

Jesus: A Present King

Matthew 1:18-24

*“...you shall call his name **Jesus**, for he will save his people from their sins.”*

Introduction: Christmastime always presents a fascinating juxtaposition of realities, especially when it comes to popular and treasured music. Turn on any radio station, Spotify or Pandora, or downloaded albums and you will hear a **sacred/secular jumble of ideas** – from sacred renditions of “O Holy Night” by Mariah Carey or Carrie Underwood, to the same artists singing about “Santa Baby” and Rudolph on the next track. But you also have millions of people singing the message of the gospel, in family gatherings to business parties, without realizing the saving power of good news that fall from their lips. Some of the most timeless Christmas songs were written hundreds of years ago and contain some of the sweetest, deep, Biblically saturated lyrics in hymnology. Consider the 2nd and 3rd verses of “**Hark the Herald Angels Sing**”

*Christ by highest heav'n adored,
Christ the everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold Him come,
Offspring of a Virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,
Hail the incarnate Deity,
Pleased as man with man to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel.
Hark! The herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King!”*

*Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings,
Ris'n with healing in His wings.
Mild He lays His glory by,
Born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.
Hark! The herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King!”*

The words of this beloved classic were penned in **1739 by Charles Wesley** (who also wrote “And can it be” and “Christ the Lord is Risen Today” among many others) and then set to music in 1753 by **George Whitfield**. The Wesley brothers, known for founding the Methodist church and for revival in England believed in preaching and singing Biblical truth people’s hearts and minds would be transformed with the true knowledge of their sin and the good news of the gospel. We believe the same thing today! This song drips with gospel truth, but is often missed by so many.

As we come into the Christmas season we are keenly aware of our hearts ability to drift into the **tyranny of familiarity**. We sing familiar songs, read well known stories, and practice well worn traditions, but we can MISS the core of Christmas which is a focus on Jesus Christ coming in the flesh, the eternal King living among mankind. Our goal this December, as it is every day, week, month, and year, is to see and savor Jesus Christ. The central message we want to contemplate today comes from the same passage Charles Wesley considered in his timeless poem from **Matthew 1**, with the key verse being:

*“She will bear a son, and you shall call his name **Jesus**, for he will save his people from their sins”*

Advent signals an arrival, and at Christmas we anticipate the arrival of the King to the earth the first time, with an eye toward an arrival yet to come. Our hope is that this will provide true **hope for sinners, rest for believers, and an opportunity to glorify our God in the highest.**

JESUS SAVES THE LEAST & LOWLY (Matt. 1:1-6)

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**

Genealogy??!!!! Why start with genealogy? These are lists we often skip over in our reading or assign to people that picked the short straw to read in public! But there is great purpose and meaning in genealogy, and Matthew starts his book intentionally for a Jewish audience to demonstrate that Jesus is the Jewish nations long awaited Messiah, but also to strategically show Jesus' unique birth. A few quick observations to make about this particular:

- There is an emphasis on the Kingly line of David – Notice in verse 1, 6, and 20, David is emphasized as the Father of Jesus, he was the king, and Joseph was a son as well. Jesus had a right to the throne through His adopted father Joseph.
- There is a clear emphasis on “*father of*” until we get to v. 16. Notice that here the rhythm is broken and emphasis is on the fact that Joseph was the **husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, NOT the Father of Jesus.**
- It was not without precedent but certainly unusual to include women in a genealogy, and Matthew include **4 women in the record** that teach us a great deal about the heart of God and the salvation of sinners.

Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and the wife of Uriah (we know her to be Bathsheba) all represent the lavish **grace of God given to sinners.** Each of these women were **GENTILES** (Tamar was most likely a Canaanite), non-Jewish relatives of Jesus. These would have been excluded from the covenant God made with Israel (Deut. 7:6-7), yet were each given a highly esteemed place in the historical map of Jesus' lineage. A quick biography of each paints a phenomenal picture of God's grace:

TAMAR (Genesis 38) – The story, like a lot of the OT, is R-rated. Judah, the son of Jacob and the one of a Promised line, took a Canaanite wife and bore him 3 sons. He took a wife for his oldest son named Tamar. But his son, with the unfortunate name of “Er”, was wicked, so God killed him. According to the Law, Tamar was transferred to the second son Onan, but he was wicked as well, so God killed him too. Not wanting to be sonless, Judah did NOT give Tamar to his youngest named Shelah, but instead kept Tamar a widow. When Judah's wife died, he sought comfort in another city. When Tamar found out Judah was in Timnah, she dressed as a **prostitute, covering her face**, and was approached by Judah for her services. To work out payment, Judah offered his **signet, a cord, and his staff** to prove the transaction. She then went back home, and in 3 months it was found out that she was 3 months pregnant. Judah was indignant and sought to have her burned, **UNTIL she produced the property of Judah himself** (we so easily get indignant about OTHER peoples sin more than our own, don't we!!!). Out of this sinful relationship came Perez, who is in Matthew's genealogy.

