



1. JESUS' BIRTH (1:18-25)

- 1.1. Matthew's progression from genealogy to how "the birth of Jesus Christ took place" (18) reflects the common practice of his time. Likewise, ancient biographers would also include important details about the person's mother and father (e.g. Josephus, *The Life of Flavius Josephus*). This however is more than just Matthew being relevant to his particular historical context. It is deliberate.
- 1.2. (Like a person's genealogy), the biblical writers (incl. Matthew) believed that the circumstances surrounding a person's conception/birth (or the parents themselves) also shaped how the child would ultimately turn out. This was especially true when such circumstances were **extraordinary**.
- 1.3. In contrast (then) to modern thought, Matthew provides no information about the duration of Mary's labor nor Jesus' birth weight/length. As a matter of fact, Jesus' childhood (as a whole) is essentially forgotten. This (too) is consistent w/the rest of Scripture. The childhood of most biblical characters goes largely unmentioned. (IOW): It is chosen not to be remembered! And that again, b/c of what the biblical writers knew to be most important (and impactful)¹.
- 1.4. What that in mind, the following represents the extraordinary circumstances faced by the holy family (Mary, Jesus and Joseph) during the time of Jesus' birth (18 - "Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way..."):

1.4.1. Mary's extraordinary circumstance = She was pregnant, but still a virgin (18).

As a result of Mary's supernatural pregnancy, she became the super-fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy about a virgin bearing a son as a sign of God's good will toward His people (Isa 7:10-14 w/v22-23 - "Immanuel...God w/us" = God is FOR us) This child would signify that God was now offering salvation rather than extending judgment. This was true in the prophecy's first fulfillment. The birth of Isaiah's son meant God was now going to deliver Judah from the wrath of Israel and Syria's kings (see Isa 7:15-16 w/7:1). In its second fulfillment, the baby Jesus Himself, would represent not just a sign of coming salv., but also the means to rec'g it. In this case, salvation from the wrath of God (Rom 5:9). Mary (however) did cease to be unique in this way (i.e. a virgin mother) when she (later) gave birth to Joseph's biological children/Jesus' half- bros and sis's (v25 - "knew her not until" = Joseph did eventually have sexual relations w/Mary; see also Mat 13:55-56)².

1.4.2. Jesus' extraordinary circumstance = He was conceived w/o Original Sin (18 - "...child by the Holy Spirit" = There was no male fertilization in His conception).

According to the Bible, the inclination toward sin (i.e. the sinful nature) as well as a share in humanity's collective guilt/condemnation for sin is passed thru the sperm of the man. This is traditionally referred to as the Doctrine of Original Sin and is a curse we all possess (Psa 51:5; Rom 5:18). However, b/c there was no male contribution to Jesus' conception, He circumvented this particular curse. As a result:

1.4.2.1. Jesus possessed a mind free from the corrupting effects of sin (contra: Rom 1:21; Ecc 9:3; Gen 6:5, 8:21)

1.4.2.2. Jesus qualified to become the kind of sacrifice God would receive for the atonement of other people's sin (i.e. a lamb w/o blemish - Exo 12:5; Notice also, this is the meaning behind His name - v21).

1.4.3. Joseph's extra-ordinary circumstance = He married a woman who he knew became pregnant w/someone else's baby while they were betrothed (18-21, 24 - "he took his wife" = remained betrothed to her rather than continuing to pursue divorce).

That Joseph was initially not going to tolerate Mary's pregnancy (believing it to be the sign of an adulterous affair) is made clear by his intentions in (v19)³. Joseph's change of heart (24) was only b/c of what the angel had communicated to him in the dream: that Mary's child was (once more) the result of divine intervention (v20). What however makes this circumstance extraordinary, is not the dream. Though it constituted a supernatural event (and in that sense cb considered "extraordinary"), it did not create - but rather helped to alleviate, the extraordinary circumstance already in existence (i.e. marriage to a woman w/someone else's baby). Why this was (indeed) *the* extraordinary circumstance in Joseph's life can be easily discerned when one considers that:

¹ The biblical writers knew that trivial experiences were just that: trivial and ultimately not determining the course of the child's life. How different from our world which puts a premium on such experiences (e.g. b-day parties, amusement parks, games, sports, etc.).

² In spite of such Scriptural support to the contrary, many throughout Church History have held to Mary's perpetual virginity including Protestant Reformers, Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli. John Calvin also seemed to favor this position. It was reasoned that Jesus' siblings were not Mary's, but Joseph's from a previous marriage. Losing one's virginity however does not require having children, but simply sex. This once more seems to be the obvious implication of Mat 1:25.

³ Though Joseph could have easily secured a charge of adultery against Mary, he knew that such charge would not be justly/righteously est'd, given her 3-fold defense (personal testimony and the testimony of Elizabeth and Zechariah to angelic announcement- Luk 1; ability to pass the virginity test - Deu 22). Hence the reason the text mentions his actions in attempting to divorce her quietly (i.e. according to the congenial divorce option of Deu 24) as demonstrating him to be a "just man".

1.4.3.1. Under Roman rule, the Jews could no longer put people to death for capital crimes. As such, divorce in cases of adultery was not simply an option, but rather the “new law” (i.e. expectation of the Jewish government)⁴.

