

Christmas And The Virgin Birth

Matthew 1:18-25

Pastor John Miller

Matthew 1:18-25 is the gateway to the New Testament. Matthew says, “Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed...”—notice that word—“...to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph, her husband, being a just man and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. 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.’ So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying...”—and he quotes Isaiah 7:14—“...‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which is translated, ‘God with us.’ Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her...”—notice that—“...till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus.”

One of the most popular hymns ever written in the English language is the Christmas carol Hark! The Herald Angels Sing. It was written by Charles Wesley, the brother of the famous Methodist preacher, John Wesley, in 1739. I want to draw your attention to the second stanza of that hymn. It goes:

“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.”

We sing of the virgin birth, but do we really believe in the virgin birth? Do we really understand its importance, its significance and its implications? There are a lot of Christmas carols that allude to the fact that Christ was born of a virgin, but today there is a move away from this orthodox position of the virgin birth. Many people are doubting it and questioning it and don’t

believe that the Lord was born of a virgin.

So I want to look at the subject of the virgin birth and, first of all, note its importance. I was reading a book by Albert Mohler, Jr. titled *The Apostles' Creed*, and in it he said, "Those who deny, ignore or explain away the virgin birth struggle to explain, in any meaningful sense, the divinity of the Son and the majesty of the Incarnation. For this reason, the miraculous birth of Christ stands at the vanguard of the New Testament. It has become a litmus test for orthodoxy." I wholeheartedly agree.

If you deny the virgin birth of Christ, you do not have a divine Christ. If you do not have a divine Christ, you do not have a Savior. In this passage, it says twice, "You shall call His name Jesus." The name "Jesus" means "God saves" or "Jehovah" or "Yahweh is salvation." It indicates His divine nature; that God is the one who saves us.

Simeon lifted up the baby Jesus and said, "My eyes have seen Your salvation." Jesus is God's salvation personified. He is Jehovah, our salvation. So I think it is essential that we believe in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.

There are two questions that I want to ask and answer. The first question I want to ask and to seek the answer to is, "Does the Bible teach the virgin birth of Jesus Christ?" Yes; the Bible clearly teaches that Christ was born of a virgin.

Let me break it down for you. Christ's virgin birth was predicted in the Old Testament. In Genesis 3:15, God is speaking to the devil. Adam and Eve have sinned, and He is talking about the curse that has been brought upon the world. God says to the devil, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."

Normally it is spoken of as "the seed of the man," but here it is "her Seed," which indicates that Jesus Christ would be born of a virgin. It's kind of hidden in the passage. But soon after Adam and Eve sinned, already God was predicting that through the woman—not the man—the Messiah would come, He would bruise the head of the serpent, actually destroying his power and authority, and the serpent "shall bruise His heel," which is a reference to the Crucifixion. So Jesus came to die on the Cross and conquer sin, Satan and death.

In Isaiah 7:14, the prophet Isaiah, writing several hundred years before the Savior's birth, wrote, "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel." The Old Testament spoke of the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.

Then in the New Testament, Christ's virgin birth was fulfilled. That is written in Matthew 1:18-25. It is significant that these verses form the gateway to the New Testament. What we run into in the first chapter of the first book of the New Testament is the supernatural and the divine. If you have a hard time believing this, you'll have a hard time believing the rest of the New Testament. Chapter 1 is a citadel and a gateway to the doctrine of the Incarnation and the

deity of Christ.

I want to show you four places in this text where the virgin birth is clearly spoken of. Verse 18 says, "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." That betrothal is an engagement period, but it was legally binding. That's the reason why Mary is called the "wife" of Joseph and he is called "her husband." They weren't married as we think of it today—they were engaged—but it was a one-year betrothal or espousal period when they were legally bound as husband and wife. But they don't consummate the marriage until the very end of that period, so they hadn't done that yet. The end of verse 18 says, "before they came together," so there was no intimacy yet. So before they consummated the marriage, Mary became pregnant by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Then verse 20 says, "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.'" So in the first chapter of the New Testament, we have two clear references to the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.

Then notice verse 23: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel." "Immanuel" means "God with us." "Christmas" means "God came down to us." This is now the third reference to the virgin birth. This verse is the fulfillment of the prophecy that Isaiah spoke in Isaiah 7:14. So 600 years after Isaiah spoke this prophecy, Jesus fulfilled it.

Continuing in verses 24-25, "Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus" or "Jehovah is salvation" or "God saves."

So we see four times in the opening of the New Testament in the Christmas story according to Joseph references to the virgin birth of Jesus. It is found in verses 18, 20, 23 and 25. They are clear, definite references to the virgin birth.

