

The Birth of Christ

Call to Worship: Isaiah 9:6-7

1st Scripture: Luke 1:26-38

2nd Scripture: Matthew 1:18-21

Hymn #147- *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*

Hymn #151- *O Come, All Ye Faithful*

Hymn #168- *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*

Introduction

Having established Jesus's genealogical connection to David and Abraham, Matthew, writing to his Jewish audience, now begins by describing the birth of the Lord Jesus, whom he has no problem calling Jesus *Christ (Messiah)* in verse 18, as he has in verse 1. Remember, the term "Christ" here, is not a last name. Matthew (just like every other NT author) is so convinced of Jesus's Messianic title and office, that he calls him, "Jesus Christ." This seemingly small or insignificant reality to our culture, a culture that blasphemes the name of Jesus on a daily basis, would have had a tremendously significant impact on a first century Jew.

I. The Birth of Christ

"Now 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" (vs. 18).

Here, Matthew gives us a far less detailed, much quicker version of how the Christ would enter this world, to fulfill His Messianic office. You'll recall, in our first Scripture reading, how Luke provides all of the details surrounding the Angel Gabriel's meeting with Mary, where he explains to her that God has chosen to bring forth the Christ through her womb, and that, by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit's power...etc. Here, Matthew gets right to the point, skipping all of those details, which were unnecessary for his audience.

However, as we will see next time, Lord willing, he will do that which is most important for his particular audience, when he connects the virgin birth to Isaiah 7:14, showing that the birth of Jesus was the redemptive fulfillment of that specific OT prophesy. You didn't always need details to convince the Jews (they were a "faith based" people), but you did need to affirm whatever it is you were seeking to prove, by Scripture. And so, that is exactly what Matthew will do here.

That said, there are two important facts, which Matthew gives here, in this first historical statement, which are worth noting:

1) Though Mary and Joseph were betrothed (that is, engaged by covenant, to be married), Joseph did not know her (Joseph was not intimate with her) until after she was already bearing Jesus the Messiah, and He was born. In other words, Jesus, did not have a natural, birth father, even though Joseph, of course, filled every other role and responsibility of a father, toward Jesus, following his birth. Jesus, the Messiah, was not conceived by the seed of a natural man. And the reason for this is critical. First, of course, his miraculous birth would be a fulfillment of the Scriptures, which again, we will consider next time, Lord willing.

But, furthermore, if the Messiah was to serve as a vicarious (a substitutionary) sacrificial atonement, on behalf of sinners; if He was to be a legitimate, legal representative and substitute for man, he could not, Himself, carry the curse of man's original sin, which all of mankind naturally inherits in Adam. He had to be pure and spotless, and without the reality, curse and effects of original sin. You see, all of mankind (including us), are sinners, because we have inherited the same fallen nature of our first father, Adam. Indeed, we share in the very guilt of his first sin, from conception. The curse and infection of sin has been propagated down to us. We sin, because we already have a sin nature. One then, who is to stand in our place, must Himself, be free from the curse of sin, if he is to bear our sins, and reconcile us to God [Note: This inward reality *was pictured* in the outward flawlessness of the animal sacrifices, which were offered, without defect, in the Old Covenant]

And so, Jesus though conceived in the womb of Mary; and though bearing every single aspect and reality of the human nature, was not conceived through the defiled seed of man. *Before* they (Joseph and Mary) came together, Mary was found with child.

2) The question is begged then, how then was Jesus formed in the womb of Mary, if not by the conception of a man's seed with Mary's egg? Matthew here tells us that "she was found with child *of the Holy Spirit*." Luke, giving us a little more information, again, tells us that the power of the Holy Spirit, overshadowed her. Now, if you want me to explain this to you scientifically, I can't, because it's never happened any other time in the history of mankind. But, I can tell you this. Somehow, the God, who spoke all of Creation into existence, by means of the

third Person of our Triune God (The Holy Spirit), fertilized Mary's egg, by supernatural means, such that, the Second Person of the Trinity (The Son), would experience a natural conception and birth through Mary, whereby, He would become fully and everything that is man; body, spirit and everything in between. And I'm leaning toward believing that our God is great enough to accomplish such a feat! And so, Mary was with child, by the Holy Spirit.

Now, if your Joseph, obviously, having not been visited by an angel, yourself (at least up to this point), you're probably not going to believe such a story. You're going to think that Mary had violated your covenant of engagement, and you're going to legally dissolve the covenant arrangement, which is what Joseph seeks to do. But, the way that Joseph does this, speaks well of the godly character of that man. Notice, in verse 19, we are told, "Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly." And so, Joseph, we are told, being a just man (a good and godly man), decides to separate from Mary, in such a way that would not make her a public spectacle. Though the appearance of adultery seemed obvious, he cared enough about Mary to protect her reputation and to graciously allow her to not have to wear the scarlet letter "A," as it were. They are in a contractual engagement, which must be legally undone, but Joseph sought to do this secretly.

