



God In The Manger

Matthew 1:18-25

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Why do you celebrate Christmas? Do you enjoy Christmas because you like to spread “cheer” and “good will?” (Whatever those things are!) Are you hoping that Christmas will eventually bring “peace on earth?” Christmas cards and TV specials seem to suggest that if we could all commit to spread good will and benevolence 365 days a year instead of just one, we could actually bring peace on earth. Maybe you just enjoy the “Christmas spirit,” that nebulous attitude of generosity, giving, and happiness. We are conditioned to believe that Christmas brings out the best in people and puts on display that quality of human goodness that makes you think, at least for a couple of weeks, that humans are not all that bad after all. I am sure that you realize already that those are all shallow and inadequate reasons for celebration, especially when we consider what we actually have to celebrate on Christmas.

Most of the holidays that we observe celebrate humans, human events or achievements: President’s Day, Veteran’s Day, Memorial Day, Labor Day, Columbus Day, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, Valentine’s Day, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, St. Patrick’s Day, and the list goes on. Christmas is different. Christmas is the observance and celebration of a **divine** event, a **divine** achievement, and a **divine** person.

Read once again this very familiar passage of Scripture from Matthew’s gospel. **Matthew 1:18-25**, “¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her,

planned to send her away secretly. ²⁰ But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of 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 Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³ ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which translated means, ‘God with us.’ ²⁴ And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, ²⁵ but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.”

This is Matthew’s account of how the angel appeared to Joseph when it was discovered that his virgin wife, who had been betrothed to him, was with child. Matthew says that Joseph was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her. As Joseph was considering breaking off his betrothal, the angel appeared to him in a dream and gave him a message. In the words of that angel, God reveals to us two things: the **identity** of the Christ Child and the **intention** of the Christ Child.

His Identity

Who or what was this baby? Who was this baby that His birth would be preceded by three different angelic visits, one to John the Baptist’s parents, one to Mary and one to Joseph? Who was this baby whose birth is celebrated all over the world? Who was this baby

whose birth split history into BC and AD? Who was this baby whose life, ministry and person have been the subject of more writing, more singing, more poems, art and literature, more worship, discussion and controversy than any other person that has ever lived?

To answer these questions, *consider what the angel reveals about His origin.* Jesus was born of a virgin. Matthew tells us in verse 18 that Mary was found to be with child **“before they came together.”** Although betrothed to his wife (*engaged* in our modern terminology), Joseph and Mary had never been intimate with each other. He was a righteous man and was not involved intimately with Mary prior to their marriage. Further, verse 25 repeats the same truth again. Joseph took Mary to himself as his wife, but kept her a **virgin** until she gave birth to a Son.

Mary had never known any man. What was conceived in her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Twice Matthew tells us that. She was found **“to be with child by the Holy Spirit”** (v. 18), and the child which was **“conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.”** (v. 20)

Matthew understood this to be a fulfillment of Isaiah, **“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.”** (7:14)

In Luke 1 the angel, Gabriel, was sent to Mary. When she wondered aloud how she could be pregnant since she had never known a man, Gabriel said, **“The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the most high will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God.”** (Luke 1:35)

Granted, we can't understand that. We can't fathom how it is that a virgin can conceive a child. We accept it by faith on the testimony of those who were there. When it pleased God to send forth His Son into the world, the Holy Spirit created in the womb of Mary a baby, a fertilized egg. A virgin conceived. His origin is **divine**. It was the creative power of the Holy Spirit, a miraculous, supernatural birth.

Now, that was His origin in time, in our world. That was how, as John puts it, **“the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”** (John 1:14), but He existed before Matthew 1. In fact, He existed before Genesis 1.

In **John 17:5** Jesus prayed to the Father saying, **“Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.”** Jesus was aware that He shared the divine glory with the Father before the world was ever created. That is Jesus' own testimony to His existence with God as God before creation.

In **Philippians 2** the Apostle Paul says that Christ existed in the form of God as God and although he was equal to God, He did not consider that divine equality something to be held on to, but emptied Himself taking the form of a servant in the likeness of men (**2:6-11**).

Jesus is called “Mighty God” in **Isaiah 9:6**, **“For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.”**

Colossians 1 says that Christ is the Creator of all things. **John 1:1** takes us back prior to God saying, “Let there be light.” John says, **“In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God, the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.”** John goes on to say that without Him nothing was made that was made. Before anything ever was, the Word was God. Christ existed as God before creation and from all of eternity. There was never a time that God did not exist and there was never a time that He did not exist as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But in time, **“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”** (John 1:14)

Christ is the infinite, uncreated Creator, God the Son, eternally existing, stepping into our world when He was conceived in the womb of a young Jewish virgin.

Consider also His name. There are two names given in the passage. The first is in verse 21, **“You shall call His name Jesus.”** The name “Jesus” is the equivalent of the Hebrew name Joshua, or Jeshua. The name means “Jehovah will save.”

“Jehovah will save” is the name given by the angel to Joseph. It would be unacceptable for Joseph to end up naming the Savior of all mankind Mark, Peter, David or even Joseph Jr. His name by divine command would testify to His work. His name would signify His mission. *Jehovah will save.*

Why should He be named “Jesus?” The angel answers that “He will save His people from their sins.”

That was the mission.

