gathered in the presence of family and friends. In the presence of witnesses, Joseph would give a ring to Mary along with a written document in which he promised himself in marriage. Vows would be exchanged, sealing their betrothal.

They were now considered legally married. However, the marriage would not be consummated for a year. Joseph would return to his home and Mary would continue to live in the home of her parents.

And yet, this was more than a mere engagement. The only way that a betrothal could be nullified would be through either death or divorce. The legal penalty for unfaithfulness would be the same as the penalty for adultery — death by stoning. In the event that this penalty was carried out, all of the woman's possessions would go to the husband. This stopped being merely theoretical when Mary was discovered to be with child.

...before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 1:18).

Many years ago, Paula was teaching a Sunday School class of high school girls and they came to the subject of Mary and the birth of Christ. Paula had one of those young girls wear a maternity dress to church that Sunday with a pillow secured underneath to show a bulging tummy. You can imagine the looks and double-takes when she walked into the class.

Similarly, you can imagine the small-town reaction as news of Mary's pregnancy began to be

rumored about. It is not long before the news come to Joseph. He knows that he is not the father. This can only mean one thing to him. His beloved has been unfaithful to him!

There is no indication that Joseph realized that Mary's pregnancy was due to the Holy Spirit. WE know that it was from our perspective. We can read it right here in Matthew's account. But Joseph did not know that. The Gospel of Matthew had not yet been written.

Joseph was confronted by a decision. What to do?

And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her, desired to put her away secretly. (Matthew 1:19).

Joseph had a decision to make. There was one of three things that Joseph could have done in this situation.

- a. He could denounce Mary publicly and have her stoned to death in agreement with the Law of Moses. In such a case, any dowry or possessions of her would automatically revert to him.

But Joseph did not want to do this. He had been hurt, but he was not out for revenge and he did not want to disgrace her in this way.

- b. He could divorce her privately. Remember, they were legally bound through the betrothal and that bond could only be broken through death or divorce. Because of what he considered to be unfaithfulness, he could divorce her privately in her parents' house and save her from the humiliation of condemnation and death. Indeed, it seems from the text that this is exactly what he HAD determined to do. What he apparently did not even consider was the third option.

- c. He could marry her and adopt her Child as his own. This was out of the realm of the ordinary, for few men in that day would overlook what appeared to be such unfaithfulness on the part of a bride.

He made his decision. He resolved to divorce her privately. He would do it in secret. He would write out a bill of divorcement and he would deliver it in private to her home. But the Lord had other ideas. In doing so, he would protect this girl whom he thought had been unfaithful to him.

But when he had considered this, 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 that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. ²¹ And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins."

Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, ²³ "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which translated means, "God with us."

And Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him,

and took her as his wife, 25 and kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus. (Matthew 1:20-25).

That is the story. A virgin became pregnant. Heaven leaned down and placed its most precious treasure within the womb of a young Jewish girl. The Creator took the form of the creature. God as a fetus. The Divine in diapers.

Joseph is a role-model for step-fathers. Our society doesn't have many kind things to say about step-fathers. But Joseph was a godly step-father. He adopted a child that was not her own, raised Him as his own and even taught Him his own trade.

What I want to do is to explore the implications of the Virgin Birth. What does it mean to us today that Jesus was born of a virgin?

1. The Virgin Birth Means That God Became Specific.

We knew that God was concerned with man in general. After all, God is love and He is the giver of life. It is easy to believe that God loves and even that He loves people. But to say that He loves ME — that is something else.

God could have written about His love in the sky. He could have printed the words, “I love you” in the clouds where all could read. He could have had the stars line up to broadcast that message. That would have communicated His message. But it would not have done so with the personableness that He did in the incarnation.

How specific did God get? One teenage girl and her carpenter fiancé. Two ordinary people — or so it seemed. This brings us to our second point.

2. The Virgin Birth Means That Jesus Has Both the Legal and the Moral Right to the Throne of David.

Notice how Joseph is addressed by the Angel of the Lord. He is called, “Son of David.” If we had read the first 17 verses of this chapter, we would have seen the genealogy of Joseph. It was a very distinguished genealogy. There are some exalted names here.

Abraham.
Jacob.
Judah.
David.
Solomon.

It was a kingly line. And Joseph was a descendant of King David. He was royalty. Of course, this line was no longer in power. An Idumean by the name of Herod the Great was on the throne. He is a puppet of the Roman government. But this Galilean carpenter is the true royal line of David. And he is going to take Mary's son and he will adopt him as his own. Because of this, Jesus will have the legal right to the title, “KING OF THE JEWS.”

That is not all. There is another name in that genealogy which has a special significance. It is seen in verse 11.

And to Josiah were born JECONIAH and his brothers at the time of the deportation to Babylon. (Matthew 1:11).

Did you hear about the fellow who looked up his family tree, only to find that he was the sap? Jeconiah was the sap of HIS family tree. He was one of the last kings of Judah. He is known in the Bible alternately as...

