THE KING ARRIVES

Matthew 1:18-25.

Well, the Christmas season is upon us again. I love this time of year. I love listening to and singing Christmas carols. I just love Christmas and the Christmas story. It never ceases to amaze me that God, the Son, Creator of the entire universe (John 1:3) would leave the glory of heaven, come down here to this sinful, dirty old earth, take on human flesh and eventually suffer and die so that you and I could be saved. What amazing love! So undeserved! I hope the reality of John 3:16 never gets old to you – that God loved us so much that He sent His only Son that if we simply by faith believe in Him, we will not perish, but instead, we will have eternal life.

Today’s lesson will be in Matthew Chapter 1. We will only be covering a few verses, familiar to us, but packed with a lot of theology. So let me begin by reading them. READ Matthew 1:18-25.

The Bible tells us that Jesus had a human genealogy, which is covered in the first 17 verses of Matthew. The Bible also says that Jesus had a divine lineage. He is the God Man. READ Matthew 1:18. The word translated as “birth” here in this verse is the same Greek word (*genesis*) that is translated as “genealogy” in Matthew 1:1. So Jesus’ human ancestry (which Matthew traces thru Joseph) is laid out for us in verses 2-16 and it shows that Jesus was from a royal blood line. His direct ancestry included Abraham, David, Solomon and the kings of Judah. By the way in Luke’s gospel we are given Jesus’ lineage traced thru Mary. Her line included Abraham and David, but then it ran through a different son of David. So Jesus’ royal lineage came through Joseph. In verse 18 we see His divine lineage laid out for us – short and sweet – “from the Holy Spirit.” So Matthew shows us that Jesus is both man and God, human and divine.

Verse 18 also talks alludes to “the Virgin Birth.” It says, “before they (Mary and Joseph) came together she (Mary) was found to be with child.” Mary became pregnant before she and Joseph had sexual relations. How could this be? Conclusion: either Mary got pregnant by another man other than Joseph (this is what Joseph concluded initially) or Mary became pregnant, as Matthew says explicitly here, “from the Holy Spirit.” So which is it? I believe what Matthew says – I take it by faith – that Mary did indeed get pregnant by an act of the Holy Spirit.

There are some even in evangelical circles who do not believe in the Virgin Birth. Well, I have news for you. If you do not believe in the Virgin Birth then you do not believe the Bible. Because the Bible is clear on this issue.

The Virgin Birth is a fundamental Christian doctrine and it has always been. The Nicene Creed (Constantinople, AD 381) says, “We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: **by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man**…” The Apostles’ Creed (AD 700) states: “I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord, who was **conceived by the Holy Spirit,** **born of the Virgin Mary**, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried…”

So, why is the Virgin Birth so important? Wayne Grudem (Systematic Theology, 530) I think puts it well. This is what he says: “God, in his wisdom, ordained a combination of human and divine influence in the birth of Christ, so that his full humanity would be evident to us from the fact of his ordinary human birth from a human mother, and his full deity would be evident from the fact of his conception in Mary’s womb by the powerful work of the Holy Spirit.”

If Jesus had no human parents then He would not have been a man at all. He would not have “become flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). We would not “have known Christ according to the flesh” (2 Cor 5:16). He could not have “sympathized with our weaknesses” (Heb 4:15). He could not have “died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God” (1 Pet 3:18). On the other hand, if Jesus had two human parents then He would have been contaminated by the sin of humanity. No, instead, Jesus was born of a sinner (Mary) and yet he was sinless because He was equally born of God. As John MacArthur puts it: “Deity cancelled humanity’s curse.”

Mary conceived miraculously by God Himself. Conception by the Holy Spirit had never happened before and it has never happened since. It was a one-time deal. In Galatians 4:4 Paul says, “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman.” There is no mention of a human father because God was His Father. A few years ago when our granddaughter Memphis was only three she remarked, “Joseph was Jesus’ step-father.” You know, that’s not a bad way to look at it.

