

The Predicted King

Matthew 1:18-25

Introduction

The chapter opens with the genealogy of the King making sure the reader knows that Jesus is the rightful heir of His father David (vv.1-17). Now Matthew describes Jesus' divine origin (vv. 18-25). It makes perfect sense that Luke would focus on the birth of Jesus from the standpoint of Jesus' mother (Luke 1:26-56) and Matthew's gospel points to the perspective of Joseph.

The text begins with the realization of the divine will; Jesus the predicted king; the promised king would have both a natural entry and supernatural entry onto the world's stage. Joseph's distress and dilemma will require a personal revelation in order to address Joseph's fear; that Mary's pregnancy was in fact miraculous and the angel's explanation believable. Joseph is willing to bear Mary's public humiliation. This is exactly what Jesus does for us. The difference is our guilt is justified, real, actual tangible. We are not unjust victims of sin. We are guilty of sin. Yet Jesus will bear our public humiliation and our private sins.

No words of Joseph are recorded. Joseph let's his actions do his talking. Joseph will overcome his initial suspicions by careful thought; real love and divine revelation. Instead of divorce he marries; and when the angel of the Lord instructs him to take Mary and the Child to a place of safety he abandons everything and obeys.

Think about that for just a moment. Instead of abandoning his wife and the Child; Joseph stays, protects, obeys! When Joseph is instructed to return; he returns. Joseph is righteous. He hears and obeys God's Word. If righteousness means anything—it means simple prompt obedience to the Lord. Joseph lives out his divine appointment with the Savior without a lot of comment; Joseph's actions will do his talking for him.

Joseph's Deep Distress (v.18)

Matthew 1:18 (NKJV) 18 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.

Very little is said about Mary in Matthew's gospel. Only one verse is devoted to the virgin birth. You would think something this enormous would require a little more explanation. But how do you explain it? The Bible simply says; "she was found with child of the Holy Spirit."

The birth of Jesus was not accomplished by human effort or initiative. Emil Bruner wrote; "When Jesus Christ comes to anyone in history, even in his first coming to Mary, it is always the result of the Holy Spirit, not of human preparation or enterprise (Bruner p.21).

In our culture when a person is engaged to be married it implies a future marriage.

In the Jewish culture of the first century betrothal involved three things; (1) an engagement—by arrangement. Arranged marriages meant parents determined who a child would marry. (2) The

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betrothal—was a determined time—the couple agreed or disagreed with the engagement. If they agreed—the betrothal had all the strength of a marriage contract or covenant and was binding and could only be broken through the legal process of a divorce. The betrothal lasted one year. It was during that time of betrothal that Joseph discovers Mary is pregnant. (3) The marriage: this is the time of the consummation of the couple—and the text says “before they came together” that is prior to the marriage and prior to the consummation.

Mary “was found with child of the Holy Spirit.”

John MacArthur writes; “One critic has waived his fist at God and called Him an unholy liar with these words: “There was nothing peculiar about the birth of Jesus. He was not God incarnate and no virgin mother bore him. The church in its ancient zeal fathered a myth and became bound to it as a dogma.” But the testimony of Scripture stands.”

The testimony of the Scripture is that Jesus was born under supernatural circumstances. We call this the virgin birth. Catholics have seen this event as an occasion to elevate Mary to a position of equality in certain respects to Jesus Himself. Mary is the mother of Jesus in history, but she is not the mother of God in eternity. Jesus existed before Mary and all of His earthly ancestors.

“If Jesus Christ were conceived and born just as any other baby, then He could not be God. It was necessary for Him to enter this world through an earthly mother, but not be begotten by an earthly father” (Warren Wiersbe’s Commentary on Matthew; p. 13).

Joseph’s Difficult Decision (v.19)

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

Joseph (*his name means ‘may he add’*) is described as ‘a just man’. What does that mean? Obeying the Law would mean exposing Mary to the authorities. Bishop Handley Moule the great Greek scholar interpreted the word to mean one anxious to do his true duty, both religious and domestic; that means to both honor God and honor his family!

Jon Courson describes Joseph as both moral and merciful and the rarity of such a combination!

The law required a betrothed virgin who committed adultery was to be stoned to death (Deuteronomy 22:23-24).

Courson: “Had Joseph pressed charges against Mary, she would have been taken to the town squarer where she would stand in a box of manure up to her knees, and the people in the city would have thrown rocks at her until she fell face down into the box of manure. That was the penalty for immorality” (p.11).

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Joseph has no desire to expose Mary to public humiliation and disgrace.

Does Joseph love her?

The very definition of justice requires you to consider the facts and acknowledge the evidence. Joseph is just. Yet Joseph wants to spare Mary both punishment and shame!

The birth of Jesus created a crisis in the life of Joseph. The birth of Jesus created a predicament. Mary is pregnant. Joseph is not the father of the child. Does he experience the normal of emotions of jealousy, anger betrayal? How could he not be troubled or disappointed?