However, before Joseph goes through with the separation, the Lord, of course, steps in, and has an angel appear to Joseph in a dream, to affirm Mary's testimony about what the Holy Spirit has done to her. Notice, in verse 20, we are told, "But while (*Joseph*) thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." And so, Joseph, while pondering all that was going on (probably wrestling with Mary's explanation, how exactly to proceed...etc), receives by dream, a divine affirmation concerning Mary's condition, which leads him to move forward with the marriage.

Now, before we move into verse 21, where the angel gives important details about the child that has been conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in Mary, let me just add a few reflective thoughts here, which might encourage us, yet again, as we consider the mysterious and profound ways, that our God works in His people.

Have you ever stopped and wondered why God didn't have his angel approach Joseph at the same time he approached Mary? In other words, why wait till the point that Joseph is ready to put Mary away? God could have just as easily met Joseph in a dream at the time when Mary was seen by the angel, Gabriel, but He allowed some time to pass, which would bring Joseph to the point that he was ready to put Mary away. Why? Knowing that God does all things in accordance with His perfect timing and will, at the least, we can here assume that the delay was intentional. And these kinds of delays in Scripture, can be beneficial to us, especially as we recognize that such delays are part and parcel for the Christian life. We all experience them, and we all must simply learn to trust God's perfect timing, in our own lives. We see that, if nothing else, here, in how God has dealt with Mary and Joseph.

Furthermore, at the very least, we can assume that Mary's faith was tested, as she would have been forced to wait upon God to convince Joseph, of that, which she would have absolutely no chance of convincing him of. "Well Joseph, you see, I am with child because God has miraculously caused me to conceive, because out of all people in the entire Jewish nation, and out of all historical time periods in the history of our people, I've been chosen to carry the Chosen One, the Messiah, whom we've been waiting for since the beginning of time." No, I think some special, divine revelation is going to be required to affirm that one, no matter how compelling Mary sounds. And so, no doubt, Mary's Faith was tested, and it was improved upon, when God did finally send an angel to Joseph, in a dream. And that kind of a faith affirming experience, probably went a long way, in helping to further prepare Mary to raise the Messiah.

Now, I'm sure there are certainly other providential reasons for this delay (i.e. Joseph and Mary provide two separate eye witness accounts to angelic testimony; Joseph's "just" attitude & godly integrity are shown; shows even Joseph was taking private action to put Mary away until the sudden change...etc), but suffice it to say, God has a perfect will, and He never ordains such delays, without having a very significant reason, at the least involving sanctification, perhaps involving salvation, and always involving glorifying His own worthy Name. And so, it is simply worth our taking note of that here. [Note: You can trust God in your delays. He knows and is doing what is best].

Finally then, let us move on to consider the angel's last statement to Joseph, revealing a most important detail about the child; the Messiah, who was presently being formed in Mary's womb. "But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. *And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His Name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins*" (vs. 20-21).

Can you possibly imagine hearing these words from the angel, for the first time, as Joseph? Imagine the *Eyewitness News* interview, after the fact. "Yeah, I was just a God-fearing carpenter, getting ready to marry my beloved wife, following the traditions of my people; quiet, on the poor side of the spectrum, ready to live with family in a quaint town in Nazareth, when...I find out my wife is with child, before our marriage is actually officiated (and we've never been intimate up to that point)...she swears that she was not unfaithful and that the Holy Spirit conceived the child in her...I'm ready to call things off quietly, not wanting to bring shame upon Mary, who sounds like she actually believes what she is saying...And as I sit there, my whole world caving in on me, trying to figure out how best to proceed, I'm carried off into a dream, where an angel tells me that this is indeed God's work, and that I did not have to worry about Mary having been unfaithful, and that the child we were going to raise, happens to be the Christ/Messiah, who was promised some four thousand (plus) years ago, at the beginning, when humanity's first parents fell. And if that weren't enough to shock the sandals off of me, we were to name our child, "Jesus," because He was going to save all of His people (and that would include Mary and I, by the way) from our sins. Does that kind of a dream, change a man? I should think so!" What a profound moment! Who wouldn't have loved to have been a fly on the wall during those moments, following Joseph around, as he interacted with others (including, and especially, Mary), after having that vision?

