

Behold, the King

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Advent: The Unexpected King / King; Birth of Jesus; Advent; Mary (mother of Jesus); Joseph (husband of Mary); An angel appears to Joseph; Isaiah / Mt 1:18-25

The birth of Jesus in Matthew 1:18-25 shows us that Jesus was the unexpected king of the Jews.

Introduction

Our Advent Sermon Series this year is called, “Advent: The Unexpected King.”

The Bible contains a record of some remarkable births.

So far this Advent, we have examined the births of Isaac, Moses, and John the Baptist.

Each of these births foreshadow the greatest birth of all, the birth of 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!

Matthew’s purpose in writing his Gospel was to show that Jesus really was the unexpected King of the Jews.

Scripture

Let us read [Matthew 1:18-25](#):

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from 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 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel”

(which means, God with us). ²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Lesson

The birth of Jesus in [Matthew 1:18-25](#) shows us that Jesus was the unexpected king of the Jews.

Let's use the following outline:

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)
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, “**Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph...**” (1:18a).

Following ancient custom, **Mary had been betrothed to Joseph**. A betrothal is like today’s engagement. Mary and Joseph were not yet married.

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.

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 earlier the angel Gabriel visited Mary and told her that she would become pregnant by the Holy Spirit ([Luke 1:30-35](#)).

After the angel left her, Mary went to visit her relative Elizabeth, who was now pregnant with John the Baptist.

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home to Nazareth ([Luke 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 **from the Holy Spirit** (1:18c). The angel Gabriel had told her that she would become pregnant **from 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 just 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 was unwilling to put her to shame, [he] resolved to divorce her quietly** (1:19b), that is, privately.

The Old Testament Law actually required death for adultery ([Deuteronomy 22:23-24](#)).

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 **as [Joseph] considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the**

Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for 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**.

Jesus, or Joshua, means “salvation.”

Surely Joseph began to ponder that this child in the womb of Mary would be the unexpected king of the Jews 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 spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us)” (1:22-23).**

Matthew was referring to the prophet Isaiah who recorded this prophecy in [Isaiah 7:14](#).

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!

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 from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus** (1:24-25).

It is important to note the obedience of Joseph. His obedience was instantaneous.

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.

From the distress of Joseph, we learn to be compassionate.

Joseph thought that he had been wronged. But, even though he thought 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 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.