

**Isaiah 7: 14 and Matthew 1: ; “The Virgin Conceiving”, A Sermon for the Christmas Season, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

This morning we thought together about the name Immanuel, a name which was a sign which was given as a sign, to Ahaz, the wicked king of Judah. I laid before you that the name Immanuel is a sign of the depths and heights. It was a sign of the depths of stubborn unbelief in Ahaz, and the unbelief of many people alive today, as well. But, positively, it was also given as a sign of the heights of the faithfulness of God. I then gave you this application: that the name Immanuel is also an encouraging sign of our solemn responsibility to believe in God’s Son, the One who was born a Savior, for us. The land of Israel was called Immanuel’s land in Isaiah chapter 8. And even when many enemies tried to conquer it, God’s purpose to bring salvation through the line of David in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ was not thwarted.

But I want you to see something further now; that the name Immanuel is a sign to us in another way yet. It was an amazing sign of the great wisdom and power of God, that Christ was formed in the womb of the virgin Mary. It shows us that God was doing something that could not be done by any man. It shows us that God was at work to bring forth a Person who would be sinless; a Person who would combine, in Himself, all that was necessary to bring fallen men and the Holy God together. This is why we are given the words, “Behold, a virgin shall conceive.” This is a most amazing sign. So I would like us to take a look at this sign from Joseph’s point of view, and I want to apply it, not only to his situation, but to our own conversion and growth in sanctification as well.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – Let’s look at Joseph’s skepticism and his faith in relation to this sign.**

Joseph and Mary were betrothed. This means that they were engaged. But in that day, being betrothed meant that they were already seen as a legally married couple, even though the marriage was not yet physically consummated by their becoming one flesh. Joseph was a righteous man. He was a man who was going to do the right thing, even when his feelings might be deeply involved with Mary; the person he loved as his wife. This dear man found out that his betrothed was with child. But he didn’t know that God the Holy Spirit was involved in this. He thought that it was unfaithfulness on Mary’s part. We are not told whether Mary had told him of the angel’s visit to her, and of his words – “Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!”

We are not told whether she related to Joseph that fact that the angel had said that she would conceive a son by the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon her, and the power of the Most High overshadowing her. We are not informed whether she was able to relate the prophetic words of the angel that this Jesus would be great and that He would be called the Son of the Highest; that the Lord God would give him the throne of his father David, and that he would reign over the house of Jacob forever. We don’t know any of these things. But I believe that Mary did tell him, and tried to explain. But it was such an amazing thing to Joseph, that as he pondered it, it seemed to be too much for him to believe. He was skeptical. What should he do?

Our text says that he was minded to put her away secretly. But God, knowing his thoughts, sent an angel to him, to tell him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife. “That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.” In applying this to ourselves, we ought to see that God’s wisdom is very great. Nothing is too difficult for the Almighty. A virgin shall conceive, and did! But, even though this was not too difficult for God, many things seem impossible to us men. And there is, even in righteous men a tendency to doubt and skepticism, when they cannot see what God is doing. Here God did something new. He did something that he had not done from the foundation of the world, and something that He would never do again. The Triune God

joined the Essence of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the Godhead, the only begotten, eternally generated Son, who had been with Him from all eternity, with a true and sinless human nature. He would so unite these two natures that they would exist side by side and yet the Person and Personality would be one, in the mind and heart and will of the Divine person being formed in Mary's womb.

I would like you to think of this now in terms of the person whom God intends to save. When God gives the gift of salvation, He causes that person to be born again to a living hope. Christ must be formed in you in the New Birth. This must take place for you to be able to see and to enter the kingdom of God. It is a miraculous work of God. The Holy Spirit must come and do a work of spiritual conception in your spiritually dead and sinful heart. It is not a work that any human being can do. Your attempted obedience to God's holy law cannot produce this good work in you. You are married to the law before conversion; legally so, as a sinner, but you cannot bear fruit unto God unless you become married to Christ. The law would condemn you as a sinner, but God would give you Christ.

You can see this if you will turn with me over to Romans 7: 2-4. It says here: "For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives." "But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband." "So then, if while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man." "Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another – to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God." In the sacrifice and sufferings of Christ, His laying down His life for every sinner who trusts in Him for salvation, all of the righteous requirements of the Law are fulfilled on your behalf. When you believe in Jesus you "die to the Law through the body of Christ".

You become "dead to the law" through Christ's having suffered on the cross for you. Christ satisfied all the righteous requirements of the law on your behalf. When you believe in Him, you are no longer under law but under grace. Since you have been crucified with Christ it is no longer you who lives, but Christ who lives in you. You have been crucified with Him, and therefore you have died this death to the law in your conversion. You can now begin to see yourself as married to another; even to Christ. This death to the law, which Christ purchased by His perfect obedience and His substitutionary sufferings, takes you out from under the jurisdiction of the law, and places you under the jurisdiction of Christ.

You become in-lawed to Him as it says in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 9: 19-21 – "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law." You see, when you are justified, dear believer, you are set free from the law's condemning power, but you should understand that this does not mean that you are without law toward God. You are under law toward Christ. You are rightly related to Him, so that all the righteous requirements of the law have been met; they have been satisfied in Christ.

