

## FOUND WITH CHILD

© Eddy D Field III

God has His way of doing things, and man has his. They think differently, and they act differently. Isaiah the prophet proclaimed, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8, 9) Saint Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” (1 Corinthians 1:25) God’s way is not the way of the world. God’s people, however, think His thoughts after Him, and they do as He says. The world cannot understand this, and they persecute God’s people for it. God’s people often suffer because they follow Him, and not the world. There is a cost to following the Son of God, and every man must count it, and every man ought to be willing to pay it.

When David was king in Israel, God made a covenant with him. He promised him:

And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. (2 Samuel 7:12-14)

Years later, in the days of the Divided Monarchy of Israel and Judah, the people were wicked, and God through His prophets many times called upon them to repent. They would not, so God warned them that He would bring judgment upon them. He said:

For Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen: because their tongue and their doings are against the LORD, to provoke the eyes of his glory. The shew of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not. Woe unto their soul! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves.” (Isaiah 3:8, 9)

God caused Pul king of Assyria to attack the Northern Kingdom, and carry some of the people away. (1 Chronicles 5) So, Pekah king of Israel, rather than repent and turn to God, made an alliance with the Rezin king of Syria in an effort to defend against further Assyrian attacks. Together the two kings planned to invade the Southern Kingdom so that they might remove King Ahaz and place their own king upon the throne. (Isaiah 7:4-6) God told Isaiah to meet King Ahaz to deliver to him a message, and to take Shearjashub his son with him. Through the prophet God told Ahaz that He would not allow the two allied kings to succeed in their plan, and He offered to Ahaz a sign to confirm His word. Ahaz refused a sign, however, on the ground that to ask God for a sign would be to test Him, something God forbade. (Isaiah 7:11, 12; Deuteronomy 6:16) This was a pretense, however, for Ahaz did not repent and trust in the Lord for deliverance, but rather had set his heart on an making an alliance with the king of Assyria, and a sign from God would have been a witness against him. So, God rebuked Ahaz, and the entire royal house of David with him, saying:

O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings. (Isaiah 7:13-16)

Ahaz was wicked, and so was his house, the house of David. With their sins they wearied both man and God. Nevertheless, God would give them a sign that His covenant with David stood, and that the Christ would come to save the nation as promised. The sign was that, miraculously, a virgin would conceive, and bear a son, and would call his name Emmanuel, which means *God with us*. Some have said that the prophet characterized the woman in question, not as a virgin, but as a young woman. However, for a young woman to conceive is nothing extraordinary, and could not serve as a sign. Moreover, the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, made in the second century before Christ, translates the word, not as *woman*, but as *virgin*, showing that this understanding did not come after the birth of Christ, but before. Some have identified the woman in question with Abi, wife of Ahaz, and the son as Hezekiah their child. But at the time of this prophecy, Hezekiah was nine years old, too old to fulfill the prophecy. So, some have identified the woman with the wife of Isaiah, and her child his son. But it would not be proper to call Isaiah's wife a young woman, and to call her a virgin would be absurd, for she had already given birth to a child. It must refer to some virgin who was unknown to the prophet. This child will be Emmanuel, God with us. He would be, as God promised, His Son. He would not be called Emmanuel simply as a token of God's providential care; He would have that name because He would be God present among us. This child, although God with us, would, of course, be a son of man, and He would eat as a son of man eats. Moreover, although the Son of God, he would learn obedience to God. (Hebrews 5:8) The Virgin Birth would be a sign of the coming of the Son of God, and of the fulfillment of God's promise to king David.

Saint Matthew in his Gospel tells of the fulfillment of this prophecy. Mary was espoused to Joseph, which means that, according to ancient Jewish custom, they had vowed to be husband and wife, but would wait some time before they consummated, that is to say, completed their marriage. According to the Jewish encyclopedia, "When the agreement had been entered into, it was definite and binding upon both groom and bride, who were considered as man and wife in all legal and religious aspects, except that of actual cohabitation." (*Jewish Encyclopedia* (1906), see under "Betrothal") Mary was espoused to Joseph, and they were husband and wife, and, because they had not consummated their marriage, Mary was a virgin. The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and said to her, "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women." (Luke 1:28) This troubled Mary, and she wondered what it could mean. Then the angel said to her:

Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. (Luke 1:30-33)

Mary asked how she could conceive a child when she had never been with a man. He told her:

The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible. (Luke 1:35-37)

It was a great honor for Mary to bear the incarnate Son of God. Yet, how would she explain this to her family? How would she explain it to her husband? She must have considered the possibility that no one would believe her. Yet, she was a righteous woman who trusted in the Lord, and she said to the angel, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.” (Luke 1:38)