There is a second name that is given to Him. It is in the quotation from **Isaiah 7:14**, "Immanuel." But they called His name Jesus, not Immanuel. So was the prophecy not fulfilled? No, it was. That is why Matthew tells us what Immanuel means. It means "God with us." You see, Jesus fulfilled that prophecy in the ultimate sense. He was God with us. He is Immanuel. *The name Jesus denotes His mission. The name Immanuel denotes His nature.*

Jesus was not "a good teacher with us." He was not "great philosopher with us." He was not "great moral leader with us." He was not a "great man with us." He was, He is, *God with us.*

In **John 14:8**, Philip His disciple said, "Lord, **show us the Father and it is enough for us.**" Jesus said to him, "**He who has seen Me has seen the Father.**" Jesus wasn't claiming to be the Father. Rather Jesus was saying, "All that can be seen of the Father, His nature, His character, His works, are in Me." There is nothing to be seen of the Father that is not revealed in Christ. The Father is in Christ, Christ is in the Father. They are two separate persons, but both equally God.

That is why Paul could say that in Christ "**dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form.**" (**Colossians 2:9**) **Hebrews 1:3** says that Christ is the "**radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power.**"

His identity is seen in His origin and in His name. He is the Son of God, God the Son. He is infinite, eternal, glorious God in human flesh. He is God made flesh, God and man, the God-man.

This is the consistent teaching of Scripture and it is a mystery beyond human comprehension. What would that have been like on the evening of that birth? To be in that stable, to be that mother who after carrying the Christ Child in your womb for 9 months reaches down and touches the skin of the infinite God? What was it like to be Joseph and to hold this small baby that is the Creator of all the universe? The very one who upholds your life and your breath by His will, you hold in your hands.

His Intention

This is given to us in the phrase in Matt. 1:21, "**He will save His people from their sin.**"

The Jews were expecting their Messiah to be a Savior, but in a different sense. The Jews were not expecting a Savior Who would deliver them from sin, but One Who would deliver them from Rome.

Being in bondage to Rome, they expected a Messiah Who would lead the nation to throw off the shackles of foreign oppression, establish again that Davidic Kingdom, and sit on David's throne and rule in peace and righteousness.

The prophets predicted such a King. That is, in fact, a promise of the passage in **Isaiah 9:6**, "**For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.**" It is unfortunate that our Christmas cards stop right there! Listen to the next verse, **Isaiah 9:7**, "**There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this.**"

Scripture cannot be broken. That will yet happen! It will happen at His second coming. But His first coming was "to save His people from their sin." The angel indicates to Joseph that Jesus would be a savior, but it would not be in a political, nationalistic sense. He was coming to save not from Rome, but from sin.

This is one reason that the Jews rejected Christ. That is why Paul and Peter argued that the Christ had to first suffer and die and rise again in order that He might no longer be subject to death and decay. That had to happen before He would sit on David's throne. In His death, He would save His people from their sin.

The word "save" means to deliver. It is used here in its fullest sense. The work of Christ, His life, death and resurrection saves His people from their sin in the fullest sense. His people are saved from the bondage to sin. Christ takes away our guilt. We are set free from the penalty of our sin. We will eventually be set free from the very presence of sin. We are delivered completely, saved to the uttermost.

Who does Matthew say that Christ saves? His people. Christ does not save from sin those that do not belong to Him. The intention of Christ coming to earth was to give His life for His people, to die in their place, as their substitute. The angel said, "**He will save His people from their sin.**"

Ephesians 5 says that Christ died for His bride the church. In **John 10** Jesus said that he would give His life for His sheep. **John 6** Jesus said that the will of the Father was that He would save and raise up to eternal glory all those that the Father had given to Him. **1**

Peter 2 says that Christ bore the sins of His people in His own body on the cross.

He stood in the place of sinners, all those who would believe on Him for eternal life. He offered His life in their stead, in my stead. If you have trusted Christ as Savior, then you are His and He gave His life in your place and bore your sin in His body on the Cross. He came to die.

The intention of the giving of the Son was announced before the Child was born, "He will save His people from their sin." He was born to die.

Christ would save His people from their sins, not by being their political deliverer and overthrowing Rome, but by giving His life, shedding His blood as a sacrifice by which the price of sin could be paid.

How could this happen? How could He save His people from their sins? This is where the **identity** of the Christ and the **intention** of the Christ come together.

No normal, moral, man born of a woman in the natural sense could save anyone from sin. No sinner could give His life to pay the price for another sinner. No animal could do that. The blood of bulls and goats could not atone for sin, they could only foreshadow the One Who would eventually give His life in the place of sinners. It had to be a man, a human being Who would give His life for other humans.

The sacrifice for sin had to have no sin of His own. He had to be a perfect, blameless, righteous, and holy man untouched by the fallen nature of Adam. He had to be a descendant of Adam without sharing Adam's corruption, guilt, and sin. He had to have a human nature and be *fully* man without being *fallen* Man. How did God accomplish that? The virgin birth.

He had to be man that he might stand in the place of

men. He had to be God that He might offer a complete, perfect, infinite sacrifice that sin required. He was the God-man. God, who came in flesh to bear the penalty that He required for sin. God is a just God who requires payment and justice for sin. He is a loving God who came to pay the penalty that He requires.

His identity? He is God. His intention? To save His people from their sin.

What About You?

Do you belong to Him by faith? Have you owned Christ as Savior and Lord? If you do not have Christ as your Savior, then you have no sin-bearer. He came to save you from your sin.

Our Christmas celebration must revolve around Christ. It must give honor to the God who took the form of a slave in the likeness of men to save His people from their sins. Glory to God in the highest!

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