

The Advent of the King

The Arrival of the King

Matthew 1:18-25

Rev. Freddy Fritz

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Scripture

Today is the second Sunday of Advent. For this season of Advent I am preaching a series of sermons titled, “The Advent of the King,” which is based on Matthew’s Gospel chapters 1 and 2.

The apostle Matthew wrote his Gospel for the Jews. His purpose in writing this Gospel was to show that Jesus really was the expected King of the Jews.

Last week we looked at “The Ancestry of the King” in Matthew 1:1-17, and we learned about the human ancestry of Jesus.

Today, I want to examine “The Arrival of the King” in Matthew 1:18-25, and we shall learn about the divine ancestry of Jesus. Let us read Matthew 1:18-25:

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. 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.

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. 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.”

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.”

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus. (Matthew 1:18-25)

Introduction

The Bible contains a record of some remarkable births.

For example, Isaac was born to Sarah when she was nearly one hundred years old and long past the age of conceiving a child (Genesis 17:16).

Samson was born to Manoah's sterile and childless wife (Judges 13:2-3).

Samuel the prophet and anointer of kings was born to Hannah, who was also sterile and childless (1 Samuel 1:2; 1:19-20).

John the Baptist was born to Elizabeth—Mary's relative—who was not only barren but also well along in years (Luke 1:7; 1:57).

But none of these births come close to the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Actually, Jesus' birth was as normal as any other child's birth. What is remarkable about Jesus is his conception.

Theologians talk about the Virgin Mary and the Virgin Birth of Jesus. By that they mean that Mary was still a virgin at the time of Jesus' birth; she had become pregnant supernaturally without the aid of any human being. And so, while it is okay to talk about the Virgin Mary and the Virgin Birth of Jesus, it seems to me that it would be more accurate to talk about the Supernatural Conception of Jesus. However, I doubt that my proposal will change millennia of tradition!

As I said earlier, Matthew's purpose in writing his Gospel was to show that Jesus really was the expected King of the Jews. Jesus' deity was constantly denied. One of the first attacks against his divine nature had to do with his conception. It is likely that people accused Mary of becoming pregnant by some man. Matthew's goal in writing this account of the conception and birth of Jesus was to set the record straight about what really happened.

Lesson

Matthew tells us in verse 18: **“This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about.”** Technically, Matthew tells us little about the birth but much more about the events surrounding the Supernatural Conception of Jesus.

Matthew gives very few details about what happened. We would love to have many more details, but the scarcity of details actually adds to Matthew’s credibility regarding the Supernatural Conception of Jesus.

And so, today, as we consider the arrival of the king, I want us to see:

1. The Dilemma of Mary (1:18),
2. The Distress of Joseph (1:19),
3. The Directive of the Angel (1;20-21),
4. The Declaration of the Prophet (1:22-23), and
5. The Decision of Joseph (1:24-25).

I. The Dilemma of Mary (1:18)

First, notice the dilemma of Mary.

Matthew begins his account by saying, **“This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph”** (1:18a).

Following ancient custom **Mary was pledged to be married**, or betrothed, **to Joseph**. It is quite likely that Mary was as young as twelve or thirteen years old, and Joseph could have been an older teenager, perhaps eighteen or nineteen years old.

According to Jewish custom, a betrothal signified much more than an engagement in the modern sense. At that time, a Jewish marriage consisted of two stages, the *kiddushin* (betrothal) and the *huppah* (wedding ceremony). The marriage was almost always arranged by the families of the bride and groom, often without consulting them. A contract was made and was sealed by payment of

the *mohar*, the dowry or bride price, which was paid by the groom or his family to the bride's father. The *mohar* served to compensate the father for wedding expenses and to provide a type of insurance for the bride in the event the groom became dissatisfied and divorced her. The contract was considered binding as soon as it was made, and the man and woman were considered legally married, even though the wedding ceremony (*huppah*) and consummation often did not occur until as much as a year later. The betrothal period served as a time of probation and testing of fidelity to ensure that the bride was not carrying anyone else's child. During that period the bride and groom usually had little, if any, social contact with each other.¹

So **Mary** was in the betrothal stage of her marriage. She **was pledged to be married to Joseph**, but had not yet had the wedding ceremony.

Matthew then notes that **before they came together, she was found to be with child** (1:18b). Matthew does not say how she was found to be with child; he simply notes that she was pregnant.

We know from Luke's Gospel that the angel Gabriel visited Mary and told her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son" (Luke 1:30-31).