He was to be given the designated Name of "Jesus," (Yeshua), because, even as many Jews had names that carried significant meaning, this child's name served a purpose, as well. His Name would identify Him with the most significant and critical description, of the purpose, for which He came. And what's interesting here, brethren, is that we know that Jesus carries many descriptive names that describe His character and being; Lord of Lords, King of Kings,

Son of David, Son of God, Immanuel (“God with us,” as we will see next time), but the earthly name that He is given, which best sums up and highlights the most important emphasis of His life work and ministry is “Jesus,” “Savior,” “for He will save His people from their sins!” God could have called Him many things, which could have emphasized many facets of His glory; perhaps, “the King of Israel” (or of the world even). That would have had a nice ring to it. But, of all names, He wanted His Son, while on earth (while conducting His earthly ministry), to be called, “the Savior” of sinners! Wow! Let that settle in your mind for awhile!

I wonder, brethren, in all of our interactions in life; as we converse with and deal with a fallen and corrupt world around us; as we think of the filthy mess of politics, the grossness of Hollywood, the utter defilement of immorality and materialistic idolatry which constantly surround us, are we quick to present Jesus, first and foremost, as Savior? Or do we hide that title, and in our own pride and self-righteousness, only highlight the kingly and judgment aspects of our Savior? Now, don’t get me wrong, He is very much all of those things, and we ought to present Him as such, but let us certainly not eclipse the present hope that everyone has, in finding the Messiah as a “Savior”; as One, who in Himself, presents the one and only way of salvation for sinners; sinners of even the worst kind. That child in the feeding trough was to be called Jesus, for a reason. And let’s not forget that. And let’s declare Him as such!

For, He WILL, He MUST, save HIS people from their sins. What a wonderful and precious, eternal reality! God has given us a safe haven to flee to, a sign post to fix our eyes upon, a hope of forgiveness and eternal life in this Jesus! You see, we, who are in Christ, all know the terror of seeing ourselves (our lives, our actions, our thoughts, our words, our motives...etc) in the light of God’s perfect Law and holiness. We know that liars and thieves, coveters and idolaters, blasphemers and sexually immoral, haters and boasters, drunks and drug addicts, insubordinate and cheaters...and on and on; we know that such people cannot stand in the presence of our holy God! And we know that those who have committed such sins are worthy of, and will face, eternal condemnation and judgment. And when we look at ourselves; when we examine the core of our life and being, with even a shred of honesty, from even the best and most favorable of viewpoints, we see that we are caked with all manner of condemning vices! And so, any inward look, leads to a lot of defeat, hopelessness and despair! It is a

crushing look, even in our present, redeemed condition, which is yet, imperfect. But then we recall, that blessed Holy One sent by God...ahhh, His Name is “Jesus,” for He will save His people from their sins! I have hope; a solid hope and anchor for the soul, which settles me deep in the Most Holy Place of God’s heavenly tabernacle, through this beloved Savior!

How can I be so sure of this? How does the Name “Jesus,” assure me of this? Because that Name speaks, first and foremost, about the cross that lays in the shadow of the manger, on that first Christmas morning! That Name, which is above every Name, and to which every knee will bow, carries me, by faith, to a bloodied, marred, broken, unrecognizable, crucified Savior, who shouts aloud in the agony of His suffering, “It is finished!” “Paid in full!” My debt; my heap (large, enormous heap) of wretched sin and offense was planted right there on this Jesus, and He condemned it and overcame it and destroyed it, for me! He paid for it! Indeed, He took it into the grave with Him, and left it there, returning, a risen King and full of glory, for my justification! “Jesus, Name above all Names, beautiful Savior, glorious Lord! Immanuel, God is with us, blessed Redeemer, Living Word!”

“Joseph, your betrothed carries a Son... *and you shall call His Name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins*” (vs. 20-21)! And Matthew, writing to the Jews, would, in the recording of this event, say, “My kinsmen according to the flesh; my brethren, who have been given the glorious privilege of being the people of God from of old, forsake your hopeless trust in Pharisaical traditions. The good and holy Law of God, that we have been given, in its original purity and with its original intent, could itself, never save you...but rather, don’t you see it here? Your Messiah has come! The world’s Messiah has come! And He came, first and foremost, to save us from our sins! But, as long as you cling to your traditions and trust in your own law keeping and self-righteousness, you cannot receive Him. He is a stumbling block to you and to all who fail to let go of everything else, so as to lay hold of Him, by faith! He is (as we will see next time, Lord willing) your God! Flee to Him, by faith, and He will save you. And He will change you from the inside out, something the Law could never (and was never intended to) do. His Name is Jesus!

The Gospel for all!

Amen!!!

Benediction: Romans 16:25-27