Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Virgin Birth
Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25
Code: 2181

Open your Bible with me, if you will, to Matthew chapter 1. Matthew chapter 1. And we're looking this evening at verses 18 to 25 of this first chapter. We began last week a study in the record of Matthew, the record really of the life of Jesus Christ as recorded by the evangelist Matthew, commonly known as the Gospel of Matthew. You're going to find that every element of life will be touched by this book, tremendously forceful powerful statement on the person of Jesus Christ and the principles that God has ordained for human existence. But in our lesson for tonight we come to verses 18 to 25, and these verses deal with the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. Matthew begins his gospel by considering Christ. And it's a very important passage. Let me read it to you. Follow along as I read.

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this way: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privately. And while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, '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 Spirit.' And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.

"Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord through the prophet, saying, **'**Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.' 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."

Now in Matthew 22:42, Jesus asked the Pharisees a question that has been voiced in every generation since then. Jesus said, "What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?" What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? That's the question Jesus asked in Matthew 22:42, and it's a question that needs to be asked in every age to every person. Whose son is he?

Now the Jewish leaders believed that the promised Messiah would be the son of David. They believed that from a human viewpoint, he would be a member of the royal lineage of David, the royal family, the royal line. And frankly, they weren't sure of much more than that. They, for the most part, seemed to reject the idea that the Messiah would be God in human flesh, though there may be some indication that a few of them may have felt that way.

The preponderance of the Jewish people at that time seem to have been convinced that the king they were going to gain would be of the seed of David, a human being in every sense, of royal lineage. In fact, when Jesus claimed to be both the son of David and the Son of God, they accused him of blasphemy. They expected him to be of the royal line of David, but apparently not to be deity in human flesh.

And I think people today are still denying that. I think people today are willing to let Jesus be a royal seed. They're willing to let him be a son of David. They're willing to let him be even one of a kingly line, but they're not anxious for him to be deity, God in human flesh. It's all right to be the son of David, but not the Son of God.

And even at Christmastime I am reminded of a carol which they sing that says this, "Christ by highest heaven adored. Christ the everlasting Lord. Late in time, behold him come. Offspring of the virgin's womb. Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see. Hail the incarnate deity. Pleased as man with men to dwell. Jesus, our Immanuel. Hark, the herald angels sing glory to the newborn king."

Now that verse of that particular Christmas carol is a verse that is built around the theme that he is God. And even though the world may sing the song, they're not really ready to receive the reality of it. To show you that, *Redbook* magazine over ten years ago took a poll of students in protestant seminaries. Fifty-six percent of the students in protestant seminaries studying for the ministry rejected the idea of the virgin birth. Fifty-six percent. The legacy of that poll and those students ten years ago is modern liberalism.

The survey research center of the University of California at Berkeley polled the denominations to get their view on the virgin birth. Sixty-nine percent of the American Baptists believed in the virgin birth. Sixty-six percent of the Lutherans believed in the virgin birth. Fifty-seven percent of the United Presbyterians. Thirty-nine percent of the Episcopalians. Thirty-four percent of the Methodists, and 21 percent of the Congregationalists believed in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.

Now the church in many, many ways - is the church not evangelical, but the church liberal – is not even ready to accept the deity of Jesus Christ and his virgin birth, so it seems rather obvious that the world isn't beating a path to the door of this great concept in reality. But you shouldn't be surprised. The apostle Paul said in Romans chapter 3 these words. "For what if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid. Yeah, let God be true and every man - " what? " - a liar." So says Paul in Romans 3:3-4.

Don't ever base your theology on majority rule. There may be people who deny the virgin birth. There may be people who flagrantly and blatantly fight against the deity of Jesus Christ, but maybe even more subtle than that are the people who ignore the virgin birth. Reading a quote by someone that

you all know, Robert Schuller at Garden Growth Community Church, this is a quote from *The Wittenberg Door*, January, 1976. He said, “I could not imprint or in public deny the virgin birth of Christ, but when I have something I can’t comprehend, I just don’t deal with it.”

Well, maybe that is the most serious error of all. Because that’s very subtle, to just ignore the virgin birth. We cannot doubt it and we cannot deny it and we cannot ignore it if we simply open our eyes and look at Matthew 1:18-25. It’s there. Dr. Walvoord, the president of Dallas Theological Seminary, says – and I quote - “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, people, is predicated 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.