RAHAB (Joshua 2; Hebrews 11:31) – Rahab was a career prostitute in a pagan city, but was saved when by faith, she rescued the spies of Israel from sure capture and death.

RUTH – A whole book is devoted to her story, but she was a **Moabitess**, a people that God had cursed because they were inhumane to Israel in the desert, not even offering water, and for hiring Balaam to

curse Israel (Deut. 23:3-4). Because of this, not Moabite could enter the assembly of the LORD, even to the 10 generation. Ruth was from a despised and cursed nation.

BATHSHEBA (2 Sam. 11) – Bathsheba was sought after and brought in by KING DAVID, where they committed adultery, producing a child who would die as a result. The whole chapter tells of David's deception, willing to kill a righteous man and his own soldiers to cover up the salacious affair.

So what is so remarkable about these?

1. **The Bible is remarkably honest about life** – If God wanted to sanitize the history of Jesus, He could of. But the Bible deals in the real world, with real people, and real sin/brokenness. History is written by those who conquer, and Matthew could have left out these characters or the circumstances of their life, but that would minimize God's GRACE. Where sin abounds, grace abounds much more!!! (Romans 5:20)
2. **God can save anyone, and He does not have any "second-class" children** – Not only were these women included in Jesus' lineage, they were brought into God's covenant people. Take Rahab. She was a career sinner, but was saved from destruction and was brought into the nation. That would have been a great story, but it goes further. Rahab married **Salmon**, and they together fathered Boaz. But Rahab's father in law named **Nahshon** was described as *the "prince of the sons of Judah"* (1 Chron. 2:10-11). Rahab not only became a follower of YHWH and a citizen, but she became a princess! When we are scrubbed clean by the blood of Christ, we are made to be NEW CREATIONS (2 Cor. 5:17) and our identity is NOT in our past or our sin, but in Christ alone. We are not branded by our past or destined to continue in its path. God sees us through the lens of Christ's righteousness, not our sin.
3. **God is NOT ashamed of our sin or past, even though we may be** – Far too many Christians live in shame and guilt of their past, both things they have done and sin that may have been done to them. Shame keeps us away from joy, intimacy, freedom, rest, and fellowship. Shame builds a wall around our past, trying to put something in a vault that God wants to heal. Matthew listed out women and men who had sordid pasts, but who also had glorious futures. When Jesus came to save His own, He not only offered forgiveness of sin but **freedom from shame and guilt!** There is NOTHING you have done or has been done to you that Christ cannot wash clean, look you in the eye, and declare His love for you. He brings us into FULL fellowship and relationship, as children of the KING. The gospel of Jesus, the gospel at Christmas, declares we can deal, maybe for the first time, with the sin that has been weighing us down, keeping us away from joy, and feeling hopeless, and allows us to know the REST that can be had in the loving salvation Jesus brings.

JESUS' BIRTH SIGNALS NEW BIRTH FOR HOPELESS SINNERS (1:18-23a)

*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,*

We'll see that Matthew goes out of his way to prove a point about the birth of Jesus: He was born **of a virgin**, without a father, and that directly affects His ability to be our Savior. So it begs the question: **why is the virgin birth so important?**

Back in 2005, Rob Bell wrote in his popular book *Velvet Elvis* about the virgin birth:

*"What if tomorrow someone digs up definitive proof that Jesus had a real, earthly, biological father named **Larry**, and archeologists find Larry's tomb and do DNA samples and prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that the virgin birth was really just a bit of mythologizing the Gospel writers threw in to appeal to the followers of the **Mithra** and **Dionysian** religious cults that were hugely popular at the time of Jesus, whose gods had virgin births? But what if, as you study the origin of the word 'virgin' you discover that the word 'virgin' in the gospel of Matthew actually comes from the book of Isaiah, and then you find out that in the Hebrew language at that time, the word 'virgin' could mean several things"*

Rob has proven to be a heretic, but he illustrates an important principle: *the Virgin birth will always be attacked by our enemy, in both denying the virgin birth or minimizing it.* Mithra and Dionysian were stories in both Greek and Roman mythology of gods being born without a man and woman...even Star Wars carried this type of mythology. Why? Because Satan will always try to offer a counterfeit to the truth, and if Jesus could be proven or believed to be a **mere man from a common birth, the hope of salvation would be lost.** So clarifying this truth is a matter of eternal life and death.

Issue #1 – Does the text clarify the Virgin Birth?