Did Joseph entertain the notion that Mary might be unfaithful? But Joseph loves her. Joseph has no desire to subject her to public humiliation. Joseph decides the best course of action is to divorce her quietly and secretly.

But her sin is great (at least in Joseph's unconvinced mind). But Joseph seems to genuinely love her and reveals a deep desire to protect her! Doesn't the Bible say that love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8)?

How many couples face the challenge of a virgin birth? Well none. But the birth of Jesus creates a predicament in every person's life. In what way? The birth of Jesus forces us to make a decision about Christ—and His claims.

The coming of Jesus will often produce a dilemma, a quandary. In baseball when a runner is trapped between the bases they find themselves in a pickle. Going back may not be possible; going forward may mean you are tagged out.

Making a decision about Christ and his claims will often put you at odds with the popular culture's views of science and culture and philosophy.

Victor Raymond Edman used to say; "Never doubt in the dark what God has told you in the light."

Poor Joseph needs light!

Joseph's Dramatic Dream (vv.20-25)

20But 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.

What does Joseph do? He begins to think about his crisis and consider the predicament. The solution will require a special revelation.

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Joseph is moral and merciful but he is also logical and mystical! Joseph is a thinker and a dreamer. In what way? The angel says; “do not be afraid”—I suspect because he was afraid. Joseph is going to face an uphill battle! This is more than just an explanation about an unwanted pregnancy. Joseph is going to face trial and persecution. The child will be hated by both the political (Herod) and religious authorities.

Would you marry a pregnant woman knowing you are not the Father? God was preparing Mary’s womb and Joseph’s heart!

The special revelation would serve several purposes. The angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream. The angel calls Joseph by name and ancestry. Joseph was called by God to serve as the earthly father to the unborn child. The source of Mary’s pregnancy is “the Holy Spirit”.

The special revelation will include assurance; guidance; explanation and of course information about the future destiny of the child.

Once again the average Christian is rescued by revelation!

21 And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”

The Lord picked out the name Jesus. Savior. He will save. The Hebrew form is Joshua or Yeshua or Yasha. It means Jehovah is Salvation. The central meaning is deliverance from some terrible disaster that leads to perishing. Have you ever met someone whose name fits them? This is exactly the meaning here; Jesus’ name and mission are the same. He really is God and he really will save. His name was common and human but still divine.

The expression “*he will save His people*” is significant. The implication suggests there are those who are not His people. The revelation is not meant to exclude people who want to be his people; for in the New Testament we do not see a single example of anyone wanting to come to Christ *on Christ’s terms rejected*. The mission of Jesus is to save people from their sins so they can join a saved community (the church). **The real enemy is sin. The real issue is sin. How will Jesus save the people from their sin?**

John 10:26-27; “But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. (27) “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.”

In what way will Jesus save His people from their sins? The Lord Jesus will save from the penalty of sin; and the power of sin; and the bondage of sin; and the guilt of sin; and in a profound and ultimate sense—from the consequences of sin—that is punishment, condemnation, God’s judicial pronouncement of guilt resulting in eternal separation from God. There are several interesting passages of Scripture (Rev.14:4) where Christ is said to redeem believers

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“from among men (worldly men)”. We as Christians are called out of this world, redeemed from the market place of sin; we are called to a life of separation—we live away from sin, above sin; to conquer sin to live victoriously over sin.

22 So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying:

The birth of Jesus fulfills prophecy. The supernatural revelation given to Joseph is confirmed by the testimony of prophecy given in the Old Testament.

The basic elements of prophecy given are; (1) Prophecy is the Word of the Lord (not the opinions, speculations, musings of men). The future is revealed by God not by men. (2) the prophet is simply the messenger, not necessarily God’s Press Secretary. (3) Prophecy must be fulfilled. It will always come to pass.

23 “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us.”

The critic and skeptic says; this didn’t happen. Poor Joseph. What the angel said in your dream is fantasy, wishful thinking of a jilted lover trying to come up with an explanation that doesn’t involve stoning your fiancée. Doesn’t one of the dusty scrolls of Isaiah hint at a supernatural birth that may provide a plausible Biblical way to go forward in our relationship?

Was Jesus really born under supernatural circumstances?

The Bible says yes! Matthew cites several things; Matthew says; “This is how the birth of Jesus Christ (not simply Jesus, but Jesus Christ—the Hebrew Messiah) came about. Mary was found with child by the Holy Spirit (v.18). What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit (v.20). Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled ‘Behold a virgin shall conceive and shall bring forth a son. They will call Him Immanuel “God with us” (v.23).

Matthew presents these facts to confirm the Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Were there some who misunderstood or misinterpreted the Old Testament prophecies? Were there Jews who expected a Messiah born ‘the normal way’? One of the repeated slanders leveled to the Christians was that Jesus was born out of wed-lock!

Matthew says; not so. Isaiah 7:14; “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel”.