You see, 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 substitutionary death, his bodily resurrection and his second coming are a package of deity. You cannot isolate any one of those and accept only that one and leave the rest or vice versa, accept them all but one.

You believe all of those realities that are the manifestation of his deity or you do not. And so we must face the question that Jesus posed to the Pharisees again. Whose son is he? Now Matthew gives us the human answer to whose son he is in the genealogy which we studied last week. Humanly speaking, whose son is he? Son of David.

Now this week, we look at the next section and we have the divine answer in verses 18 to 25. Whose son is he? Son of God. Son of David, humanity. Son of God, deity. Both of those are essential to an understanding of the incarnation. Jesus is God in a human body, humanly through the lineage of David he gains the right to rule the world. And from the standpoint of deity, he gains the very essence of the nature of God by having been born without a human father through the agency of the Spirit of God himself.

And so Matthew in writing his Gospel squarely faces his Jewish readers and all the readers of all the ages, and he gives them the answer. The genealogy of Jesus tells you whose son he is, David. And the birth of Jesus tells you whose son he is, God. Now if Matthew 1:1-17, the genealogy, were all that could be said, then Christ may have had the legal right to be the king, but he could have never redeemed men.

He could have never conquered death. He could have never conquered sin. He could have never conquered Satan and hell. For that, he had to be God. And so Jesus was the God-man, 100 percent deity, 100 percent humanity. That is the message of chapter 1 of Matthew. And so he splits his chapter into two parts, dealing with the human and then the divine.

Now let me add a footnote that you might think about. Matthew may be writing in an apologetic manner. And by that I don't mean he was apologizing for what he was saying. Apologetics comes from a Greek word, *apologia* which means a speech in defense of. And it may be that Matthew is actually writing here not simply just to lay out the facts, but that he is really writing to counter a certain thing that was going on. He is really writing to counter a certain slander.

For example, we know that at the time of Jesus Christ, there were some who accused him of being an illegitimate son, a child born out of wedlock, the son of a Roman soldier who cohabitated with Mary, and Mary was an adulteress, and thus Jesus was an illegitimate child. Those kind of slanders were in existence at that time. And it may have been that Matthew was not just pedantically recording the facts of the birth of Christ, but that he was countering a slander that existed about his dear Lord.

And this text sets such a slander right. The virgin birth is essential enough for the Apostles' Creed to speak of Jesus as "conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary." That's always been a cardinal fact of Christianity. And it's always been one that is attacked by false doctrine.

Now the world has had its unusual births. I mean, I remember back in reading about the first quintuplets. I think they were the Dionne quintuplets, born about 1934, long before I was ever a twinkle in my father's eye. And we in our own lifetime in the United States have seen the, I think it was the Fischer quintuplets, and then more recently, about 1973, the Stanek sextuplets. We've seen some unusual births is the point.

I remember when our first little guy, Matthew, was born. We thought we really had a monstrosity. What was he, honey? Ten pounds and two ounces or something. He was a good, healthy kid. And at the same day, we thought, boy – you know how fathers, we've got the biggest kid in the place. Right? Run right out and bought him a football. And I read in the paper the same day there was a baby born 16 pounds and some odd ounces. Now that is a baby. That is a baby, folks.

I mean, there have been some unusual births. We are aware of that. But there is no birth ever in the history of humanity that is as singularly spectacular as the birth of Jesus Christ. And any rejection of Christ's supernatural origin leaves his supernatural life and his supernatural death and his supernatural resurrection inexplicable. You got to have it all for any of it to make sense. And if Jesus wasn't virgin born, then the claim that he can save is highly questionable. So Matthew, to begin with, affirms the virgin birth.

Now let's look at five features, five distinct elements appearing in the narrative. And I like to take a narrative like this, and even though it isn't divided up in terms of logical thought, it's just a narrative, but if we divide it up, we can kind of get a look at the single highlights of it, and that's the purpose in doing that. And there's probably an outline in the bulletin. If you have one there, you can follow. But

we see five things. The virgin birth conceived, confronted, clarified, connected, and consummated. Those are not profound words. They're just hooks to hang your thoughts on.

First of all, the virgin birth conceived, then confronted, then clarified, then connected, and then consummated. Now, by the way, it's most interesting how certain liberal theologians deal with this problem here. They say, "Well, yes, we do agree that, of course, this is an account of a virgin birth. But after all, Matthew was written by a well-meaning fellow who was not inspired by God."