The virgin birth is also referenced in Luke 1. In that chapter, the angel Gabriel came to Mary and announced that the Savior would be born and she would be the mother of the Messiah. Mary was startled and freaked out and asked the question, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" In other words, she hadn't been intimate with a man; she was a virgin. She understood how conception worked, so she wanted to know how she could conceive. She wasn't questioning that it would happen; she was questioning how it would happen. There is a difference between "I don't believe it" and "I believe it, but how are you going to do it?"

The answer to Mary's question is in Luke 1:35: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you." Then in verse 37 it says, "With God nothing will be impossible."

Isn't that great? If I'm the one called to help, you may not get what you need. If I call you for

help, you may not be able to help me. But when you call on the Lord, He's always able to help. Nothing is too hard for God. With God all things are possible. You can take that to the bank.

Yet some still say, "Well, I don't believe in the virgin birth. It's not scientific; it can't really happen. It's not logical." So based on your world view, that will determine whether you believe it or not. I happen to believe the Bible is the Word of God, inspired by the Spirit of God, inerrant and infallible. The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus was born of a virgin. But if you believe in a closed universe, that there is no transcendent supernatural being or God outside of our time-space domain, you are going to have problems with this doctrine.

Actually, if you believe Genesis 1:1, you're not going to have problems with anything else in the Bible. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." There is a God, and God can create all things. Once you believe the very first verse of the very first chapter of the very first book, everything else is easy from there. If there is a God—and I believe there is—God can do anything.

The virgin birth of Jesus Christ is essential Christianity. It is essential to another crucial doctrine. The Incarnation. That is a word which means "becoming flesh." The idea is that God became a man; He took on full humanity in the womb of the Virgin Mary, while still maintaining His deity. God is immutable; He doesn't change. The fact that the second Person of the Godhead left heaven and was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary doesn't mean that Jesus stopped being God. The virgin birth supports the Incarnation; He was born of a virgin and He was God in the flesh. That means that He was fully man, but He was sinless humanity. The fact that He was virgin-born means that He was sinless. And Jesus had to be sinless to save us from our sins. He had to be a man to die on the Cross. So Jesus is the only one in all of human history to be perfectly suited to do the work of saving us from our sins, because He is the Son of God, manifested in the flesh.

John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Here you have the eternal Word, you have the personal Word and you have the divine Word. Now you jump to verse 14 where it says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." There's the Incarnation. It means, "The Word flesh became," or Jesus took on full humanity, which implies that He pre-existed Bethlehem. He has been in existence for all eternity; He is the eternal God. The Word was personally face to face with God in the beginning. The Word, who was divine, became flesh. It literally means that He pitched His tent among us. What a beautiful Christmas verse. Heaven came down and took on full humanity. What a blessing that is. The Bible tells us in Isaiah 9:6, "For unto us a Child is born..."—that's His humanity—"...unto us a Son is given." That is His full deity. So the Bible teaches the virgin birth and the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

My second question is, "Why the virgin birth?" or "Why did Jesus take on humanity?" Why was Jesus born of a virgin, and why did he become the God-man in the womb of the Virgin Mary? I want to give you three reasons. This is by no means exhaustive, but they are essential to the Incarnation and to the virgin birth. They all start with "r" and I call them the three r's of

Christmas.

Number one, He came to reveal God to man. You cannot know God apart from revelation. God is transcendent; He is above and beyond us. The Bible asks, "Canst you by searching find out God?"

I lived through the hippie movement. I wasn't a super hippie, but I was a semi-, quasi- hippie. We hippies believed that you could get into a lotus position, contemplate your navel and "find God." All I ever found was lint. Or you could take LSD and "find God." I don't think so. Or you could follow some other Eastern religion to "find God." We went on our quests to find God, but we didn't find Him, because God reveals Himself. The chief means by which God reveals Himself is not just through creation or our conscience, but He has revealed Himself through the Person of Jesus Christ in the Word of God. The greatest revelation of God is found in the Person of Jesus Christ.

There is one more Christmas verse in John 1. It's in verse 18. It says, "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son..."—literally in the Greek, it's "God"—"...who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." The word "declared" is the word "exégeomai." That's why we call it expository preaching. It's pulling out of the text or explaining. So what does Jesus do? He exégeomais the Father. He explains Him and declares Him. No one has ever seen God, but when you look at Jesus Christ, you are getting an explanation, a revelation, an understanding of who He is.

In Hebrews 1:1-2, the writer opens Hebrews with "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets..."—that's another way God speaks—"...has in these last days spoken to us by His Son...through whom also He made the worlds." So He has spoken in, by and through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Do you know that God is speaking? He is speaking in the Person of Jesus Christ. When Jesus speaks, God is speaking. Where His words are recorded in Scripture, you're hearing the very words of God.