Quite understandably, Mary asked the angel, "How will this be since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said."

¹ John MacArthur, *Matthew* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1989), 16.

After the angel left her Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth, who was now pregnant with John the Baptist.

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home to Nazareth (1:34-40; 1:56).

It is likely that shortly after Mary's return to Nazareth she began to appear pregnant. That is perhaps when **she was found to be with child**.

No doubt people would have wondered who the father was. Perhaps they wondered if Mary became pregnant by someone in the hill country of Judea.

Of course, Mary knew that she was with child **through the Holy Spirit** (1:18c). The angel Gabriel had told her that she would become pregnant **through the Holy Spirit**.

But who would believe her? No one had ever heard of such a thing. How would Joseph ever believe her?

So, we see here the dilemma of Mary.

II. The Distress of Joseph (1:19)

Second, observe the distress of Joseph.

Matthew does not tell us how Joseph learned of Mary's pregnancy. But he obviously did, and it distressed him greatly.

He was pledged to be married to Mary. He was building them a home, and now he wondered if all his work was for nothing.

Matthew tells us that **Joseph was a righteous man** (1:19a). Joseph trusted in God and was a justified man. He wanted to obey God and his laws. So, he knew that he could not go through with the wedding ceremony because, as far as he knew, Mary must have had relations with another man.

And yet, it is clear that Joseph was also a loving, compassionate and tender man, and because he **did not want to expose Mary to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly** (1:19b), that is, privately.

The Old Testament Law actually required death for adultery. Deuteronomy 22:23-24 said, “If a man happens to meet in a town a virgin pledged to be married and he sleeps with her, you shall take both of them to the gate of that town and stone them to death—the girl because she was in a town and did not scream for help, and the man because he violated another man’s wife. You must purge the evil from among you.”

However, the Law also stated that he could divorce Mary privately in the presence of two witnesses (Numbers 5:11-31). This is the compassionate course that Joseph decided to take.

It seems clear that Joseph loved Mary. Even though he had been shamed (because he assumed that Mary was pregnant by another man), his concern was not for his own shame but for Mary’s. Even though he was distressed about the situation, he decided to do what was best for her.

III. The Directive of the Angel (1:20-21)

That brings us to the directive of the angel.

Matthew says that **after Joseph 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. 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” (1:20-21).**

What an incredible turn of events! Joseph was deeply distressed because of Mary and, suddenly, while he was sleeping an angel appeared to him and gave him the most incredible message: Mary really was pregnant by the Holy Spirit!

Can you imagine how Joseph must have felt? He must have been ecstatic! Mary had not lied. What she said was really true! How could he have doubted her?

But more than that, the child Mary was carrying was the promised Messiah! He was the King that Joseph and his people

had been waiting for. Oh, joy! And now Joseph was to help take care of this precious child, whose name was to be **Jesus**.

Because Joseph was a righteous man I suspect that he contemplated the meaning of the name **Jesus**, which is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua.

Jesus, or Joshua, means “salvation.” There were two well-known men named Joshua in the Old Testament. Both men were types of Christ; that is, they prefigured the person and work of the coming King.

The first Joshua was a soldier and Moses’ successor who led the people of God into the Promised Land (see book of Joshua). Just before the fall of Jericho Joshua had an encounter with the “commander of the army of the Lord” (Joshua 5:13-15) who intimated that he would lead the people of God to victory. In the same manner, Jesus is the Commander of our Salvation, leading us to victory in him.

The second Joshua was the high priest mentioned in Zechariah 3 who represented the people of God before the throne of God. Similarly, Jesus is our Great High Priest, representing us before the throne of God.²

Surely Joseph began to ponder that this child in the womb of Mary would be at once the Commander of our Salvation and also our Great High Priest. Jesus is the one who **will save his people from their sins**.

What incredibly good news from the angel!

IV. The Declaration of the Prophet (1:22-23)

Fourth, hear the declaration of the prophet.

Matthew noted that **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” (1:22-23).**

² Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1997, c1992), 16.

Matthew was referring to the prophet Isaiah who recorded this prophecy in Isaiah 7:14.

The word **virgin** has often been disputed. Some scholars say that although it means “virgin,” it could also mean “young woman” or “young girl.” Of course, these scholars want to take the force away from the miraculous nature of the conception of Jesus. And so they contend that all that is meant is that Mary was a young girl when she became pregnant and not that she was a virgin.