And they tell us that at the time in which Matthew wrote – they don't know what time that was, as I told you last time. It was about a 30-year possibility. But around that time - from 40 to 70 AD - around that time, they say there were a lot of virgin birth myths floating around. And it just so happened that it was a kind of a popular thought, and so when Matthew wanted to lay out his deal on Jesus, he just snatched one out of the air and incorporated it here because there were so many virgin birth myths floating around.

You want to know something? There have always been a lot of virgin birth myths floating around. Guess who made them up? Satan. Why? He is the master what? Counterfeiter, deceiver. So there's always been those things. Let me give you an illustration of one. By the way, the writers from as far back as Origen, who wrote early on in the Christian era, writers from then to the present have shown us very clearly the fowl character of such tales. They're very, very questionable. I mean, there's just no comparison. Let me give you an illustration.

There was a legend that Alexander the great – you remember Alexander the Great, son of Philip of Macedon, Alexander the Great conquered the world, taking the world from the Medo-Persians. He swept east with a great army and conquered the world for Greece. Well, Alexander the Great, it was claimed, was virgin born. Okay? Here's the story.

A serpent, snake, was once seen sharing the bed of Olympius. Now Olympias was the wife of Philip of Macedon. So she cohabitated with a snake. And, of course, we all know, if we know anything about Greek legend, who that snake was. There was one of the Greek gods who more than any other was a sexual deviant. Whenever there's some weird sexual thing, you can always figure that it was Zeus. He had a problem.

And so frequently in Greek culture you find the god Zeus taking the form of an animal for some strange cohabitation. And that's what they say occurred in the case of Alexander the Great. This was Zeus in the form of a snake, crawled in bed with Olympias and made Olympias pregnant. And Zeus also appeared often as a bird, and sometimes he even appeared as foam on the sea, knocking ships over and things, strange stuff.

But anyway, what the legend says is that when Philip of Macedon discerned what his wife had done, his own sexual desire was dulled and hence the product of the union had to have been born of the snake, and it was none other than Alexander. And thus, Alexander the Great was the child of Zeus. That is the virgin birth story of Alexander the Great. A filthy, vile, inconceivable, stupid, asinine, not to be compared story with that of the Word of God.

And to say that Matthew just happened to find a few of those deals up in the air and he yanked one down and slapped in on Jesus' life is to do two things. Number one, it's to accuse Matthew of being a blatant liar. And number two, it's to say that the Word of God is in fact not the Word of God but the word of man. This story is history, beloved, not fantasy. It is history.

Now there wasn't really a lot of talk about the Messiah being virgin born. I mean, they didn't really see that, even though it was sort of veiled in the Old Testament and even though there was Isaiah 7:14 and there were other passages that maybe kind of leaned that way. But they didn't really see that. But there was evidence, and I want you to note this in your mind. There was Old Testament evidence that the Messiah would be God.

Now it was veiled and it wasn't just flat out. But there were at least indications in the Old Testament that the Messiah would be deity. And we're not going to take time to go into those, but just take that and put it in your file somewhere up in our mind. But it was very vague. And it wasn't until the New Testament that the full mystery of godliness, the God was manifest in the flesh was really unfolded. It became crystal clear in the New Testament.

Naturally, then, if it is clear in the New Testament that Jesus is God in human flesh, then what will be the number one point of attack of every false system? The deity of Jesus Christ. Invariably, they all do it.

Now the facts are clear in the narrative. They are here to support the fact that from the very beginning, Jesus was the Son of God, God in human flesh. No matter what the Jews may or may not have believed, no matter what the legends were, no matter what the critics said, no matter what the slander said, Matthew records the facts. Now let's see how this incredible event occurred.

First of all, point number one, the virgin birth conceived. Verse 18. The virgin birth conceived – this miracle is so incredible that I hope you haven't heard it so often that your senses are dulled to the spectacular, unbelievable supernaturalness of this thing.

Verse 18. "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was in this way: When as his mother Mary was espoused or betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child by the Holy Spirit." Now we'll stop there. Now here you have the virgin birth conceived. Here the Spirit of God through the writer Matthew tells us that Mary was impregnated by the Holy Spirit.

Now let me just show you something about the verse that I think is fascinating. See the word “birth”? The word “birth” at the beginning? That is the very same Greek word as the word in verse 1 of chapter 1, where it says the book of the genealogy. It is the same word for “genealogy.” In other words, he is simply giving you the genealogy of Jesus from the divine side. 1:1 “The book of the genealogy, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” Over here, now the genealogy of Jesus Christ was in this way and this is the divine side he was conceived by the Holy Spirit of God. See, just two sides of the same genealogy. The genealogy of Jesus Christ was in this manner.