And now, by grace, you will learn a better way to keep God's commandments than from the self-principle; the "I can do" principle. In order to glorify God now as a Christian, you must learn to keep God's commandments from this greater principle; the principle of dependence upon Christ's grace. That is, that in all of your going about to obey God's law, you will remember that you are "in Christ" now. You are no longer doing what you do in your own strength and wisdom and self-determination. You are obedient, to whatever extent you are obedient, by the grace of Christ. "Without Me," Jesus says, "you can do nothing." To make progress in living the Christian life, then, to the glory of God, you must not only be aware that you have been forgiven of all of your sins, you must remember that Christ's life is in you.

You must not only understand that you have been declared righteous on the basis of Christ's righteousness, having believed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. You must also come to know and to realize that the seed of Christ's imparted righteousness has been formed in you in the New Birth; and that He will be formed, more and more in you, in your pursuit of righteousness and holiness, according to the working of His mighty power. It is resurrection life of Christ that is the basis for all of your progress in living the Christian life. Christ's death purchased life, but it is His life given in the gift of the Holy Spirit which gives spiritual life to you day by day as you live your life to God. The Bible teaches very plainly that God comes to the sinner, first, in acts of salvation. His Holy Spirit comes to you, one whom God is having mercy upon, and He, according to the sovereign will and purpose of God, gives spiritual conception.

He plants the seed of righteousness in your heart, and yes, this comes at the same time that the gospel is being preached to you.. This is what Mary had when the Holy Spirit gave her conception, in the placing of the Lord Jesus in her womb. She knew from the word of God to her through the angel, that she was a "highly favored" person. But as she thought about the reality of her own sinful heart, she was troubled. She needed the assurance of the Lord that all was well in receiving this sovereign work. You too, dear believer, are seen by Him as one of His highly favored ones, and yet you may be troubled when you begin to tell others around you of what the Lord by His Holy Spirit has done for you. They may be skeptical of the Lord's work.

You yourself may not understand it, and you may be troubled. But there is no need to be troubled or afraid. God is at work. His righteousness will be satisfied. His law will be fulfilled. But it will not be fulfilled by human strength, human nature, or according to human expectations. It will be God's work. Salvation is God's work. The law is all fulfilled in Christ. The righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in you through Christ, and all is well.

**2<sup>nd</sup> – Let's look at what Joseph did when God made it plain to him that Mary's conception was of His Spirit.**

It says that the Lord gave Joseph this revelation, concerning what He was doing in Mary's womb, while Joseph was asleep. It came to him in a dream. When he woke up, it says – He did as the Lord commanded him and took her to him as his wife, but he did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. Now we know from the way that these things are written, that Joseph was a good man. He was a righteous man. And he well represents the Law in relation to our being converted to Christ. He stood back from the work that was going on in Mary's womb. He was not about to take Mary to himself in any sexual way, because if he did, it might be claimed that he was the father of this Child, the One who would be the Savior of the World.

I hope that you understand that it is an essential part of our faith that we have a sinless Savior. And, in order for us to have this sinless Savior, there absolutely had to be, a conception in the womb of Mary that was brought about by God while she was still a virgin. The Savior of the World, as a man, could not come into being by the seed of man, for then sin would have transmitted to Christ's human nature; the fallen likeness, of our first forefather Adam, to Him. No, this could not be. It must be a perfectly holy seed which would penetrate Mary's ovum by the work and power of the Holy Spirit in Christ's conception. It must be a holy seed that would formed a Person in her womb who would be both God and man.

But it would also be a conception, which would show Joseph and all the World, that salvation comes not from man, or the law, or man's works. God must save, and God alone. So Joseph took her to wife, it says, but he did not know her. He did not have sexual relations with her, until she had brought forth her first born Son, the Divine Son. And this shows us the relation of the law to the work of grace in our hearts, in both conversion and sanctification. When you come to realize that you are a sinner, you should also realize that the law cannot save you. It can condemn you, and God, who the law represents, can think of putting you away, but the law has no ability to save you.

Every Christian should love the law of God. It is holy and righteous and good. It shows us the righteousness of God and the perfection that he requires of any person before they can be accepted and pleasing to Him. But the law must, as it were, stand back and wait before it can have any relationship with us that will bear fruit. Christ's virgin birth was an essential part of His Incarnation. We are saved, both by Christ's life, and by His death. When Christ died, He died as a sinless sacrifice, having fulfilled the law on our behalf. But when He laid down His life, He laid it down so that He might take it up again. He did these things in this way, so that all the work of redemption from first to last would be completed and accomplished by Him. In being both sinless and perfectly righteous, He would, as it says in Isaiah 42: 21 – "magnify the law and make it honorable."

So, the law, and all of mankind, must stand by, and look on, at what the Lord Jesus Christ, alone, became and did, by His Incarnation, His life, His death, and His resurrection. True believers look on with love and admiration. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the Divine Trinity voluntarily condescended to be joined together with a helpless human nature, and to be born as a babe in Bethlehem. And so, a sinless Savior was born to live so perfect a life that the Law would rejoice at His perfect love, His perfect words, and His perfect actions, in regard to both God and man. The justice of God in relation to His holy law would be satisfied fully; not only by His obedience, but by His sacrifice; His bearing the wrath which we so richly deserve.

The Law, if we could personify him here for a minute, saw something in Jesus which went far beyond, even what it required. It was this; that a Divine Person, whose value exceeded the value of all of the people who have ever lived, would Himself become a man, and would take the place of sinners. This is what we celebrate this Christmas. He left the halls of heaven to enter the fallen realm of mankind. The Most Valuable of Persons came to live His life as a Man among men. When Mary knew that her conception of this most valuable Person would be in her womb, she said – "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior...." "He who is mighty has done great things for me." And when Christ is formed in your heart, you too will say the same thing.