Jeconiah.
Jehoiachin.
Coniah.

His was a very short reign, lasting only a few months. Even within those few months, he did so bad that the Lord pronounced a curse upon both him and his descendants.

*Is this man Coniah a despised shattered jar?
Or is he an undesirable vessel?
Why have he and his descendants been hurled out and cast into a land that they had not known?
O land, land, land,
Hear the word of the Lord!
Thus says the Lord,
"Write this man down childless,
A man who will not prosper in his days;
For no man of his descendants will prosper
Sitting on the throne of David
Or ruling again in Judah. (Jeremiah 22:28-30).*

Do you see what God promised? He said that none of the descendants of Jeconiah would ever prosper on the throne of David.

This means that, while Joseph had the legal right to sit upon David's throne, he did NOT have the spiritual right to do so. But his adopted Son DID. Jesus is the only One who has both the legal as well as the spiritual right to sit upon David's throne. If Jesus is not the rightful Messiah of Israel, then there IS NO Messiah.

There is no second choice. There is no understudy waiting in the wings. There is no other name under heaven, given among men whereby you can be saved.

3. The Virgin Birth Means That the Prophets Were Right.

Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, ²³ "Behold, the virgin shall be with child,

and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which translated means, "God with us." (Matthew 1:22-23).

This is a quotation from Isaiah 7:14. An examination of the context of that prophecy reveals that it seems to have been fulfilled as least initially in the days in which the prophet lived.

Isaiah prophesied at a time when the Assyrian Empire was at its zenith. Their warriors had spread their reign of terror throughout most of the known world and were now threatening the lands that lay along the eastern Mediterranean. The small kingdoms along the coast were no match for the hoards from the north and they decided the only way they could resist this onslaught was to band together into a single alliance. Accordingly, Egypt, Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel formed an alliance to which they invited the southern kingdom of Judah to join. Ahaz, the king of Judah refused.

The alliance took the stance that to be separate from them was to be against them and they prepared to invade Judah and to install a puppet king of their own choosing. Suddenly Ahaz found himself surrounded by enemies on all sides. It is into this scene that Isaiah comes. He has a message. It is a message from God. The message is that the plans of this confederacy will fail.

God gives a prophecy to Ahaz. He tells Ahaz what will happen in the future. Ahaz will not be deposed. It is instead the kings who threaten him who will meet their end. Ahaz is given a sign to show the prophecy will come to pass. This sign serves as the signature of God, assuring Ahaz that the prophecy will come to pass.

Then the LORD spoke again to Ahaz, saying, ¹¹ "Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; make it deep as Sheol or high as heaven." (Isaiah 7:10-11).

God offers to let Ahaz choose what the sign will be. He can make it anything he wants. But Ahaz refuses to ask for a sign, even though God has told him to do so.

But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!" (Isaiah 7:12).

At first glance, Ahaz seems to be doing a very noble and pious thing. He gives the excuse that he does not want to test the Lord. But that is not a correct response. He is like the man who says, "I don't pray because I don't want to bother God with my petty problems." At the root of Ahaz's problem is that he is trusting in the armies of Assyria rather than trusting in the Lord.

Then he said, "Listen now, O house of David! Is it too slight a thing for you to try the patience of men, that you will try the patience of my God as well? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:13-14).

The Lord has been addressing Himself through the prophet to Ahaz. Yet something quite remarkable takes place in these verses. He speaks to the “house of David” and He switches to the plural. Though He is speaking to Ahaz, His audience is wider than Ahaz. While this might be a plural of majesty, it might be something more. It may be a clue that we are to see the words of this prophecy as having a wider audience.

Here is the sign. A virgin will be with child. She shall have a son. He will be called Immanuel. To be fair, we must point out that the Hebrew word used here does not technically mean a “virgin.” It more specifically represents a “maiden” or a “young woman.” On the other hand, the Jewish translators of the Septuagint translated this with the Greek word *parthenos* which is the specific term for a “virgin.” That translation was made over 200 years before the birth of Christ and the translators were not trying to prove a theological point. They were simply translating the text as they understood it.

The prophecy has both an initial application that was fulfilled in the days of Ahaz as well as an ultimate application in the birth of Jesus. You look at this prophecy and it speaks of a sign that was given in the days of Ahaz that brought about his political salvation and it also speaks of that which brings about our eternal salvation.

The Bible is NOT a unique book because it contains prophecy. There are other religious books which contain prophecy. But the Bible is distinctly unique in that it contains specific prophecies which were fulfilled independently of the author. Consider for a moment only those prophecies which relate to the coming of the Messiah.

- He would be a Jew from the tribe of Judah.
- He would be the Son of David.
- He would be born in Bethlehem.
- And yet He would come out of Egypt.
- And also be known as a Nazarene.
- Even the date of His coming is alluded to.
- As well as Herod's assassination attempt.

But the most unusual prophecy of all was the one that is quoted here in this chapter. He was to be born of a virgin.

