

Matthew 1:18-25 “Conception, Coming, and the Gospel of The Childbirth” Dec 7, 2014
Isaiah 7
Psalm 80

Isaiah 7:14 is embedded in very particular story.

The reigns of Jeroboam II of Israel and Uzziah of Judah were long and prosperous.

But in the year that King Uzziah died –

all of this is beginning to change.

A new power has arisen in the north and east.

The Assyrians, led by the mighty king Tiglath-Pileser III,
were advancing.

Their clever policy was to depopulate whole regions,
scattering captured peoples throughout their realm
in order to dilute potential rebels.

As the Assyrians approached from the north,

Syria and Ephraim made a defensive alliance.

Syria had been the greatest enemy of Israel,

but in the face of the Assyrians, old animosities were put aside.

They invited Ahaz to join the alliance, but Ahaz refused.

That was the right answer—God had forbidden alliances with wicked kings,
—but Ahaz was not doing this for the right reason.

Ahaz recognized that the West Palestinian Treaty Organization could not stand
against the shadow of the north.

So now his neighbors came against Judah in order to overthrow Jerusalem
and establish the son of Tabeel on the throne (v6)

Isaiah has come to King Ahaz (a wicked king of the house of David)

and promises that Damascus and Samaria will not overthrow Jerusalem.

And God tells Ahaz to ask for a sign,

but Ahaz refuses.

And Isaiah says that the Lord himself will give you a sign.

*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and shall call his name Immanuel.*

He shall eat curds and honey

when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good.

*For before the boy knows how to refuse to the evil and choose the good,
the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted.*

The sign of Immanuel is a sign for Ahaz.

And indeed, only a couple years later

Damascus and Samaria were overthrown by Assyria.

But then Isaiah continues and says that those days will be days of judgment,
not blessing.

Isaiah says four things about that day in verses 18-25:

*In that day, the Egyptians and the Assyrians will overrun the land.
In that day, the king of Assyria will be a hired razor to shave the land.
In that day, sheep and cows will have plenty to eat.
And in that day, the cultivated land will be desolate*
(which explains why the sheep and cows will have so much to eat!)

The sign of Immanuel – God with us –
is a sign to the house of David that God will come in judgment
and bring desolation on the land.

The only way that you can turn the prophecy of Immanuel into a nice happy promise
is if you take Isaiah 7:14 and totally ignore the rest of the chapter!

“God with us” does not mean that everything will be happy.
“God with us” means that “yea, 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.”

Psalm 80 fits beautiful with this:
When our enemies overrun the land –
when boars from the forest ravage the vineyard of the LORD –
then “Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine that we may be saved.”
“Let your hand be on the man of your right hand,
the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself!”

And since Psalm 80 has so many parallels with the text of “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,”
we thought that the tune for “Veni Emmanuel” would be a good fit!

Sing Psalm 80
Read Matthew 1:18-25

Last week, Pastor Jon showed us how the genealogies of Matthew 1
are all about “Anticipation, Advent, and the Gospel of Adoption,”

it seemed fitting to show the connections
between the genealogies and the narrative of the birth of Jesus,
by talking about “Conception, Coming, and the Gospel of *The Childbirth*.”

¹⁷ *So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.*

Matthew 1:1 starts with “the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ” –
directly quoting from Genesis 5:1 –
“the book of the genealogy of man.”

Matthew has highlighted the fact that Jesus is

“the son of David, the son of Abraham.”

And as Jon showed us so beautifully last time,
Jesus is only the son of David by *adoption*.

He cannot trace his biological descent from David.
Rather, Joseph adopts him and raises him as his own son.

Some might be tempted to say,
“But that’s not right! The son of David should be a *real* son of David!”

But why?
The first man, Adam, was a son of God by adoption.
If God could adopt Adam as his son and give to Abraham an inheritance –
and adopt Solomon, the son of David, as his son,
and give to him an inheritance –
then why should not the last son of David
be a son by adoption?!

And indeed, as we will see today,
there was no other way for God to save his people from their sins!

He became all that we are by nature,
so that we might become all that he is by grace!

1. The Birth of Jesus Christ (v18a)

¹⁸ *Now the birth of Jesus Christ^[e] took place in this way.*

The first thing that we see is that Jesus was born.
While we are highlighting the fact that Jesus was adopted by Joseph,
it's worth pointing out that you can't be adopted if you are not born.
Behind every adoption is a childbirth.

Adoption, in that respect, is not an alternative to childbirth –
it's not that you can either be born *or* adopted! –
rather, adoption is *subsequent* to childbirth.

One who is born may also be adopted.

Indeed, our story today highlights the grace that God gave to *Joseph*.
After all, if Joseph does not adopt Jesus
then Jesus will not become the Son of David.

We have just witnessed an example of that.
If Hugh and Rachael do not adopt Ava Hao Di,
then Ava Hao Di does not become a Christian.

So in order for Joseph to adopt Jesus,
Mary must first get pregnant.

And we are told in verse 18 that Mary was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.
Of course, Joseph doesn't know that yet!