Well, look at Joseph’s response to Mary’s pregnancy. READ Matthew 1:19. One can only imagine the hurt and confusion that Joseph must have felt. When Mary became pregnant Joseph must have thought that Mary had been unfaithful to him and he faced a dilemma. During the betrothal period fidelity was required, as the couple was regarded as husband and wife. The punishment for the infidelity of the wife (adultery) under the Law (Deut 22:23-24) was death by stoning. By Jesus’ day this was no longer the standard practice. However, publicly shaming someone for their indiscretion was quite common.

Betrothal (engagement) was like being married without sexual union so to break it required a legal divorce. I want you to notice the kind of man that Joseph was. He was a good man, a just man, a righteous man. He was faithful to live up to God’s guidelines and keep His commandments. It was Joseph’s righteousness that motivated him to spare Mary any public embarrassment. Rather than get angry with Mary and disgrace her publicly, Joseph treated her kindly. He cared about Mary and her feelings. He decided to protect her and keep the divorce secret.

It was at this point that God in His sovereign providence and wonderful grace intervenes. READ Matthew 1:20. This verse emphasizes again the divine nature of Christ’s birth. The angel’s words provide us with the essential truth of the Virgin Birth. Jesus would have an earthly mother making him fully human, but a heavenly Father making him fully God.

Notice that the angel addresses Joseph as “son of David.” Joseph was a direct descendant of King David. The angel tells Joseph to not put Mary away, don’t divorce her, but follow through in your commitment to be her husband.

The angel tells Joseph that she conceived by the Holy Spirit. Then the angel gives Joseph a few more important details. READ Matthew 1:21. The name Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua. It literally means, “YHWH (Jehovah) will save us.” In the Jewish culture names are significant. They define who you are. In the angel’s announcement, Jesus’ mission is defined. He came to save us. Jesus tells us in Luke 19:10 (speaking of Himself): “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

Matthew now adds a commentary to let his predominately Jewish readers know that this was a fulfillment of O.T. prophecy. Last week I mentioned that Matthew’s purpose for writing his Gospel was to show that Jesus of Nazareth was the long-awaited Messiah-King – the One foretold by the O.T. prophets. Some 22 times Matthew shows how Jesus fulfilled an O.T. prophecy concerning the Messiah. Here we have the first of these…

READ Matthew 1:22-23. The prophecy spoken about here comes from Isaiah 7:14. [Context in story of Judah’s evil king Ahaz who worried about an attack by the Assyrian Empire] Amazingly, most Jews recognized this as a prophecy that pertained to the birth of their future Messiah. They knew His birth would be unique and most rabbis acknowledged that their Messiah would be born of a virgin and have no earthly father.

The story in Matthew Chapter 1 demands a similar response – to trust in God rather than in man. According to verse 23 the name Immanuel means, “God with us.” When Jesus came to earth it wasn’t like He was merely a God-sent prophet or a divine messenger. He was God. He was God in human flesh. He was God with us. He became one of us!

What was Joseph’s response? Was there any doubt in his mind about what the angel told him? Apparently not. Look at verse 24. READ Matthew 1:24. Joseph obeyed the word he received from God. It says that he arose from his sleep. I believe he told Mary about what the angel had told him and pledged again his commitment to her and to the child. I can just imagine Joseph’s relief and excitement!

READ Matthew 1:24-25. Matthew points out that Mary remained a virgin after her marriage to Joseph until after Jesus was born. Joseph did not defile the perfect seed of the Holy Spirit inside Mary. Finally, Joseph followed through God’s instruction and named the baby, Jesus (Jehovah will save us).

My hope and prayer is that this year we will keep Christ at the center of Christmas. He is the one and only hope this world has. He is the Savior, the King, God with us. He left heaven, came to earth and as Peter said, “He died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God.” That is the story of Christmas.

 Just a closing thought: During this time of year you will hear a lot about “Peace on earth” and “good will toward men.” I have news. According to the proclamation of the heavenly host in Luke 2:14, peace on earth will only be a reality “with whom God is pleased.” It’s funny. People conveniently leave that last phrase out. The truth is that without Jesus at the center of our lives, there can be no peace with God or with man.