When his mother, Mary – and we don’t know much about Mary. I wish we knew more about her. We don’t know much about Mary. Let me see if I can kind of put some things together for you. It may be – this is a real possibility – let me just see if I can find that verse for you. John 19:25, I think it is. You don’t need to look it up. “There stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.”

Now we don’t know much about Mary, but apparently Mary had a sister, the wife of Cleophas, who also was named Mary, which is not necessarily uncommon. So we know at least one person in the immediate family. And it is also true according to Luke 1:36, listen to this, “And, behold, - ” it says “ - thy cousin Elisabeth, has also conceived a son - ” and who was her son? John the Baptist.

So we know at least a sister, and it’s very likely that that reference there is referring to a regular blood sister in John 19. And we know of her cousin Elisabeth. So we know a little bit about her family. And if we can take the genealogy of Luke and assign it to Mary’s family, her father’s name was Heli, H-E-L-I. She and Elisabeth being related, thus Jesus and John the Baptist were also related.

Now we don’t know much about Mary other than that. Her early life was spent in Nazareth. She was probably poor, probably hard working, and no doubt a very righteous lady. I think if you want a good character study of Mary, you can just simply listen to her. In Luke 1, you have a parallel account of the annunciation and all that.

And, of course, when Mary found out what the Spirit of God had done and what was going to happen, you know, it said, “The Spirit of God will come upon you and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you” and that “that which is born of you shall be called the Son of God.” Luke 1:35. You’re going to have a child and it’s going to be the Son of God, deity.

And verse 38 tells us about Mary’s character because of her response. “And Mary said, ‘Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.’ ” Now what do you learn about Mary right there? She submitted to what? God’s what? God’s Word. Verse 45. And Mary – it says, “And blessed *is* she that believed:” Blessed is she that believed. Elisabeth and Mary having a conversation, we learn a second thing about Mary.

Not only did she submit to the Word of God, but she was a woman of what? Faith. She believed God. Now listen, ladies, if an angel came and told you that, would you just say, “Be it unto you even as the Word of God has said”? Would somebody say, “Oh, what a great person of faith?” She must have been a great – most women would have said, “Say, Joseph, I had this weird dream. I’ve gotta go see a counselor.” She believed. Great lady of faith.

And, by the way, I would just remind you that that kind of faith is characteristic of a righteous person. A person who submits to the authority of the Word of God and who lives by faith in that Word, even when it makes absolutely no sense and there was no human historical precedent on which she could say, “This is true.” That’s a woman who is righteous. She accepted it. And most lovely was her Magnificat, as the Bible, or as history has called it. “And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord,” Luke 1:46.

“And my spirit hath rejoiced. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy *is* his name.” Oh, what a godly lady. There was no quizzical thing in her mind. There was no doubt. There was no misgiving. There was no pondering. There was no wondering. There was no questioning. There was an instant submission and an instant belief that this, in fact, was God’s truth. What a righteous lady.

She was so plugged into God. She was a true Old Testament saint that she could sense when God was speaking, and she went on to praise God for what he was going to do. It might be interesting for you to know it. Do you know what the word “Mary” is in Greek? The word “Mary” in Greek is Miriam. And do you know what the root meaning is? Rebelliousness. Poor lady, badly named. She wasn’t rebellious.

She was married, or betrothed. Look back at verse 18. It says she was betrothed to Joseph. Now Joseph, we don’t know anything about background. We just don't know anything. He is described by a Greek term that can be translated “carpenter” or “mason.” And it may have been that a man did both. If he built houses, he would need to be able to lay the bricks and frame the windows, too, and the doors, so perhaps he did both.

But he was undoubtedly a poor, hardworking man, and I’m quite confident he was a righteous man. It says in verse 19, “Joseph her husband, being a righteous *man*,” He, too, was a godly man. He was a true Old Testament saint. So here are two Old Testament saints. They were very young. Most Bible scholars feel they were in their teen years, since marriages in that day and age occurred to ladies as young as – would you believe – 12? And betrothals occurred when girls were 12 and 13. And so they were most likely older teenagers, because we sense that because of the tremendous maturity of Mary.

