

## The Birth of Immanuel—Matthew 1: 18-25

### *Introduction, Outline*

- Scripture reading: Matthew 1: 18-25, Isaiah 7: 3-17.
- Teaching scripture text: Matthew 1: 18-25 (NASB95)

**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.

- “Virgin birth? I don’t believe that. How can a virgin possibly have a baby?” “Well, nothing is impossible with God. The Bible is God’s Word. Whatever He says, I believe. Simple as that!” To have such simple faith is good, but is that all for the virgin birth? Merely a test to challenge our faith? Not so.
- Outline:
  - Title: The Birth of Immanuel
  - 1. Matthew’s Preface (v18a)
  - 2. Mary’s Pregnancy (v18b)
  - 3. Joseph’s Dilemma (v19)
  - 4. Angel’s Command (vv 20-21)
  - 5. Immanuel’s Meaning (vv 22-23)
  - 6. Joseph’s Obedience (vv 24-25)

### **Matthew’s Preface (v18a)**

- “the birth of Jesus”: The same Greek word was used in verse 1 to introduce the “record of the genealogy (birth) of Jesus”. In verse 1, it is the record of his birth, an official document, and here is what actually happened in his birth. According to the official record, Jesus is the son of Joseph, “the

son of David, the son of Abraham”. This is according to the family tree. But in reality, Joseph is not Jesus’s father. Mary conceived Jesus by the Holy Spirit. Even in his conception, Jesus is 100% of God and 100% man.

- Jesus being 100% God and 100% man is very crucial to salvation. Only being 100% man can he act as a substitute for us to fulfill the requirement of God for us and to bear the punishment of our sin. Only being 100% God can the sacrifice of his life have enough value to pay the ransom for sinners. (cf. Psalm 49: 7-8)

### **Mary’s Pregnancy (v18b)**

- “be with child by the Holy Spirit”: This is not a big surprise to Mary, for the angel has already told her that.

Luke 1: 35 “The angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God.”

As Jesus has a supernatural birth, so does every believer in Christ have a supernatural birth. As the birth of Jesus is completely the work of the Holy Spirit. So is the regeneration of your soul.

### **Joseph’s Dilemma (v19)**

- “Joseph her husband, being a righteous man” A righteous man will pursue the righteousness of God. The righteousness of God does not permit intercourse outside marriage. What would a righteous man do in this case?

According to Deuteronomy 22, if a married woman commits adultery with another man, she must be stoned to death. The only exception is when she wasn’t forced and had no way to escape. Obviously, Mary’s case doesn’t fit anything in the law, but the truth was hard for Joseph to believe. How would a righteous man respond in this case?

- “Not wanting to disgrace her”: One characteristic of a righteous man is kindness. Disgracing her would be to bring her to the court for a public trial. Mary would be condemned publicly and her reputation destroyed. On the other hand, Deuteronomy 24 allows for a husband to divorce his wife privately by writing her a certificate of divorce, thus avoiding public humiliation. So, within the boundaries of what God’s law and his conscience could allow, Joseph chose the most lenient way possible.

### **Angel’s Command (vv 20-21)**

- “when he had considered”: Literally “As he pondered it”, so apparently he’s still unsettled with his decision, thinking over it day and night, even in his dream, when the angel appeared to him.
- “son of David”: A messianic title. The implication is that God has chosen him for the honor of being part of the family tree of the Messiah.

- “Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife” To obey this command, Joseph has to overcome fear. Fear of what? Being criticized by others. It’s the fear of man. “Look, his wife got pregnant before they got married. Tsk tsk...” A righteous man will not fear people. A fearer of man cannot be a fearer of God.
- “Conceived ... of the Holy Spirit.”: God proved Mary’s innocence to Joseph through the angel. Mary must’ve told him already, but when God Himself spoke, he’d no longer have any doubt. Another characteristic of a righteous man is that he trusts God’s Word completely.
- “you shall call His name Jesus”: Jesus means “Yahweh saves”, and the Angel says this is because “He (Jesus) will save His people from their sins”. Jesus is Yahweh. If Jesus is not Yahweh, he is not your Savior. Yahweh Himself says, “I, even I, am the Lord (Yahweh), And there is no savior besides Me.” (Isaiah 43: 11)
- “He will save His people from their sins”: Not just from the consequences of sin, such as sickness and suffering, but from sin itself; and not from other people’s sin, but from *their own* sins.