All he knows is that she is pregnant – and he didn't do it!

But it's worth our time to stop and ask, why was Jesus born of a virgin?

Well, for starters, since it was a woman who sinned first,
therefore it must be a woman who bears the Savior of the world.

After all, that is what God says in Genesis 3:15.

The seed of the woman will crush the serpent's head.

As we sang earlier:

“to show God's love aright, she bore to men a Savior.”

We should rejoice to honor the blessed virgin.

After all, all generations are to call her blessed.

Truly, “blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment
of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” (Luke 1:45)

But there is a far simpler reason for why Jesus must be born of a virgin.

He is the eternal Son of God.

He is the *natural* Son of God.

If he had a human father, then he could not be a natural Son of God.

After all, if Jesus had a human father,

then he would have had to have been adopted by God.

The virgin birth demonstrates that God alone is his natural Father.

What do we mean by “natural” Father?

It means “according to nature.”

In all births, you have a natural father and a natural mother.

(Today we often say “biological” father and mother,

but natural is better because it addresses the question of “nature”).

Who is Jesus' natural father?

Obviously he has no “biological” father,

but in the virgin birth there is still a natural Father.

As the angel says to Mary in Luke 1:35,

The Holy Spirit will come upon you,

and the power of the Most High will overshadow you;

therefore the child to be born will be called holy – the Son of God.

Both in his divine nature, and in his human nature,

Jesus has one Father.

He is NOT an adopted Son of God.
He is a natural Son.

I mention this because our salvation depends on it!
The history of Israel that Pastor Jon traced last week was a history of an adoptive sonship.
But adoptive sonship can only exist on the foundation of a natural sonship!

If no one is ever born
 then no one will ever be adopted.
If there is no natural son,
 then there will be no adopted son.

In Jesus, God became all that we are by nature,
 so that we might become all that he is by grace.

The Council of Chalcedon put it this way in the year 451,

Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the fathers has handed down to us.

Jesus is “recognized” in two natures.
 In other words, you can see that he is true God and true man.
 He is one person who acts according to the properties
 of two distinct but inseparable natures.

If you ever get confused by how to think or speak of the two natures,
 just remember this:
 persons act,
 natures are.

Have you ever seen a nature going for a walk?
Or have you seen a nature scrubbing the floor?

No!

Natures don't *do* anything.

“Nature” refers to a set of properties or characteristics.

Human nature refers to that set of properties or characteristics that belong to humanity.

Divine nature refers to that set of properties or characteristics that belong to God.

Natures do not act.

Persons do.

Persons walk.

Persons scrub floors.

So if you ever hear someone say,

“it was the human nature of Jesus that suffered,”

they are simply revealing their ignorance of the English language.

It was the person, Jesus, the eternal Son of God, who suffered—

and he suffered according to the properties of his human nature.

Jesus is one person who acts according to the properties of two natures.

His divine nature he has from the Father from all eternity.

His human nature he has from the Virgin Mary,

together with the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit –

a nice, mysterious way of putting it!

But it is precisely this mysterious origin

that results in the awkward beginning to the story of the gospel.

2. Inauspicious Beginnings – “Being a Just Man...Resolved to Divorce Her” (v18b-19)

When his mother Mary had been betrothed^[1] 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.

We saw in the genealogies the four “awkward moments” where women entered the narrative.

Tamar, the daughter-in-law of Judah, who played the harlot to seduce her father-in-law, in order to get pregnant;

Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute from Jericho;

Ruth, the Moabitess, who were not supposed to enter the Assembly of the LORD,

and the “wife of Uriah” – with whom David committed adultery.

Matthew has left out the most honorable women –

like Sarah or Rebekkah –

but he has also left out the truly wicked women –

like Jezebel or Athaliah.

The four “awkward moments” set us up for Mary.

The verdict on Tamar, after all, was declared by Judah:
“She is righteous, not I.”

Rahab and Ruth turn out to be remarkable stories of faith.
And even Bathsheba, while things did not start well,
turns out to be the faithful mother of Solomon.

The shame of their early situation is eventually covered –
and they become famous – “blessed women” – in Israel.

Verses 18-19 show that a similar situation was developing for Mary.
She was pregnant.

Joseph knew that he wasn’t the father.

If your fiancée was pregnant, and you knew it couldn’t be you –
what would you do?

Well, Joseph was a just man.

He didn’t want to disgrace Mary.

But he was a just man.

Some people seem to think that “he was a just man”
means that he didn’t want to disgrace her.

No, “he was a just man” means that he wanted to do the just thing.

He couldn’t go through with marrying a woman who was pledged to one man,
but would sleep with another!

And indeed, the *just* thing to do was divorce her.

In those days, engagement was a binding contract.

The only way out of an engagement was divorce.

Please notice this:

sometimes divorce is *just*.

Sometimes it is righteous and good to get a divorce.

We’ll come back to this topic later in Matthew’s gospel –
but here Matthew simply points out that Joseph, a just man,
“resolved to divorce her quietly.”

He was a just man – but he was not a cruel man.

