Jesus Was Born of the Virgin Mary

December 23, 2018

Matthew 1:18-25

Key Verse 1:23 “‘The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’ (which means, ‘God with us’).”

The virgin birth of Jesus Christ is essential enough for the Apostles’ Creed to speak of Jesus as “conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary.” It is essential doctrine of Christianity.

Dr. Walvoord, the president of Dallas Theological Seminary, says, “The incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ is the central fact of Christianity. Upon it the whole superstructure of Christian theology depends.” The whole essence of Christianity is based on the fact that Jesus is God in human flesh. And that is something made clear at the very birth of Christ, an essential doctrine. If Jesus had a human father, then the Bible is untrustworthy, because the Bible claims he did not. And if Jesus was born simply of human parents, there is no way to describe the reason for his supernatural life. His virgin birth, his bodily resurrection and his second coming are a package of deity.

Immanuel means God with us. Immanu means “with us.” El is the name for God. So Immanuel means literally, “With us is God.” Even today, “God be with you” might be the best greeting to all helpless people. We cannot say to a dying patient, “Take care.” Often we hear “Take care” or “Have fun,” as forms of greeting. These reflect selfishness and self-centeredness in this society.

Of course, they never called Jesus Immanuel while on earth. The title reflects who Jesus is. He is God in flesh with us. The following story illustrates why God became flesh: A little girl was sleeping by herself across the hall. She said, “Daddy, I’m scared!” The father responded, “Honey, don’t be afraid, Daddy’s right across the hall.” After a very brief pause she spoke again, “I’m still scared.” The father thought and again responded, “You don’t need to be afraid. God is with you. God loves you.” After a long pause she says, “I don’t care about God, Daddy; I want someone with skin on!” The logic used by the little child is precisely the reason for the Incarnation. After thousands of years of being unsuccessful in being able to convince his people that he really loved them, our Creator realized that the best way to demonstrate his love for us was to send “someone with skin on.” That is the meaning of Immanuel. That is the meaning of Christmas. Likewise, Jesus is with us in the Holy Spirit, but sometimes we don’t feel his presence. We eagerly await a Savior from heaven, someone with skin on from heaven.

Look at verse 18a. “This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph....” In Jewish society, the pledge of marriage was a legally binding relationship. According to Jewish custom, after the pledge of marriage there was one year waiting period before a couple could marry. During this period, the bridegroom and the bride continue to stay at their parents’ house, and the two of them were not allowed to come together. Although the two of them could not come together for a physical union, they were still called ‘husband and wife.’

One day an unexpected thing happened to them. Look at verse 18b. “...but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.” As God had promised, a Savior of the world was to be born from the offspring of a woman (Ge 3:15). This Savior had to be a perfect man (Heb 4:15), and at the same time he had to be the perfect God. So Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. This great work of God demanded that Joseph and Mary sacrifice their dream of happy marriage and a sweet home. Before marriage Mary had to bear a son—the Savior of the world. For this, Mary had to be pregnant by the Holy Spirit before she got together with Joseph.

What did Joseph do in this situation? Verse 19 says, “Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.” To our surprise, at the news of Mary’s pregnancy, Joseph did not give in to his emotional turmoil, nor was his love transmuted into hatred, saying, “How could she betray me?” If Mary were exposed to public disgrace, she might be stoned to death. Joseph would be the first to run to Mary’s house and stone her. In time of personal frustration, distress and anger, Joseph did not become emotional. Obviously he knelt down and prayed earnestly, asking God’s mercy on him. Then God helped Joseph to make a decision to protect Mary at any cost. There were two reasons for Joseph to get angry at Mary. First, her apparent unfaithfulness to him. Second, even though innocent, he would inevitably be accused of sleeping with Mary before marriage. It was a great shame to him and his family. He could have exposed Mary to public disgrace in order to get rid of misunderstanding and shame and put all the blame on Mary. But he made a tentative decision to divorce her quietly. We see in him the image of Jesus, who took up all our infirmities and transgression. We learn from Joseph how to think as Christians at a crucial moment. Joseph thought of God first. Then he thought of Mary, and then of himself—last. It was possible for him to think in this way, because he had a personal relationship with God. Joseph did not care about himself, if only he could save Mary.

What happened next? Look at verse 20. “But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.’” When Joseph struggled with the problem of Mary’s pregnancy and tried to save her from public disgrace, he was afraid and tired. So he fell asleep. While Joseph was in a dream, God sent his angel to tell him to take Mary home as his wife. At that time, according to Jewish custom, it was beyond imagination for Joseph to bring pregnant Mary to his home; it was shame for his family; it was shame for his relatives. But Joseph took Mary home. Probably Joseph’s family members pushed him out to sleep in the stable of an animal. Look at verse 25. “But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.” Joseph was pure in heart. Even though he brought Mary home, he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. Humanly speaking, he was a carpenter. Spiritually speaking, he was a man who could see God. Matthew 5:8 says, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” Thank God that we can see God when our hearts are pure. God was pleased with Joseph and used him to make an environment for the birth of Jesus. In taking Mary as his wife, Joseph also took her child as his adopted son. This is how Jesus became the legal heir to the throne of David.

