

Text: Matthew 1:18-25 (Part I and II)

Title: The Birth of the King—from Joseph’s Perspective

Date/Location: Wednesday 12/30/2020, 1/6/2021, and 1/10/2021 at FBC

Introduction

During the betrothal period Mary received a message from the angel Gabriel and subsequently became pregnant by the miraculous work of God’s Spirit. Luke’s gospel tells us the events from Mary’s side, just like Luke’s genealogy focused on Mary. How would she explain this to her fiancé in such a way that he would believe her? This event was unique in all of world history. Matthew’s gospel focuses on Joseph’s perspective, just like it focused on Joseph’s genealogy.

I. The Righteousness of Joseph, v. 18-19

Truth: We should be righteous like Joseph was righteous.

“¹⁸Now 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. ¹⁹Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.”

- A. Betrothal: as binding as marriage. Typically a year-long “engagement” but they were “committed” to each other. A divorce was required to break this kind of engagement.
- B. They had not come together yet, so Joseph knew the child was not “his.” This was a real dilemma. How is a good man supposed to respond? He did not want to start off married life with an unfaithful spouse. That was a fearful possibility to him. How troubling this must have been!
- C. The phrase “of the Holy Spirit” was not evident to Joseph until after the dream. Read the sentence without that last phrase and let it sink in. It is a dark time for Joseph.
- D. The Bible tells us that Joseph was a just / righteous man and did not want to make her a public example. Here is where our thought focuses in this message: what kind of righteousness characterized

this man? How would that character affect his decision in this matter?

1. What kind of righteousness was this? It was righteousness which was associated with salvation. Joseph believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. He looked for the consolation of Israel. He knew the OT. It is would not make sense to me that God would send His Son into a family with anything less as *that* for a head of household.
2. How would this affect his behavior? The Greek text indicates that the meaning is this: *Because* Joseph was a just man, and *because* he did not want to make her a public example, he decided to put her away secretly. The first cause feeds into the second. He did not want to humiliate / disgrace her because he was a good man. And because he did not want to shame her, he decided on a course of action that would be gentle and merciful.
3. This is the opposite of the hard line that a certain kind of righteousness could take. "The law demands that an offender in such a case be stoned!" See John 8:5. They wanted to put Jesus on the horns of a dilemma. Either support their view of the Law and run against the Roman government, or deny the Law's penalty and be seen as a lawbreaker.
4. There are problems with this approach, however. **First**, the Jews did not have legal right to exercise capital punishment for law-breaking, because the Romans were occupying their territory and were the governing power. The Jews lost that power because of their unfaithfulness to God. **Second**, the Pharisees themselves were guilty of the sin they accused the woman of—just had not been caught or publicly outed (John 8:9). But that did not matter to them. **Third**, the Pharisees and scribes were operating on a purely legalistic basis. God desires mercy, not sacrifice (Hosea 6:6). He wants us to be near him not our lips only, but with our hearts also (Matthew 15:8). He calls us to a kind of righteousness with is internal, not merely external (Matt 5:28).
5. According to John 8:11, Jesus acted toward the woman in John 8 in like manner to how his dad decided to act toward Mary in

Matthew 1. There had not been a sin in Mary's case, but Joseph did not know that. But in the John 8 case, of course, there had been sin. Jesus does not sweep that under the rug. He uses it as an opportunity to tell the woman to go and sin no more.

6. So instead of the hard legalistic type of righteousness that the Pharisees had, Joseph models for us a kind, merciful, gracious righteousness. It was not necessary that Mary be stoned because the Law of Moses was inoperative at that level. He could put her out of his life quietly, with as little harm to her as possible, and find someone else who *was* faithful and pure.

E. *Because* he was righteous, he was kind. That is a key part of righteousness. Because he was righteous, he was merciful, also a key part of true righteousness. Compassion is part of righteousness. Reasonableness, gentleness, forgiveness, longsuffering, etc. are all part of righteousness. Bringing sin into your life is not part of that, however, so Joseph planned to not go ahead with the marriage. He was doing the best he could figure to handle the situation.

II. The Message from the Angel, v. 20-21

A. Some divine intervention was needed to convince Joseph of the truth of Mary's claim about an angelic messenger and a baby on the way. So God sent an angel to provide some comforting information.

B. The angel calls Joseph a "son of David." What a privileged background he had. Yet, it was stained by the disobedience of ancestors between David and himself, rebellion that sent the nation into exile, from which it still had not recovered by Joseph's time, nor has it by our own time. But Joseph was a righteous man. His righteousness led him to plan the way he did to sever the relationship with Mary in a gentle manner as we discussed above.

C. The angel told him "not to be afraid." Joseph was not to worry that Mary was or would be unfaithful, for the pregnancy was induced by the Holy Spirit. That is a completely innocent—though indeed miraculous—explanation of what was happening.

The exact phrase “do not be afraid” is repeated 50 times in the NKJV, often from God or Christ to people. Another 51 times the phrase “do not fear” is used. Over 100 times: that is reassuring. Whenever an angel or the Lord appears to people, this phrase or similar is a necessity (Daniel 10:12, Rev. 1:17). Fear and love appear together in **Deut. 10:12, 2 Tim. 1:7, 1 Peter 2:17, 1 John 4:18**, and Jud 12.