Mary and Joseph were **betrothed to be married**, meaning they had an agreed upon contract drawn up by the two families that signified a legal marriage. This would hold for up to a year as the bride prepared herself for marriage and the couple proved their chastity. They would NOT consummate the marriage until the *chuppah*, the weeklong wedding celebration. If a woman was found to have broken her sexual purity, OT law required her death (Deut. 23:24), which most likely had become lax in practice by this time, but would have meant a very public and shameful legal divorce. When news came out that Mary was pregnant, it would have been salacious, scandalous, and a future husband and current fathers sad reality. I'm sure Mary's plea of "it wasn't a man, it was God" fell on deaf ears, so an angelic messenger was needed.

As the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, he told him the shocking and monumental news: the baby was a result of **the Holy Spirit, not a man**. HOW this happened we do not know, but THAT it happened is obvious in the text. The same Spirit that hovered over the face of the waters in Creation (Gen. 1:2) and the same Spirit who ignited the formation of the Church (Acts 2:4) was the same Spirit who gave life inside Mary.

Then Matthew said that all of this was to fulfill a seemingly obscure prophecy from **Isaiah 7:14**, which was a prophecy and sign given to king Ahaz of Judah. Ahaz was being pressed by Israel in the North and Syria from the East and his courage was failing, so God gave him a **sign of a future occurrence where a virgin would conceive one who would be called Immanuel**. Truth be told, if that is all we had, it would be tough to see how that would apply to Messiah, and yet Matthew clearly does. Many have argued (like Rob Bell) that the word used in Isaiah was "Almah", which could mean "young woman", but Matthew translates the word as "*parthenos*", which absolutely means *virgin*.

On top of all of this, it is clear that Mary stayed a virgin **UNTIL** after Jesus was born, and then she and Joseph functioned like a normal married couple, including bearing multiple children. (1:25; 12:46; 13:55 – at least four sons).

Issue #2 - Why is the Virgin birth (or virgin conception) so vital to salvation?

Maybe this is a simple and obvious question, but is often missed at Christmas and every other time.

- **Every person is born with a sin nature and sin BECAUSE we are sinners** – King David said in Psalm 51:5 that he was brought forth in iniquity, not because his mom was adulterous, but because he was conceived with a sin nature. In this, we stand condemned and in need of salvation. This is also why the Bible is clear that NO ONE is good or righteous (Rom. 3:10).
- **We needed a replacement, a Savior, to take our place and pay for our sin** – Because of our sin and inability to glorify God (Rom. 3:23), we needed something or someone OUTSIDE of ourselves to solve our sin problem.
- **Jesus had to have a different birth in order to fulfill all righteousness** – The only one who could save us had to die in our place as a man, yet had to be righteous enough for that sacrifice to be effective. Jesus was born into humanity, taking on flesh and living life JUST LIKE you or me, EXCEPT he was unique in his conception so that He did not possess a sin nature. Hebrews says it this way:

Hebrews 4:15 – *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, **yet without sin**”*

Hebrews 7:26-27 – *“For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a **high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.** 27 He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself”*

Jesus was both JUST and JUSTIFIER (Rom. 3:26) since He was both man and divine, perfect in all ways. His life, death, and resurrection overcame our sin, so that God could look at Him and be satisfied, and when we believe by faith, repent of our sin, and ask for forgiveness, God counts our sin against Him while we get His righteousness applied to us. This is the good news of Christmas, and allows Him to **save His people from our sin.** But the story does NOT stop there!

JESUS' GREAT PRESENT IS HIS PRESENCE (1:23b-25)

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.*

As I get older, I understand what my parents will always say: the best present they can get is when the family gets together. Presence matters. We are embodied creatures and being able to BE WITH those we love is a precious gift. So when Jesus was given the name “**Immanuel**”, it signaled that God was not a distant God but one who entered into intimate and loving relationship with His own.

Here is what we celebrate at Christmas: His arrival the first time signals His arrival the second. WE did not get to experience His loving leadership and care the first time, but take it all by faith. Jesus told us that He would never leave us or forsake us, but that He would **be with us always, to the end of the age** (Matt. 28:20), and He delivered on that promise through the arrival of the Holy Spirit who indwells every believer. But there will be a day in the future that we will see Jesus, and He will dwell with us.

I bring you back to the betrothal of Joseph and Mary. In Jewish custom, they would have a contract/covenant, followed by a time of waiting which was for purifying and preparation. There would be a fetching of the bride, a ceremony, and then a bringing her into a home to begin a new life together. Christmas signals that we are in a time of **betrothal with Christ, awaiting our groom to come for us to live with us in a home He has prepared for us.** Until that day, we prepare, purify, and anticipate His arrival back, since it is sure. It is why **1 John 3:2-3 is so hopeful for us:**

*Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, **because we shall see him as he is.** 3 And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure*

He will purify us and dwell with us...forever. Salvation and presence, rescuing so we can be together, becoming like us to bring us to Himself is the message of Christmas. May this hope fill us with joy at Christmas and everyday.