In John 14:2-3, Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." Then Thomas said, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way? Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'" When Jesus mentioned the Father, Philip now chimes in. He said, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." Jesus then turns to Philip and said, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father."

Now don't misinterpret what Jesus is saying here. He's not saying that He was the Father. He's saying that He shows us the Father, that He reveals the Father.

I've had people who know my son come to me and say, "Man, I saw your son. I can see you in

your son. And he acts like you, talks like you and looks like you.” Such is the case with the Son of God. You want to know what God is like? Take a long look at Jesus Christ.

Notice Jesus is called “Immanuel” in verse 23 of Matthew 1, which means “God with us.” He is here with us in this life. He is with us in our joys, in our sorrows. He’s here to comfort us in our suffering. He is with us when we face temptation. He is with us—thank God!—when we are facing death. “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.” Even when I’m facing that last step before the grave, I know that God is with me, because Jesus came at Christmas.

So if you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. What did Jesus say to the woman caught in adultery? He said, “I don’t condemn you. Go and sin no more.” When you sin and you ask God to forgive you, He forgives your sin. Jesus said, “The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.” If you come to Him, He won’t cast you out.

If I lose a loved one, am at the grave burying someone, my heart is broken and I’m crying, does God know and does God care and does God understand? The shortest verse in the Bible says, “And Jesus wept” at the grave of Lazarus. The word “wept” is an interesting Greek word. It means that His eyes moistened, and a tear trickled down His cheek. He wasn’t wailing. He wasn’t sobbing. He was feeling, in His humanity. Someone said, “In every pain that rends the heart, the Man of Sorrows has a part.” The Incarnation means that God feels, that God cares, that God knows, that God understands. When I’m hungry, God knows. Jesus said, “Not one sparrow falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will.” You are more valuable than many sparrows. He’ll feed you and take care of you and protect you. Jesus taught us that God loves us and cares for us, and He wants us to be His own. He wants us to trust Him. So Jesus gave us a picture of who the Father is by revealing Him to us.

The second reason for the Incarnation and the virgin birth is not only to reveal God to man but to redeem man back to God. The first point that Jesus came to reveal speaks of the doctrine of revelation. The second point is that He came to redeem and speaks of the doctrine of redemption. Redemption is a vast subject; the whole Bible is about God’s redeeming love.

In the Old Testament is the book of Ruth. It is a book about redemption. The Moabite widow, Ruth, left her homeland to live with her widowed, Jewish mother-in-law, Naomi, in the city of Bethlehem. Have a familiar ring? The story is that when they returned from Moab, it was Ruth and Naomi. That’s where you get the famous statement, “Wherever you go, I will go. And wherever you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.” It was a beautiful commitment that Ruth made to follow Naomi.

They needed food, so Ruth went out to glean the field. There was a law in those days that if you were poor and hungry, you could just go into anyone’s field, eat all you wanted and take out whatever you could carry in your hands. They didn’t have Social Security or welfare in those days, so the poor could go into a field and eat the grain and carry some out.

It just so happened that the field that Ruth went into was owned by Boaz, a relative of the man she had married and of her mother-in-law, Naomi. That is significant, because they had what was called “the right of redemption,” the “goel” or the “kinsman-redeemer.” If you had a family member who had to sell themselves at a time of financial crisis, you could redeem them back. Or if they lost their land, you could redeem it back.

There were three qualifications to be a kinsman-redeemer, and Boaz fulfilled all three. Number one, you had to be a blood relative; number two, you had to have the price to purchase the land—the price of redemption; and number three, you had to be willing to buy the land—and in this case, be willing to marry the bride, Ruth.

The first day that Ruth came home from gleaning in Boaz’ field, she had a lot of grain. Naomi said, “Wow! That’s awesome! Where were you gleaning?”

Ruth said, “I was gleaning in a handsome man’s field; in the field of Boaz.” (That’s not in the text, but I know she said it.)

Naomi said, “Oh, guess what! Boaz is not only handsome, but he’s our near kin. Tomorrow we’re going to get you all made up and do your hair, and you’re going to keep gleaning in Boaz’ field. Don’t go anywhere else.”

Ruth indeed did that. There was some scheming, but Ruth went back to Boaz’ field. When Boaz saw Ruth and she saw him, they fell in love. When the time came for Boaz to redeem the land and marry Ruth, he was the kinsman-redeemer.

This story is a picture of what Jesus Christ, our kinsman-redeemer did for us, through the virgin birth and the Incarnation. Adam and Eve sinned and fell, and as a result, a curse was brought on all mankind. Jesus then came and took on sinless humanity through the womb of the Virgin Mary as the God-man. He handed us the price to pay for our redemption; He died to buy the field, to redeem the world and to redeem the bride, which is the church, you and I.