- D. The angel also told Joseph and the baby would be a boy, and he saved the parents the problem of figuring out a name. His name was to be *Jesus*. The name Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew word “yeshua” (salvation) or “yehoshua” (Jehovah saves) and also derives from the Hebrew name Joshua.
- E. The reason for this name is stated: “for He will save His people from their sins.” This is VERY SIGNIFICANT. It is the real meaning of Christmas, and the real meaning of all that Jesus did on earth, especially His self-sacrificial death and what we remember at the Table of the Lord. This connects the entire life of Jesus together in a single package from birth to death—He is the savior of all.

Jesus did not come to bring a health-and-wealth gospel or to be a good moral example or teacher for us. He came to save His people Israel from sin, and by extension, to provide for all people—Gentiles included—rescue from their sins.

Just as important is that in doing so, He restores our ability to relate to God. We are saved from sin, not just from Hell. We are also saved *to* holiness and a relationship with God through Christ that is life-enriching, life-sustaining, eternal, peace with God.

- F. Do not gloss over the fact that God was speaking to a Jewish man with a Jewish soon-to-be-wife with a Jewish baby boy on the way, Who would save His people—the Jews—from their sins. That is the meaning of the text. There are no Gentiles in this verse. To get Gentiles into the picture, we must connect the dots with other Scriptures such as Ephesians 2:11-13. Christ has come to save Gentiles as well, but firstly Jews. If you deny that or put the Jews in purgatory or punishment where God will have nothing to do with any Jews or the Jewish nation ever again, you are doing the Devil’s work (Rev. 12:13-17).

III. The Fulfillment of Prophecy, v. 22-23

- A. Matthew quotes Isaiah 7:14. The remarkable sign given to faithless King Ahaz 700 years earlier was of a virgin conceiving and bearing a son. In less than the length of time it would take for such a young child to discern right and wrong (if born in the days the prophecy was given), the military threat that was on Israel's doorstep would be removed by God.
- B. The birth of such a child did not happen 700 years earlier. It was in Joseph's day that the prophecy was coming to pass.
- C. The child would have a title "Immanuel" which means "God with us." This was a huge clue that the virgin-born baby would not be a regular human being, though He would be fully a human. Indeed, he could not be "regular" because such requires a human father. He could not be regular because He would not be a sinner. He could not be regular because He would be a perfect, infinite sacrifice for sinners. He would be fully human and also fully divine, so that the baby could truly be called "God with us."
- D. Such is the Bible's brief explanation of the doctrine of incarnation. This is "how it works." John's gospel goes into a bit more detail in 1:14 and chapter 3. But at bottom, it is a mystery. How can it be?

The incredible truth of Christianity is that God came down to humanity, Himself in the flesh. We explain how this works by a fancy phrase called the "hypostatic union." This describes how the divine nature of the Son of God and the human nature of Jesus were connected together into a single person who is our Redeemer. To say the least, it boggles the mind. But we believe based on the testimony of Scripture and its eyewitness authors that this is indeed what happened.

Note that God was not "disguised" as a man or "made merely to appear as a man." The second person of the Godhead was and still is in fact an actual human being, a man by gender. The Son of God revealed himself in humanity, to humanity, to show us exactly what God is like as close as we can understand it. We should agree that God is incomprehensible in that He cannot be known by any

finite creature *fully*. But He can be known *truly* and He can be known *well*.

IV. And so it Came to Pass, v. 24-25 [1/10/2021]

- A. A just man obeys God. That is exactly what Joseph did. He knew his dream was a word from the Lord—something that is very rare, but nonetheless Joseph knew by the combination of circumstances and the voice of the angel.
- B. So he took Mary to himself and began to live together and provide for her, but not to consummate their marriage until after the birth of Jesus. He did this to ensure the integrity of the prophecy about the virgin bearing a son. Furthermore, he obeyed in the naming of the child by assigning Him the name Jesus. He would be the “new Joshua” for His people, leading them to salvation.

Conclusions and Applications

Joseph was a just man, and Mary was a pure girl. This is the place to start if you want to be used by God—be obedient to God and righteous in your life.

Note the adoption of Jesus by Joseph. An adopted son is just as much a son as any other.

Note that no divorce happened here. For one thing, God does not like divorce. Even in an exceptional case divorce is *not required* by God.

God wanted His Son to have a human father—a functional family. If anyone had a valid reason for divorce, it was Joseph, at least until he found out what really happened. But instead, there would be a man to guide and protect the family through the harrowing experiences that would come soon with Herod out to get the child, and travel to Egypt and back to Israel. A new mom and baby need a man to take that load off them, to provide and protect.

Note that the virgin conception and birth is a fundamental of the Christian faith. If you knowingly reject the virgin birth, you are showing that you are not a genuine believer. Why? To do so denies clear Scripture here and in Isaiah 7:14. It denies the very nature of Christ as deity.

In our day, there are many who deny various of the other fundamentals of the faith, such as the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible, the deity of Christ, the substitutionary atonement, the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, the one way of salvation by grace through faith apart from works, and the second coming of Christ. Such denials are all serious signs of spiritual apostasy and lack of salvation. The Spirit of God simply does not lead His people into such error.

What does Jesus get for Christmas? It is his birthday, after all! Encourage our young ones, especially, to give themselves to Him. How to do that? Pray and tell the Lord that you would like to give Him yourself for Christmas 😊. How he wants you to do that is to listen to what He says and obey it! Second only to God's gift of His Son to us, giving ourselves to Christ is the best Christmas present of all—when someone gives themselves to the one who gave Himself for them.

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