So he resolved to divorce her quietly.

3. The Message of the Angel – “He Will Save His People from Their Sins” (v20-21)

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.”*

Notice that the angel highlights the role of *Joseph*.

“Do not fear to take Mary as your wife....
She will bear a son, and *you* shall call his name Jesus...”
If Joseph names the child, then Joseph is claiming the child as his own.

Consider Isaiah 43:1 –
“I have called you by name; you are mine.”

The angel reminds us what is at stake here:
if Joseph repudiates Mary, then Jesus will not be the son of David.
There are two things that Joseph must do:
first, take Mary as his wife,
and second, give the child a name – “you shall call his name Jesus.”

Verse 21 highlights the role of all three members of the holy family:

²¹ *She will bear a son* – that is Mary’s role – the Virgin Birth.
and you shall call his name Jesus – that is Joseph’s role – adopting Jesus.
for he will save his people from their sins – that is the role of our Blessed Redeemer!

And all this, Matthew tells us,

4. Matthew’s Commentary – “This Took Place to Fulfill...Immanuel” (v22-23)

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).*

Notice the parallel between verse 21 and verse 23 – which again highlights the role of each:
the virgin shall conceive and bear a son – that’s what Mary does.
and they shall call his name Immanuel – that’s what Joseph does.
(which means, God with us) – that’s what Jesus does.

The name “Jesus” and the name “Immanuel” are closely bound together in this narrative.
Jesus means “Yahweh Saves” –
but of course, Jesus is the one who saves his people from their sins!
And he does this because he is *Immanuel* – God with us.

So should we call Mary the “mother of God”?

In the early church there was a bishop named Nestorius who objected to that title.
The Greek word *theotokos* means “God-bearer.”
So the real question is whether Mary bore God in her womb.
Did Mary give birth to God?

The early church decided that if you would not call Mary “the God-bearer,”
then you must be a heretic.

Why?

Well, to whom did Mary give birth?
Jesus.

Who is Jesus?

As the angel said to Joseph in Matthew 1:20,
“that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.”
This child is “Immanuel” – God with us.

So if the child that she bore is true God,
then Mary is unquestionably the *theotokos*, the God-bearer.
She is the Mother of God.

She is not the mother of God the Father.
Nor is she the mother of God the Holy Spirit.
But she is the mother of God the Son,
for the person that was born of her is the eternal Son of God.

5. Joseph and the Gospel of the Virgin Birth (v24-25)

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.*

Joseph did the two things that the angel commanded.
He took his wife,
and he called the name of her son, Jesus.
He adopted Jesus as his own –
gave him a name,
and by virtue of that adoption,
made him truly a son of David.

And in so doing,
Joseph brought upon Jesus all the curses of the human race.

I realize that sounds a little shocking –
but that *is* what it means for Jesus to “save his people from their sins.”

In becoming the heir of David,
Jesus inherits the promise of Isaiah 7:
“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).”

When God comes to dwell in our midst,
then truly judgment has come to the household of God.

The Virgin Birth is a sign of judgment,
for in this birth – in the coming of Immanuel –
God has come in the flesh.

As Paul says in Romans 8:3,
*By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for a sin offering,
he condemned sin in the flesh,
in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us,
who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

Let me put this to you simply.
God created Adam as his son – his adoptive son.
He called Adam to live as the Son of God.

But Adam failed.
And Adam brought the curse of God upon the whole human race.

And so God adopted Abraham and his seed.
The seed of Abraham – Israel – was called to succeed where Adam failed.
Israel is my son, my firstborn.
Would Israel, the son of God, undo the curse?
No.
Israel would fail.

And so God called David and his sons.
The son of David would be adopted as the son of God –
I shall be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.
Israel had failed to live like the son of God.
Will the son of David succeed?
No.
And in the son of David's failure, the curse of Adam comes upon Israel,
and Israel was sent into exile with the Son of David.

The history of the people of God is the history of the son of God, as Paul says in Galatians 4:
*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son,
born of woman, born under the law,
to redeem those who were under the law,
so that we might receive adoption as sons. (Gal. 4:4-5)*

The Heidelberg Catechism has a beautiful way of saying this:

36. What benefit do you receive from the holy conception and birth of Christ?

A. He is our Mediator, and with His innocence and perfect holiness covers, in the sight of God, my sin, in which I was conceived and born.

When it says that his innocence and perfect holiness covers my sin,
it is not talking about his death – nor even his whole obedience in his life.

It is talking simply about his holy conception and birth.

Irenaeus liked to say that because the Son of God came as an infant
he sanctified infancy,
and because he passed through all the stages of life,
he sanctified all the stages of life.

Because he was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary,
he covers my sin, in which I was conceived and born.

And so indeed, the song speaks truly when it says,
“to show God’s love aright, she bore to men a savior, when half-spent was the night.”

Blessed be Mary the Virgin, who believed what was spoken!

And blessed be Joseph the Just, who heeded the word of the angel, and adopted our Lord.

And blessed be our Lord Jesus Christ, the Immanuel – God with us – who saved me from my sin.