And it says there, look at the word “espoused.” We get the word “spouse” from that. But it is in the Greek “betrothed.” Now what does this mean? We’ve had a lot of discussion about it. What do you mean, they were betrothed? Does that mean they were engaged? Does that mean they were going steady and Mary wore Joseph’s ring around her neck on a chain? What does it mean? Wore his letterman’s jacket? What does it mean, Mary and Joseph were betrothed?

Well, I’ll give you a little background. The Old Testament and the rabbis, as well, in the rabbinical writings, distinguished two stages in marriage – in Hebrew marriage. Two, one is called the kiddushin, and the other is the hupah, or the chupah, to say that “H” properly. The kiddushin and the chupah. Now the kiddushin was the betrothal.

And what it was - Deuteronomy 20:7 tells you about it if you want to jot that down, Deuteronomy 20:7. What it was, was two families would draw up a contract - or two individuals could do it – draw up a contract that promised marriage. Okay? It was – now watch this – a binding contract. And if at any time during that contract of betrothal period you violated that marriage vow, you had to be divorced in an official sense. You were constituted legally married, though there were no physical relationships whatever.

It was a normally 12 month period and it was a period of protection for the would-be husband and wife so that there would be a period in which to prove a fidelity. So that if the girl was pregnant, that would become very manifest in that period. If anybody was going to be unfaithful or there were going to be problems, there was a period of time in which that could be worked out.

And by the way, during that period, there was not a lot of social contact at all. They still maintained a certain distance. It was simply a promise that was made, a contract that was made. Now, at the end of the period, it could go as long as 12 months, sometimes 6 months, the chupah took place. That was the wedding. And weddings lasted approximately seven days. You think you got it tough now, father, when you marry off your daughter? How would you like to have the neighborhood over for seven days? You got to feed them, provide drink for them.

That’s the marriage at Cana. Remember what happened? They ran out of wine, right? One of the reasons that when you gave your daughter away to be married you wanted something in payment for her was, of course, to take care of some of your own needs. So there was what was called the mohar. That was the price. And the price of the girl would vary, depending on the girl, you know. It could be anything from a couple dozen sheep to a lame chicken, I suppose. But anyway, there may have been some girls that just you could say you could have them for nothing. I’ll throw in a couple sheep, you know.

But basically, basically there was what was called the mohar. And this is the price that was paid. And it was paid at the point of betrothal. It was usually, according to Genesis 34, it was goods or services. And it had several purposes. Number one was to compensate the father because the father would have to expend a great amount of money in order to marry his daughter off. It was also to act as life insurance for the wife.

And normally the Jewish father would hold it in trust and if the husband died, he would give it back to the daughter. And it also was kind of a divorce insurance because the husband, of course, would have to give it up, and, you know, it usually was a rather formidable price and he had no hope of ever realizing it back again unless he stayed married to the girl and received it back by inheritance after the death of the father. So it tended to keep the marriage together. Plus you couldn't run around and marry too many people or you'd be destitute, giving all your stuff away.

So the betrothal period, then, was the period prior to the chupah or the wedding itself, when the marriage was consummated physically and all. The betrothal period was a period of testing, a period of probation to ensure the bride's virginity and the fidelity of the husband and the wife, and so forth. But, they used the term "husband and wife" because it was as good as valid, just not consummated. And you'll not that because it says in verse 25, "He knew her not until she had brought forth her firstborn son," and verse 18 says, "Before they came together."

In other words, it was in this betrothal period that Mary was made to be with child by the Holy Spirit. So that there would be absolutely no question about whether Joseph was the father. And Joseph was a godly man, a righteous man, who would not have violated God's standard. You know, God looks with great concern on purity and virginity is of high value to God. It's a sacred thing, not something to be trifled with. And I'm reminded of how beautiful and lovely and sacred virginity is when I see in the case of Mary how honored she was because of it.

And so she was found with child by the Holy Spirit. Now, Mary knew it. Mary knew this. Now we don't have the Luke account in this text, so let's look at Luke 1 and let's find out how Mary found out. Luke 1:26. "And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel - " well, of course this was six months after Elisabeth conceived. So, Mary was made pregnant in Elisabeth's sixth month, so that John the Baptist was six months older than Jesus, which gave him just enough time to get the ball rolling. "And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth." This is where Mary lived. In fact, if you go to Nazareth today, you'll go to a place and they'll tell you, "This is the well where Mary used to draw water when she was little." Don't you believe it.