Look at verse 21. “She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” The name Jesus means, “the Lord saves.” In this verse, “his people” refers to the people of Israel. At that time, the people of Israel were under the oppression of the Roman Empire. They lived in constant fear and misery. All of them thought they were miserable because of the Roman occupation. But they were miserable not because of the Roman occupation but because of their sins. What is sin? The Bible says that sin refers to man’s state of being, every inclination of his thought, his action or non-action, which falls short of God’s perfect standards. At the core of sin there is sin of pride. Satan tempted Eve at the Garden of Eden, saying, “You will be like God.” That is still true today. Many are deceived, thinking, “I don’t need God, I can do everything by myself. I am my own man. God is not my King.” One woman shared the following in her testimony; when she was in high school, she decided to lose weight. She experienced her will power. She could control her body. Then she though that she could do anything by herself. But it led her to bulimia. Later she repented of her pride. Sin separates man from God and from fellow human beings. It breaks man’s relationship with God and with one another. These days many people suffer from broken relationships. And at the core of every broken relationship, there is always an element of sin of self-centeredness and pride. Is there any hope? Yes! There is hope. God sent Jesus to save his people from their sins! Jesus heals relationships! Just as fish cannot live without water, so man cannot live without relationships. Fish cannot live in stinky water. Likewise, we cannot live in a rotten relationship; we need relationships which are healthy and sound, and which are maintained by God’s righteousness and selfless love.

At that time Caesar Augustus was the emperor of Rome. The term Augustus means to be worshiped and revered. Archaeologists have discovered an actual monument dedicated to Caesar and inscribed with the words, “Caesar Augustus, the savior of the whole world.” But the angel announced to the shepherds, who were keeping watch over their flocks at night: “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” (Lk 2:11-12) Effectively, God was saying, “Caesar Augustus is not the Savior; Jesus Christ is the Savior. The Savior is not wrapped in royal robes. He is wrapped in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.”

Look at verse 23. “’The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’ (which means, ‘God with us’).” God saves us by being with us. God became man to reveal to us what he was really like. God came to the earth as one of us to show us exactly who he is and how we are to live. Jesus came as the light of the world to reveal our sins so that we may be saved from our sins. John 8:12 says, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” In darkness we don’t know how dirty our house is. Jesus came as the light to expose our sins so that we may be saved. There is an interesting story about two men who left their house for work before dawn and came home late at night. They would eat rice with soy sauce every morning. One day they had an off day. They decided to clean the house. In day light, they saw a skeleton of mouse in the soy sauce jar. They had such a severe stomach ache. In darkness we don’t see dead mouse. Only in the light of Jesus we can be cleansed.

“God with us” is especially meaningful to Matthew. He was originally a tax collector. In modern terms, he was a drug dealer. If only he could make money, he was willing to do anything, even betraying his own people. The result was that he was hated by everybody. Everyone despised him, even his own wife and children. One day Matthew was sitting in his tax collector’s booth all by himself. He was lonely-so lonely that he felt like dying. What was worse, no one approached him; everyone ran away from him. But Jesus came to him and said, “Follow me.” It meant, “be my disciple.” Matthew could not believe his ears. But it was reality. At the moment, Matthew could see God in Jesus. This is the reason he could follow Jesus immediately, leaving his tax collector’s job. But Matthew was a very difficult person to help because of his blind selfishness. Matthew made Jesus sick and tired every day. But Jesus was always with him, until he was healed of his blind selfishness. Jesus was with him until his greatness in God was fully restored. To Matthew, “God with us” was the good news of great joy for all the people, especially for himself. Obviously Matthew said again and again, “You know, nobody wanted to be around me. I was lonely. I was like a leper. But Jesus came to me and was with me until I was changed into St. Matthew!”

It was prophesied in Isaiah 9:6, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given....” This verse means that God would send his one and only Son to this world as a child to be born of Mary. Almighty God came down to this world as a helpless child. Why did God do so? It was so that he might be with all sorrowful people and save them from their sins. While on earth, Jesus was always with sorrowful people. While on earth, Jesus was always with helpless people. While on earth, Jesus was always with very fatalistic people. It was to save them from their sins of fatalism and bring them back to his glorious kingdom. All men are fatalistic because of the sting of death. But in Jesus there is no death and no fatalism, because he came to this world to save fatalistic sinners by being with us. Jesus is the God of Immanuel.

The supernatural birth of Jesus is the only way to account for the life that he lived. Somebody once asked a Christian, “Well, if I told you that a child had been born today in the city over there in that hospital without a human father, would you believe me?” To which the Christian replied, “Yes. If he lived as Jesus lived.” Jesus is none other than God in human flesh. Matthew tells us he came to dwell with the sick, to heal them. He came to dwell with the demon possessed, to liberate them, with the poor in spirit to bless them, with the lepers, to cleanse them, with the diseased, to cure them, with the hungry, to feed them, with the paralyzed, to restore them, but most of all, he says that he came to dwell with the lost in order that he might seek and save them.

Immanuel, God with us, infinitely rich became poor, assumed our human nature, entered our sin-polluted atmosphere without ever being tainted by it, took our guilt, bore our griefs, carried our sorrows, was wounded with our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, went to heaven to prepare a place for us, sent his Spirit to dwell in our hearts, right now makes intercession for us, and will someday bring us to his glorious kingdom.