Of course, Joseph did eventually learn of his wife’s condition. The law of Moses states that if a virgin is betrothed to a husband, and she willingly lies with another man, then both she and the man must be put to death. If, however, she is unwilling, then only the man must be put to death. (Deuteronomy 2:23-37) At first, Joseph did not know how his wife came to be with child, and he assumed there was another man. He believed that, because Mary was no longer a virgin, he was not allowed to consummate his marriage to her. He might have publicly shamed her, as did they who brought to Jesus the woman caught in adultery. (John 8:1-11) However, as he was, according to Saint Matthew, a righteous man, he had it in mind quietly to divorce her. While he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:20, 21) Mary had conceived a child, and there was never such a conception before nor since. The Holy Spirit caused her, without a man, to conceive a child. Mary was never unfaithful to Joseph; she had never been with a man. Although she was with child, she was a virgin, and Joseph was free to take her as his wife. Mary, Joseph’s wife, would bear a son, and they were to call His name *Jesus* which means, *Jehovah is Salvation*. They were to call His name Jesus because He would save His people from their sins. Saint Matthew makes this comment: “Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.” (Matthew 1:22, 23) Here Saint Matthew makes reference to the prophecy of Isaiah, and states that Jesus of Nazareth is its fulfillment. The ancient prophecy Isaiah had given hundreds of years before had finally come to pass. The Savior had finally arrived, and would save His people.

Saint Matthew records Joseph’s response to the angel’s instructions: “Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.” (Matthew 1:24, 25) After Joseph woke, he did as the angel told him. He took Mary as his wife, but he kept her a virgin until Jesus was born. Whether he kept her a virgin after that Saint Matthew does not say. When the child was born, Joseph did call His name *Jesus*.

One may pause and reflect on what this meant for Mary and Joseph, and for Jesus. In ancient Israel, if a woman was unfaithful to her husband, she committed a great sin, and according to the law of Moses the penalty for that sin is death. It was shameful for her, and, if she was not executed, then she had to bear the shame for the rest of her life. Mary the mother of Jesus was a virtuous woman. She was so virtuous that God chose her to bear His incarnate Son. Yet, she may have had also to bear the shame of the adulteress. People knew that she was the mother of Jesus. (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3) People knew that Joseph was the father of Jesus. (Matthew 13:55)

Yet, it seems that some doubted that Joseph was the biological father of Jesus, and they impugned Mary's virtue. In Jesus's most bitter dispute with the Jews, they said to Him, "Abraham is our father." (John 8:39) Jesus answered them, "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father." (John 8:39-41) Then they said to Him, "We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God." (John 8:41) According to the church father Origen, the philosopher Celsus, who lived in the second century, wrote of Mary that "when she was pregnant she was turned out of doors by the carpenter to whom she had been betrothed, as having been guilty of adultery, and that she bore a child to a certain soldier named Panthera." (Origen, *Against Celsus*, 32) Mary was maligned for the sake of Jesus her son, yet she believed in Him to the very end. This means that Joseph, also, suffered insults from them that said his wife had been unfaithful to him, and that Jesus was not his son. Joseph must have foreseen these aspersions; yet, he took Mary as his wife as the angel of the Lord had commanded him. Of course, Jesus suffered this slander. He is the only perfect man, and His mother was a virtuous woman. Yet, the Jews, when they became angry with Him, lashed out at Him and said, "We were not born of fornication." (John 8:41) These foul accusations against Mary and Jesus continue to this day.

Mary could not say that Joseph was Jesus's biological father. Joseph could not say it. Jesus could not say it. If they told people that Mary's conception of Jesus was of the Holy Spirit, a miracle, many would have scoffed. To some it would have seemed ridiculous. Even today, many ridicule the idea. They say that it is not possible for a woman to conceive a child without a man. They say that a mundane explanation for the conception of Jesus is more likely. But God's thoughts are not man's thoughts, His ways not man's ways. "Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world," Saint Paul wrote to the Corinthians. (1 Corinthians 1:20)

Why did the Holy Spirit cause Mary to conceive Jesus without a father? What is the reason for the Virgin Birth? The angel Gabriel told Mary, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:35) It seems that if Joseph begat a child by Mary, then that child would have been an ordinary man. Because Jesus had no biological father, because the Holy Spirit caused Mary to conceive Jesus, Jesus is the Son of God. Moreover, if Joseph begat a child, then that child would have inherited a sinful nature just as every one of Adam's descendants has. Since, however, Jesus had no biological father, since the Holy Spirit caused Mary to conceive Him, he has no sinful nature. This means that He was not bound to sin. It means that He "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:15) This means, in turn, that He sympathizes with our weaknesses. (Hebrews 4:15) More importantly, however, it means that He was a perfect sacrifice for our sins. Saint Paul wrote to the Hebrews:

For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:13, 14)

God said to His people, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:9)

Let us recognize that God's wisdom is greater than man's wisdom. Let us trust in the wisdom of God. Let us not be ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. *Amen.*