

THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST

Matthew 1:18-25

Key Verse: 1:21

“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

In chapter 1, verses 1-17, Matthew reviewed 42 generations of God’s people to proclaim that God is faithful. God promised to send a Savior, and God kept his promise. Though his people are unfaithful and sinful, God is faithful. Praise God! Now, in verses 18-25, Matthew focuses on one family to reveal how Jesus Christ was born. God used the faith and obedience of Joseph and Mary. God used ordinary people who loved and obeyed him. Mostly, we learn who Jesus is. Jesus is the Savior sent by God. And Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. Let’s accept him today.

First, a Jesus-centered house church (18-21;24-25).

Look at verse 18. “This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.” Matthew tells us, in a nutshell, the human situation of Joseph and Mary, and how God began to work in them. Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph. Mary’s heart might have danced with joy and excitement as she prepared the day of her wedding. Perhaps she secretly read the Song of Songs, “How beautiful you are, my darling! O, how beautiful! Your eyes behind your veil are doves. Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from Mount Gilead” (SS 4:1). After daydreaming for a few minutes, she would suddenly come back to her senses and laugh to herself. But one day something happened to interrupt her daydream. An angel of the Lord appeared to her with a message: She was chosen as the mother of the Messiah. It was the great blessing of God. Yet it required an immediate decision of faith. Mary did not hesitate. She accepted God’s grace and plunged her life into the providence of God. Then the Holy Spirit came upon her, and baby Jesus was conceived.

Verse 18 says that Mary was found to be with child. This suggests that Mary did not tell Joseph. Rather, Joseph discovered it through the obvious change in her body shape. Joseph could only conclude that Mary’s pregnancy was a result of unfaithfulness.

How did Joseph respond? Look at verse 19. “Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.” Joseph was a righteous man. He saw this event in God. He remembered that he and Mary had both made a pledge before the holy God. Perhaps they had a public ceremony before the elders of their community. Therefore, Mary’s act was not just a breach of faith with Joseph, it was sin against God. So Joseph did not take it personally. An egocentric man would have been overwhelmed by a sense of injustice and become self-righteous. We remember Judah. When he heard that his daughter-in-law Tamar was pregnant by prostitution he said, “...have her burned to death,” not realizing he was the father. Joseph was different. Joseph thought about this event in God. So he did not become emotionally unstable; he maintained objectivity. Since Mary was not right with God, he could not accept her.

Joseph’s application of the law was tempered with mercy. Joseph decided to divorce her quietly. Joseph could have insisted on the full measure of justice and treated Mary harshly. He could have publicly disgraced Mary, making her like Hester in Hawthorne’s novel, *The Scarlet Letter*. For pious Mary, this might have been worse than a death sentence. But Joseph wanted to spare Mary from public disgrace. So he decided to divorce her quietly. We learn from Joseph how to make godly decisions in a crisis. First, we must see things in God, and in light of his law. We must be willing to carry out God’s law, though it is unpleasant and costly. Second, we must think of others before ourselves. Then we can make a sound decision in the sight of God.

Look at verse 20. “But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.’” It seems that Joseph had not told anyone about his decision. Still, God knew his heart. To God, Joe’s decision making process was pretty good, but his conclusion was wrong. Joseph did not recognize the work of the Holy Spirit. God intervened and told Joseph to take Mary home as his wife. Joseph had to change his mind 180 degrees. It was because God had his own plan in this matter. To be useful, Joseph had to accept his place in God’s plan.

When the angel addressed Joseph, he called him “Joseph son of David.” Humanly speaking, Joseph was a Jewish carpenter in an oppressed nation living in relative obscurity. He seemed to be nobody. But God recognized him as a son of King David. God regarded Joseph highly because of his spiritual heritage. As a legal heir of David, Joseph could register Jesus in David’s line. Furthermore, Joseph had the fear of God in his heart like David did, and compassion for his people like David did. Joseph was a son of David in spirit and character, as well as in name. God chose this Joseph to be a human father to Jesus.

Look at verse 21. “...you are to give him the name Jesus...” God gave Joseph the mission of naming the boy Jesus. It was a great privilege. God trusted Joseph to provide a good environment for Jesus and to protect Jesus like a father. This would involve hardship, even risking his life. Obviously, God regarded Joseph as the best shepherd candidate. God entrusted his precious Son Jesus to Joseph.

Look at verses 24-25. “When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.” Joseph obeyed God absolutely. First he took Mary home as his wife. People in his community would question his integrity. Yet Joseph bore their reproach, defending Mary. Also, Joseph named the boy Jesus. In doing so, Joseph expressed his faith in God’s word. Joseph believed that Jesus really was the Savior of the world. Joseph’s faith and obedience made him very useful to God. To some, Joseph’s role is unappealing. Joseph was a humble environment-maker, known as “the husband of Mary.” But Joseph was overjoyed and thankful to be used greatly by God as a shepherd for Mary and Jesus.