Verse 27. Go see "a virgin espoused to a man - " again, betrothed. The Bible is very clear about this. The marriage was not consummated. " - whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name *was* Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, 'Hail, *thou that art* highly favoured, the Lord *is* with thee: blessed *art* thou among women.' And when she saw *him*, she was troubled - "

well, I can guess.

A little old simple girl up there in hayseed part of the country where everybody was a farmer and it wasn't even Jerusalem. It was kind of insignificant, and all of a sudden an angel, a great, glorious angel, not just any old angel, but Gabriel, Gabriel, the hero of Yahweh, Gabriel comes in and says, "Hail, Mary, highly favoured, blessed art thou among women."

"And when she saw *him*, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of greeting this should be." What in the world is he saying? I'm nobody. "And the angel said unto her, 'Don't be afraid, Mary: for you have found favour with God. And, behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bring forth a son, and thou 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.'

"Then said Mary unto the angel, 'How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?' " You see, here is Mary affirming her virginity. "And the angel answered and said unto her, 'The Holy Spirit 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 - " not only be called the son of David, but what? " - the Son of God.' "

I mean, what an incredible announcement to just a nobody lady living in a little dinky place called Nazareth. And so Mary knew it, and when she became pregnant, she knew why. But poor Joseph, he didn't know. When he found out, it was a shock. It was a shock. It jolted him. He knew Mary, see? I mean, he knew this girl that he was betrothed to.

He knew the quality of her character. He knew the righteous standard by which she lived. He knew her stature before God. He knew Mary. This was totally out of character. It made no sense at all. And he knew Deuteronomy chapter 22 well enough to know that back then when a woman became pregnant with a child outside of wedlock, the punishment was what? Death. Death.

In Deuteronomy chapter 22 there are many verses. Let me just remind you of some that speak to this issue. Deuteronomy 22:13, "If a man take a wife, and go in unto her, and hate her, and give occasions of speech against her, and bring up an evil name upon her, and say, 'I took this woman, and when I came to her, I found her not a virgin:'"

Well, if he finds that to be true, "Then they shall - " verse 21 " - bring out the damsel to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her with stones that she die: because she has wrought folly in Israel, to play the harlot." And of course there are other things involved in between. There's – this whole chapter deals with various kinds of harlotry.

Verse 22, “If a man be found lying with a woman married to a husband, then both of them die, *both* the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: put away the evil. If a damsel *that is* a virgin be betrothed unto a husband, and a man find her in the city, and lie with her; Then bring them unto the gate and stone them.”

So it covered every element of this. Death would have been what happened then, and Joseph was literally rocked to the very core of his heart. He loved Mary. And Mary had, you see, absolutely no way under the sun to protect her reputation. She’s going to go out and say, “Listen, folks. This baby is conceived by God.” And they’re going to say, “Uh-huh. That’s a new one, Mary. We’ve heard them all. That’s a new one.” She has no way to protect her reputation. So a blessed Spirit of God protected it for her right here in the pages of the Word of God. Let there be no reproach on Mary ever.

If Jesus is an ordinary man, if Jesus is simply just like all the other men, then we can say he was probably born like all the other men, but he isn’t like anybody else. And he wasn’t born like anybody else. If he is simply the illegitimate child of Mary’s infidelity, or if he is the child of Joseph’s natural sexual activity with Mary, then he is not God. And if he’s not God, his claims are lies. And if his claims are lies, his salvation is a hoax, and if his salvation is a hoax, we are damned.

So Matthew records for us clearly that God entered the flesh by a virgin in which seed was planted by the Holy Spirit. You say, “Well, how does that work?” Don’t ask me that. People always want to ask those kind of questions. People always ask the questions you can’t answer. And I’ll never forget the times when I’d be teaching on the book of Revelation and I’ll say, “You know, and the Word of God says that the Lord is going to give you a name which no man knows.” And invariably someone will come up and say, “What is that name?”

I don’t even understand how normal human birth works. And I don’t know any doctor who really understands the mystery of it. Don’t ask me how this works. God did it. So a cloud of suspicion and a cloud of shame and a cloud of scandal soon hung ominously over Mary. In all of human history there had never been a virgin birth. When people saw an unwed mother, there was only one conclusion. That's all. Except in this case. There was another conclusion. The Holy Spirit.

Nothing new for the Holy Spirit in this sense. His was always a work of creation, wasn’t it? In Genesis 1, he brooded over the emptiness and the nothingness and he created everything. In Acts chapter 1, he moved upon the situation of people gathered in the upper room and he created the church. And why shouldn’t he be able to create the marvelous miracle of the virgin birth?