Pastor John MacArthur says, “Scholars sometimes dispute whether the Hebrew term in Isaiah 7:14 means ‘virgin’ or ‘maiden.’ Matthew is quoting here from the Septuagint (LXX) which uses the unambiguous Greek term for ‘virgin.’ Thus Matthew, writing under the Spirit’s inspiration, ends all doubt about the meaning of the word in Isaiah 7:14.”³

The child born to the virgin will be called **Immanuel**—**which means, “God with us.”** **Immanuel** is used more as a title or description than as a proper name. It signifies one of the most wonderful and miraculous actions: God left the glory of heaven in the person of his Son, and came to dwell with us!

In the Old Testament God dwelt with his people in the symbols represented by the Tabernacle and the Temple. But, now in the New Testament, God dwells with his people in the person of his Son, Jesus. And he did all this to save his people from their sins!

V. The Decision of Joseph (1:24-25)

And finally, be aware of the decision of Joseph.

Matthew says that **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 (1:24-25).**

³ John Jr MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Publishers, 1997, c1997), Mt 1:23.

It is important to note the obedience of Joseph. His obedience was instantaneous. I remember Gordon MacDonald saying that delayed obedience is disobedience. Here we see immediate obedience to the command of the angel of the Lord.

This is another confirmation of the righteousness of Joseph. As soon as he understood the command of God (through the angel), he obeyed the Lord. Like his legal Son, Jesus, his desire was to do the will of the Father.

Conclusion

What lessons can we learn from the arrival of the king?

Clearly, God was orchestrating his Master Plan of Redemption. God was in sovereign control coordinating various events in order to bring about the Supernatural Conception and birth of his Son, Jesus Christ.

From the dilemma of Mary we learn that God sometimes brings unusual events into the lives of his children. Of course, the Supernatural Conception will never occur again. But, unusual events sometimes do occur. At those times, when God's providence seems strange to you, let me urge you to be patient and trust in God. When situations occur and you cannot figure out why they are happening, respond as Mary did, "I am the Lord's servant. . . . May it be to me as you have said."

From the distress of Joseph we learn to be compassionate. Joseph thought that he had been wronged. He would have been within his legal right to squeeze every ounce of justice out of the situation. He could have had Mary stoned to death. But, even though he had been wronged, he decided to do what was compassionate for Mary. In instances when you are wronged, think about how you can be merciful to the person who has wronged you, bearing in mind the words of Joseph's Son, Jesus, who taught, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy" (Matthew 5:7).

From the directive of the angel we learn that Jesus is our Savior. He is the Commander of our Salvation and our Great High Priest. He is the only one who can save us from our sins. You and I have sinned by breaking God's law. We deserve to be sent to hell for all eternity. But Jesus paid the penalty for sin. He has paid the penalty for my sin. Has he paid the penalty for yours?

From the declaration of the prophet we learn that Jesus was supernaturally conceived in the womb of a virgin named Mary. How this is possible is of course a mystery. And yet it happened. So Jesus is both human and divine. He is two natures in one person. That truth makes Jesus the unique Son of Man and also Son of God. We should never doubt the Supernatural Conception of Jesus.

And finally, from the decision of Joseph we learn obedience. Because Joseph was the recipient of God's grace, his heart's desire was to obey God. You and I do not obey God in order to earn or merit his grace. Rather, because we are the recipients of grace, we obey God in order to express our gratitude to God for his pardon and forgiveness and love and mercy and grace. Our desire is to obey every command of God that is given to us in his word.

May God help each one of us to learn these lessons from the arrival of the king. Amen.

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*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org

PRAYER:

Our Father, as we consider the Advent of the King we thank you today for the Arrival of the King.

We thank you for orchestrating your Master Plan of Redemption. We know that you were and still are in sovereign control of all events in order to bring about your plans and purposes for our salvation.

We thank you for the dilemma of Mary. Help us to be patient and to trust you in the face of strange providences that come into our lives.

We thank you for the distress of Joseph. Help us to be compassionate, especially when we believe that we have been wronged.

We thank for the directive of the angel who taught us that Jesus is our Savior. Father, we deserve hell for all eternity. And yet, in your grace, you have provided for all or our sin in the person of Jesus. And for that we give you thanks.

We thank you for the declaration of the prophet teaching us that Jesus was supernaturally conceived in the womb of a virgin named Mary. We believe that Jesus is fully man and fully God in one Person.

And finally, we thank you for the decision of Joseph to obey you immediately. We are the recipients of your grace, and we ask you to enable us to respond with similar immediate obedience to all of your commands.

And all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

Give thanks to for the Arrival of the King. And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.