1.4.3.2. God’s command that Joseph forgo pursuing divorce and (instead) move forward in marriage not only meant Joseph was going against the expectations of his people, but (as a result), the forfeiture of his reputation/standing (as a “just man”), his family’s reputation in general and that his new family would most likely be poor. The Jewish community would now shun them, taking away also the possibility of acquiring steady work or good jobs (Mat 13:55 = notice, they do not/refuse to mention Joseph by name, opting instead to refer to him only by his trade. In ancient society, speaking a person’s name was a sign of respect. When persons were despised, their names were often omitted when referenced – e.g. Exo 23:13; contra Heb 2:12; Phi 2:9-11; e.g. James and John, the sons of Zebedee; Joh 8:41; Luk 2:22-24)⁵.

1.4.4. Why all of this is important:

1.4.4.1. B/C it indicates Who we sb listening to if we want the ability to accurately assess our lives and safely navigate thru this world.

(Eph 4:17-21 = IOW: you know to listen to Him/His way of thinking versus the depraved reasoning of unbelievers. Since His mind is not depraved/corrupted, He is the standard of all truth. As such, a person’s ability to discern will therefore always be proportionate to their knowledge of Christ’s Word/Word of God. Hence why Peter says what he does in 2Pe 3:17-18; see also Col 2:1-8, 3:16).

1.4.4.2. B/C it reveals the impossibility of fixing our sin problem apart from God.

Adam’s fall into sin did more than just put him at odds w/God. It also changed the “moral DNA” he would pass on to all of humanity. As such, the stain exists at the ontological level of the soul. It is therefore impossible to remove it and its terrible side-effects thru psychiatric drugs, participation in charity events, Buddhist chanting, self-help or flagellation. It requires (instead) divine intervention (i.e. God entering into the human race in order to provide someone who could trade His moral state for ours – 2Co 5:21).

1.4.4.3. B/C it demonstrates that God considers relationships as always conditional.

It is not uncommon today to view the relationship we have w/ God - or even our relationships w/one another as based on unconditional love. The Bible however paints a very different picture. Biblical relationships (and the blessings of the love they express) are instead conditioned upon fidelity. Hence why Matthew can record Joseph as a “just man” in his pursuit of divorce for Mary’s seemingly apparent infidelity. Hence why also Jesus is said to save only those who are (or remain) “His people” (Jud 1:20-21; Joh 14:15-16, 21; Rev 2-3 = Christ’s relationship to the churches is conditioned upon their repentance and obedience).

1.4.4.4. B/C it reminds us that remaining faithful to God should never be dependent upon our circumstances (extraordinary or otherwise):

1.4.4.4.1. As it re: to Mary and Joseph

Thru their entire betrothal – including a portion of their marriage, Joseph and Mary did not engage in any sexual activity (18, 25). (IOW): they remained sexually pure, even when the circumstances were extremely difficult⁶ (Mat 19:12; 1Pe 3:14-15 w/Rom 13:13-14).

1.4.4.4.2. As it re: to Joseph = (24-25)

Joseph obeyed God by not only going forward w/the marriage – but even adopting Jesus as his own son. And that once more, regardless of what the consequences such circumstances would create for both himself and his family (20 – “**Do not fear to take Mary as your wife...21 - you shall call His name Jesus**” w/24 - “**He did as the angel of the Lord commanded him...25 – “And he called His name Jesus.**” = Joseph is the one who gave Jesus his name. This was the job of fathers in ancient history. Such action on the part of Joseph therefore reveals how he viewed Jesus – as his adopted son).

1.4.4.4.3. As it re: to Jesus = He remained faithful to what both His birth and name signified (again vv21-23), though the path was filled w/strong temptation to abort (Mat 4:1-11; Luk 22:42; Heb 2:17-18).

⁴“In contrast to most of modern Western culture, Joseph lived in a society where he had no option of giving Mary a second chance... Jewish courts in this period could not execute capital offenses...Jewish law [therefore] demanded that a man charge his wife [i.e. divorce her] immediately on the discovery that she had not been a virgin. Roman law actually treated a husband who failed to divorce an unfaithful wife as a panderer exploiting his wife as a prostitute. Mediterranean society viewed with contempt the weakness of a man who let his love for his wife outweigh his appropriate honor in repudiating her.” – Craig Keener (*Matthew: Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*)

⁵ “Joseph was righteous in [his intentions to divorce] Mary; to fail to do so would violate law and custom, would bring enduring reproach on his household, and would constitute embracing as his wife one who had betrayed him in the worst manner conceivable in his culture. [Joseph] would remain an object of shame in a society dominated by the value of honor. Joseph’s obedience to God cost him the right to value his own reputation.” - Craig Keener (ibid)

⁶ “In middle Eastern societies outsiders assume that if a man and woman were alone for more than twenty minutes they have had intercourse...B/C they [Mary and Joseph] were probably a poor couple, we may assume they shared the same bed in the same room [after marriage]. Married though they were, they controlled their passions for the honor of God’s Messiah (cf. Mat 19:12).” - Craig Keener (ibid)