Jesus is God manifest in the flesh. The name is not simply a descriptive title—but a descriptive term. It characterizes a person. Jesus is Immanuel. Jesus is God with us. Jesus is God revealed in human form.

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In the early centuries false views of the Incarnation sprouted like dastardly dandelions on the lawn of Biblical orthodoxy. The Ebionites denied the reality of Jesus' divine nature. It was refuted in the opening passages of John's gospel; 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' (John 1:1).

The Gnostics denied the reality of Jesus' human nature. The Gnostic error is refuted in the first verse of John's epistle (I John 1:1); "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life".

The Arians affirmed Jesus' pre-existence but denied His Deity (Like modern Jehovah's Witnesses).

There was a group called the Nestorians who believed two distinct persons comprised Christ—a human person and a divine person. The Eutychians went to the opposite extreme and said both natures—the human and the divine—mingled to make a third and totally different nature from the first two. Augustus H. Strong in his Systematic Theology offers the true view of the incarnation: "In the one person, Jesus Christ, there are two natures, a human nature and a divine nature, each in its completeness and integrity, and these two natures are organically and indissolubly united, yet so that no third nature is formed thereby".

Does it really matter whether Jesus was born of a virgin?

I think the answer is yes.

1. The Scriptures predicted that a virgin would give birth to a child (Isaiah 7:14). The Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel". Isaiah says; 'sign'. A sign not easily faked by pretenders. If the Bible is wrong about the virgin birth; how can we be sure it is right about the resurrection?

2. Jesus is God. Does that mean a virgin birth was absolutely necessary? Could God have come some other way? Does an eternal self-existent being require anything if He desires to acquire a new nature—a human nature? Perhaps God could become a man absent a human host. But the Bible makes it clear that the Messiah would be human and related to Adam and Noah and Abraham and David. God chose this way.

3. Jesus is man (human). This was very important to the early church fathers. Jesus was a real human being; born from a real human mother.

4. Jesus was a human being with no sin. If Jesus had two human parents; it is difficult to see how he could have been spared the curse of Adam's sin. The sinless nature of Jesus was absolutely vital to our salvation (see 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22; Heb. 4:15).

5/ The nature of grace. If salvation is by God's act; not human effort; then the birth of Jesus is in one sense—like our own; by the Holy Spirit.

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Can you be a Christian and not believe in the Virgin birth? You can be a Christian and be wrong! You can be a Christian and be deceived. I suppose it might be possible! But let's look at the facts. The Bible teaches the virgin birth—and therefore you would have to reject the Bible's revelation! Rejecting God's Word is a serious matter. Rejecting God's Word leads to compromise and compromise leads to disobedience in other areas. On what basis would you reject the Bible's testimony? You might say; "Gino—on the basis that virgins don't give birth to children." I would say; "Dead people do not come back to life." Why then believe in the resurrection?" If Jesus was not born of a virgin—then the Scriptures are false. The early creeds of Christendom are false. Since all contain the words; "I believe in Jesus Christ. . .conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary" (The Apostle's Creed).

Does the Christian who has experienced the new birth find a resurrection impossible? Does the Christian who has received Christ find the opening verse of Genesis impossible to believe? If God can make a new creation in Christ—is anything impossible? "The personal miracle makes the historical miracle credible" (Bruner). A converted mine worker was asked if he truly believed that Jesus turned water into wine. He replied; "I don't know if he really changed water into wine; but I know he has changed beer into furniture. I stopped drinking. I started taking care of my family."

24Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife,

Joseph will receive a special call and accept that call and obey that call. Most won't. "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt.20:16).

Who does God call? The Bible says that God has chosen the foolish to confound the wise. Not many wise, not many noble (1 Cor.1:26-27).

25and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus.

Some faith traditions have Mary as a perpetual virgin. But the text doesn't support that position. The fact that Matthew adds; "and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son" assumes that other children were born to him and to Mary during the course of their life together as husband and wife.

Joseph is not simply dealing with an unplanned pregnancy or an unwed mother. The shock and embarrassment at first was more than Joseph could bear (v.20).

Even Mary was shocked and amazed by the angel's revelation that she was the chosen vessel to bear the child; "How shall this be, since I am a virgin" (Luke 1:34).

Virgin's don't give birth to babies. It would require a supernatural intervention.

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But isn't that exactly what you would expect if God did in fact visit us? Why wouldn't you expect the Messiah to be born under unusual circumstances?

Joseph's predicament (vv.18-19) required a special revelation from God (vv.20-21); a serious and persuasive appeal to prophecy (vv.22-23); and a radical obedience within Joseph (v.25)!

Joseph will obey God! Mary is pregnant. They are not married. How much gossip did this generate? How much suspicion did this generate? What did Joseph and Mary tell their families? What did they say to their friends? Would people believe the unbelievable? Would a strange dream or angel's message or ancient prophecy persuade them?

Conclusion

What are the claims of Christ that have placed you in an unwanted predicament?

What is the revelation that will safely guide you out of that predicament?

Will that revelation lead you to prompt and patient obedience to God?