That beautiful love story in the book of Ruth is a picture of God’s redemptive love for you. Jesus willingly, voluntarily left heaven and took on humanity, lived a sinless life and gave Himself to the Cross to die for our sins. So the blood relative is the Incarnation, able to pay the price is the Crucifixion and willing to buy the land and marry Ruth is redemption. It is a wonderful story of our redemption.

1 Peter 1:18-19 says, “You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” There is only one individual suited, right and able to redeem mankind, and that is Jesus Christ. He is the only one. So Jesus came as our goel or redeemer.

The third and last reason for the Incarnation and virgin birth is to reign on the throne of David. Jesus came to reveal God to us, to redeem us back to God and to reign on the throne of David.

The story of King David is told in the Old Testament. As king, David lived in a beautiful palace, but God was still in a tent or tabernacle. The temple had not yet been built. David felt bad that he lived in a beautiful, cedar palace while God lived in a tent, so he decided to build God a house. He called in Nathan, the prophet, and told Nathan his idea. Nathan didn't pray or seek the Lord about David's idea, but he thought it was a great idea, so he told David, "Go for it. Do all that's in your heart." And David said, "That's awesome."

But when Nathan was leaving David's presence, God spoke to Nathan. He said, "Nathan, go back and tell the king that he can't build a house for Me. He's been a man of war from the time he was young; there's blood on his hands. He cannot build Me a house. But I will build him a house; from his lineage and loins will come the Messiah, the Savior of the world. The Savior will sit on David's throne and will reign forever."

So Nathan went back to tell David good news and bad news. The bad news was that he could not build God a house, and David was disappointed. But the good news was that God would build David a house. His great-great-great-great-great-great-great grandson would be the Messiah, the Savior of the world. Amazing! So David, who had written all these beautiful psalms and had a way with words, was in awe. He said, "Who am I, and who is my father's house, that you would grant to me and to my inheritance that I would have the Messiah, and He would sit upon the throne." This is why Jesus is also called the Son of David. What a glorious truth!

In Luke 1:32-33, the angel Gabriel spoke to Mary and said "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

You ask, "Well, Pastor John, when does this happen? It sounds good; when will Jesus reign?"

When He comes in His Second Advent. Christmas is the first Advent, and Jesus' Second Coming is the Second Advent. Then Jesus will come not in humility, not to die for sin, not as a lowly carpenter, not veiled in flesh. When He comes again, every eye will see Him. The Bible says that "As the lightning shines from the east to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be." Revelation says that "His hair shall be as white as wool and His eyes like a flame of fire. Out of His mouth will come a sharp, two-edged sword. His feet will be like polished brass." So He is coming in majesty, in glory and in power. He came the first time as the Lamb. He's coming the second time as the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Under the reason He is coming is to reign is also that He is coming to reverse the curse. All the sin, all the sorrow, sadness, sickness, death and Satan will be gone. All the trouble that we have in this world is because of man's sin. Jesus came to pay for man's sin, and He will reverse the curse.

We sing at Christmas:

"He came to make His blessings flow,

As far as the curse is found.”

So when you think about Christmas and look at that little baby lying in a manger, don't forget the miracle of the virgin birth. Don't forget the miracle of the Incarnation. God was in Christ, and He came to reconcile man back to Himself, so He had a body that could die on the Cross. That's the Crucifixion. Then we have the Resurrection, the Ascension, the exaltation and the coming again of Jesus Christ. That's all linked together with Bethlehem. It all started when the Holy Spirit came upon a young virgin named Mary, and that which was conceived in her womb was the work of the Holy Spirit.

And the world has never been the same since. We know that there is a God, and that there is more than the mundane, temporal that we see. We know that God exists beyond our universe. What a glorious truth that is!

In Isaiah 9:6-7, the prophet Isaiah said, “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government will be upon His shoulder.” When will that happen? When he comes to reign. “And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”

So at Christmas we sing:

“Joy to the world, the Lord is come!

Let earth receive her King;

Let every heart prepared Him room.”

That song was actually written about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. We've adopted it as a Christmas song, but it's about the Second Coming.

You don't have to wait for the Second Coming for the government of your life to be on His shoulder. You can submit to Him and surrender to Him. You don't have to wait for the Second Coming for Him to reign. He can reign in your heart and in your life right now, but you must acknowledge your need of Him and trust Him as Savior. You must realize that He died for you on the Cross, He rose from the dead and He lives to save. Turn from your sins and trust Him to forgive your sins and to save you and to make you His child.

When you do that, joy will come into your heart. Peace will come into your heart. Light will come into your life. You can't find Christmas under the tree if Christ isn't first in your heart. Trust Him today.