Three levels of being saved from sins:

- From *the power* of sin, now, as Christians mortify their sin by the Holy Spirit in this life.
- From the *condemnation* of sin, on Judgment Day, when Christians will be spared of the punishment of hell before God.
- From the *very presence* of sin, in heaven, as not a trace of sin or its consequence can be found in heaven.

### **Joseph’s Obedience (vv 24-25)**

- “Joseph ... did as the angel of the Lord commanded him ...”: Joseph obeyed the angel’s command exactly to the word, and he obeyed at the earliest possible timing. A righteous man obeys God’s Word without delay or reservation.

### **Immanuel’s Meaning (vv 22-23)**

- “fulfill”: Fulfillment is a key theme in Matthew. Just in the first two chapters of Jesus’ birth and infancy narrative, this word is used five times, each as a summary of a section of the story as a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies.
- “Virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel”: This is to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 7: 14. This is a profound prophecy that requires some background knowledge.

Background: Ahaz, king of Judah, was confronted by two powerful enemies (Isaiah 7: 3-9). Ahaz was a very evil king (2 Kings 16), yet God gave him hope of salvation via the prophet Isaiah, that the two enemies will fail (Isaiah 7: 7), together with a warning to the king and the nation that “If you will not believe, you surely shall not last.” It may look like a warning, but God was really giving Ahaz an opportunity to repent, “although you’ve done so much evil, if you repent now, I will still establish you and the nation.

Then, God asked Ahaz to ask for a sign (Isaiah 7: 11) so God could show him He's trustworthy. Ahaz, with a feigned piety, rejected, saying, "I will not ask, nor will I test the Lord!" (Isaiah 7: 12). Truth is he had already decided to ask for help from Assyria (2 Chronicles 28). He simply would not trust in God. Whoever has a big strong army he'll trust in him.

God responded in vv 13-16 that He will give the house of David a sign. "Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel." Ahaz would not live to see this sign, but God gave him another sign for this sign, that is, "the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken." When the latter comes to pass, you'll know the first will happen too.

Isaiah 8: 1-4, Isaiah's own child became the sign of sign of sign, indicating the sign of sign would soon come to pass, that the two kings would be destroyed. Sure enough, the two kings were soon destroyed (2 Chronicles 28), and that in turn indicates that the prophecy of Immanuel would be fulfilled as well.

With such a background, what then is the significance of the sign of Immanuel? House of David, when you see the sign of Immanuel, you will know that I am Yahweh, the Faithful One. I will do what I said I would do. You must trust in me. I am your Savior, and I will fulfill all the promises I gave to the house of David. I have fulfilled this sign, and I will fulfill all my promises, I will save you from all your enemies. You must believe me. You must trust in me. Trust in me alone. Do not trust in idols. Do not trust in Assyria. Do not trust in money. Do not trust in human power. If you have trusted in other things, repent now and return to me, for I am your salvation. But you must believe in me. If you don't, and if you refuse to repent like King Ahaz, you will not stand firm. You will be destroyed.

*Have you received this Sign? Have you repented and believed in God through Jesus? Is God your only salvation? When confronted with difficulties in life, do you first turn to God, seeking His wisdom from His Word through prayer? Or do you first turn to the internet, or to other people, or to friends who can listen to your bitter complaining? What is it really that you put your trust in for your life? The truthful and powerful Word of God? Or the wisdom and power of man? Do you trust in your own ability, your parent's money, your spouse's support, your children's achievement, or every word from the mouth of God? How much of your trust in God is built solidly upon His Word, and how much of it is based on mere hear-say or wishful thinking? Have you received the promise of Immanuel? Have you really turned to Jesus and been saved from your sins?*