Joseph and Mary had the most fruitful house church in history. It was through their faith in God and obedience. God was at the center of their hearts. God was at the center of their family. We pray to raise Jesus-centered house churches. For this, young men must learn to love God first, and their wives next. May God raise 10,000 men of God like Joseph. May God raise 10,000 Jesus-centered house churches.

Second, Jesus saves his people from their sins (21).

Look at verse 21. “She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” The angel said that Jesus will save his people from their sins. There may have been many things that the people of Israel wanted to be saved from. They wanted to be saved from their Roman oppressors, and they wanted to be saved from poverty. But from God’s point of view, they needed salvation from their sins. To God, sin is the real problem. What each person needs most is salvation from sin. Yet there are so many people who have no idea about the sin problem. What is sin? Sin is to separate or to cut one’s relationship to God through disobedience. Some symptoms of sin are meaninglessness, depression, guilt, shame, fear and despair. One young person is paralyzed inwardly. Sin is the cause of this paralysis. Sin makes him helpless to serve God or do his homework. Sin robs him of spiritual desires and makes him as petty as an alley cat. Yet he does not think that sin is the real problem. Rather, he blames the system and other people. In the last couple of weeks, we have experienced devastating hurricanes in the Gulf Coast. From God’s point of view, it is divine discipline on our nation for ignoring God’s calling. Sin is the problem. We must repent and come back to God.

Then how does Jesus save us from our sins? Jesus saves us from our sins through his death and resurrection. While on earth, Jesus served all kinds of needy people. Jesus healed the sick, drove out evil spirits and raised the dead. Most of all, Jesus planted the living hope of the kingdom of God in the hearts of people. But Jesus was despised and rejected by men. It was mostly because his holy life convicted them of sin. So they conspired against him. Wonderful Jesus was arrested like a common criminal and brought to trial. With no charge, he was condemned and beaten. Finally Jesus was crucified. Though Jesus was treated in such a way, he did not open his mouth to defend himself or threaten others. Instead, Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34a). Then Jesus bowed his head and breathed his last. Jesus died on the cross for our sins. Isaiah 53:4-5 says: “Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.” Jesus’ death is the sacrifice of atonement that God accepted for our sins. On the third day, God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus’ resurrection opened the way for us to have eternal life in the kingdom of God. While on earth, we can live as God’s precious children and serve his holy purpose. Luke 1:74,75 explains that Jesus came “...to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us

to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.” In this way Jesus saves us from our sins. Praise Jesus!

Third, Jesus is Immanuel—God with us (22-23).

Look at verses 22-23. “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’—which means ‘God with us.’” Let’s think about how Jesus is Immanuel—God with us.

In the first place, Jesus humbled himself to be with us. Let’s remember who Jesus really is. John 1:1-3 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” In these verses, “the Word” refers to Jesus. Jesus is the Creator God. Through Jesus, heaven and earth were made. To Jesus, it was easy to push back oceans and mark out nations. With the breath of his Spirit, Jesus gives life to man whom he made in his own image. Jesus is Spirit. Jesus is infinite. Jesus is eternal. Jesus is Almighty God. Yet Jesus came down to this world and entered human history as a baby boy. Jesus gave up his power, honor, and glory. Jesus became weak and vulnerable. Jesus emptied himself, giving up everything, in order to be with us. Jesus is humble. We could never reach up to him. But Jesus humbled himself to be with us.

In the second place, Jesus is with us through the Holy Spirit. Through his death and resurrection Jesus solved our sin problem. As he promised his disciples, he sends his Holy Spirit to those who love and obey him (Jn 14:23). The Holy Spirit is our Counselor. The Holy Spirit is our source of strength. The Holy Spirit enables us to overcome the gravity of sin and to live a holy life that pleases God. The Holy Spirit produces fruit in our inner man and develops our character. The Holy Spirit helps us grow in the image of God. There is a young man who is willing to serve God. But he grew up in suburban America and contracted a severe case of easygoing spirit. When he is asked to do something, he nods his head in assent; after that, he forgets it. But through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit he is being healed. He is learning to be diligent and persistent as a Bible teacher. Ultimately, Jesus saves us from our sins by dwelling in our souls through the Holy Spirit to sanctify us as his children.

In the third place, Jesus is with us always. Jesus’ last words in Matthew’s Gospel are, “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Mt 28:20b). Jesus promised to be with his people always, to the very end of the age. Jesus is not a fair weather friend. Jesus is with us always, in good times and bad times; in times of struggle as well as times of blessing. Jesus is with us when no one else can be with us. Jesus is with us until he completes the work he began in us (Php 1:6). Jesus is with us until he comes again in glory as King of kings.

Today we learned that Jesus came to this world as a baby to be with us. Jesus solved our sin problem through his death and resurrection. Jesus is willing to dwell in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we think that no one wants to be with us, and that no one can be with us. But Jesus is Immanuel—God with us. Let’s accept Immanuel Jesus in our hearts today.