There were other Jews from the tribe of Judah. And other descendants of David. And other children who were born in Bethlehem. And perhaps even some who had come out of Egypt. And who were known as a Nazarene. There might even have been some such that were born at this time in history. It is THIS prophecy which makes Him distinct. Born of a virgin. Conceived by the breath of God. And even more amazing is the fact that it was foretold by the Hebrew prophet 700 years before the birth of Jesus.

Do you see the implication? It is that our God is a God who keeps His word. He speaks and it comes to pass. He kept His word in the days of Ahaz and He also keeps His word today. That means you can believe Him when He makes a promise to YOU. He has never yet

broken a promise. He won't start with you. You can believe Him.

4. The Virgin Birth Means That God Is with Us.

Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which translated means, "God with us." (Matthew 1:23).

A little boy was out walking with his father. The father said, "Son, do you know where we are?" The son replied, "No." The father asked, "Do you know how far it is to home." And the boy admitted that he did not. "Son, do you know the direction we ought to turn if we were going home?"

"No," replied the boy. "Son, you appear to be lost," the father commented. The boy responded, "How can I be lost when you're with me?"

When the Father is with us, we may not know where we are, but we can never be lost. This is what Christmas is all about. It isn't about gifts or credit cards or wrapping paper or jolly old Santas. It is about a time when God came near. It is about a time when heaven touched earth. Because of that, earth can now know heaven.

Not everyone is all that fond of Christmas. There are a lot of people who become gloomy and depressed at that time of the year. The next time you feel that way, remember that the party is not for you. It is for HIM.

5. The Virgin Birth Means That We Have Salvation.

And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins. (Matthew 1:21).

Notice that the name "Jesus" is said to have a special significance. It is the English form of the Hebrew name Yashua (Joshua). It means "Yahweh saves." This name presupposes several things.

First, it presupposes that there are sins from which we need to be saved. Not merely mistakes. Or alternative lifestyles. Or psychological aberrations. But SINS. Active and outright rebellion against God.

We all have sinned and we all continue to fall short of that to which we were created. We are real people who commit real sins. That is the bad news.

To make it worse, our sins separate us from God. They cry out for the justice of God to judge them. He IS a just judge who will not permit sin to go unpunished.

The bad news is really bad. But the good news is really good. The good news is that we have

a SAVIOR. Not merely a good example. Or a teacher. Or a probation officer. But a SAVIOR.

Several years ago, a petroleum ship floundered and broke up in heavy seas off the coast of Puerto Rico. The derelict hull presented a hazard to navigation, so a special team was sent out from South Florida to plant explosive aboard it and sink it. One of the lieutenants under my command in the fire department was a part of that mission. They flew to San Juan and from there to the Dominican Republic where they boarded an ocean-going tug. In spite of the heavy rolling seas, they were bone-tired and they were shown to a couple of bunks and fell fast asleep.

They were wakened the next morning by a crewman rushing into the room to dig out a life jacket, don it, and rush out again. You don't need to be an expert to know this is not a good sign. They went out on deck and found that the vessel was already listing. A quick SOS was sent out and then they were in the water as their vessel sank into the depths of the sea. They were 60 miles away from land. No lifeboats. Just a few flotation devices in rough, 12-16 foot seas.

An hour passed and then two. They saw a rescue helicopter in the distance, but it passed by and was gone. An hour later they saw another, but it also passed by. The day passed. Those in the water were seasick and exhausted. They were beginning to lose hope. The sun had passed its zenith and was lowering in the west when another helicopter was spotted. It also began to pass by. And then, the pilot happened to spot the bobbing heads out of the corner of his eye. They were rescued. They were saved.

What would you think of the rescuers if they had come over those in the water and called down, "You guys are doing okay. Just keep swimming in that direction and you will be okay." This would not be a Savior. It would merely be a GUIDE. How about if the rescuers tossed down a book on "How To Swim"? This would have been a TEACHER, but not a Savior.

Perhaps one of our rescuers might have jumped into the water, demonstrated the Australian Crawl and showed the right form? This would have been an EXAMPLE, but not a Savior.

Let's say that they took the victims up into the helicopter, dried them off, and flew them halfway back to land than then pushed them out, saying, "You can make it the rest of the way on your own!" This would not be a Savior - it would be a PROBATION OFFICER.

Fortunately for them, their rescuer was not a...

Guide

Teacher

Example

Probation Officer.

They had a SAVIOR. And you have One, too. His name is Jesus. He came as a baby. But He didn't stay that way.

The virgin birth took place so that God could taken on flesh and die in our place. He took on flesh

so that He could take on the guilt of our sin. He made the supreme sacrifice. He paid the ultimate price.

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Such an act calls for a response on your part. If you have never come to Jesus Christ in faith and repentance, then I invite your response. If you are a Christian who has been caught up in the hustle and bustle that this world generates, I invite your response. If you are plagued with guilt and weighed down in sin, I invite your response. If you are feeling lost in the crowd and as though your prayers aren't getting past the ceiling, then I invite your response. I invite you to come to Him today.