Don’t be shocked. Don’t be shocked. We should have expected it. Really. Go all the way back to the first book of the Bible, the 3rd chapter of Genesis. Genesis 3:15. Now we’re way back, folks. And when the Lord God is speaking here to Satan. Satan has done what he did in causing Adam and Eve to fall. And God says to him, “I will put - ” Genesis 3:15. “I will put enmity - ” or animosity, or

antagonism, or hatred. It's the word for enemy, really. "I will put - " make an enemy " - between thee and the woman, - " Now watch " - between thy seed and - " what? " - her seed; he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

He said, "Look, Satan. Some day there's going to come a woman and that woman is going to have a seed, and you may bruise his heel – " and he did at calvary – but he'll do what? "He'll bruise your head." And you notice that it says that Jesus would be the seed of the woman, her seed. Only one time in the history of the world did a woman ever have a seed. Seed is in the man. But once in the woman. And that's what Genesis 3:15 said.

And Paul says in Galatians 4:4, he said, "In the fulness of the time - " Christ came. Watch this " - made of a woman, made under the law." Made of a woman. Bypassing the curse of Jeconiah, as we saw in our last study. Now listen to me. Now get this. If Jesus had had no human parents, then he wouldn't have been man at all. He wouldn't have been partaker of our flesh. On the other hand, if Jesus had two human parents, he could not have avoided the contamination of humanity.

So he had to be the child of man and yet the child of God, and that's exactly what he was. He was born of a sinner, and yet he was sinless because he was equally born of God. Deity canceled humanity's curse. The water of the nature of God drowned the fire of the nature of man. So the virgin birth conceived.

Second point. The virgin birth confronted. What about poor Joseph. He doesn't know what's happening. His little world is just come to an end. Joseph, a just and righteous man, no doubt deeply committed to Mary, waiting with anticipation the day when they both are proven during the period of betrothal and can come together to consummate the marriage. What about Joseph?

Verse 19. "Then Joseph her husband, - " notice he's called a husband even though they were still in the betrothal period " - being a just, a righteous *man*, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privately." Now all of a sudden we see the virgin birth confronted. Joseph has to confront this thing. He has to face it. And the miracle is just very, very unclear to him. He doesn't understand it. He was jolted.

And he was a just man and he didn't want to put it away, he didn't want to make her a public example. Those are two participles, by the way. Two participles describing the character of Joseph. He was a just man, and he was not willing to make her a public example.

What do you mean he was a just man? It means he was a righteous Jew. He was, again, a true Old Testament saint, godly man. And you know what a godly man would say to himself? "I can't marry this lady in this condition." She has violated the principles of God. Even though I care about her, even though I don't understand this thing, even though everything is a mystery to me, as a just man, I must

do what the law requires.

To call him a “just man” puts him in the same class with Zacharias and Elisabeth because the Bible says that they were righteous before God, walking in all his commandments and ordinances, blameless. It puts him in the category of Simeon, of whom the scripture says he was righteous and devout. He was a real god-fearing Jew, and he knew that he had to be obedient to God’s laws and God’s laws say when somebody does that, there are consequences.

Joseph was a true saint. So his first prompting came from his righteousness, but his second prompting came from his concern, and it says he was not willing to make her a public example. Now he had that option. Two courses were open to Joseph in this day and age. Had he been living in the day Deuteronomy was written, they would have required one thing.

But the laxness of Jewish, of the Jewish view of the theocracy, the laxness with which they kept the law of God had brought it about to this point, where they had substituted less stringent laws for the ones that God had ordained, and that’s why their country got into so much trouble, because they violated God’s laws which were preventatives.

And here in this lax day, there were two things open open to Joseph. One was to make her a public example, and this is how they did it. He would charge her openly in a public court with having committed adultery. She would be shamed. She would be brought to trial. She would be convicted in front of everybody, ruined in terms of reputation.

The other possibility was that they provided for a more quiet way. The two parties could get together before two or three witnesses and write out a private bill of divorcement, such as is indicated in Deuteronomy 24. And they would write out this private little bill of divorcement.

There would be no judicial procedure. There would be no public knowledge. There would be no fanfare. Nobody would need to know. It was stated at that time that you did not even need to write the cause for the divorce in the statement. So that she could go away without anybody ever really knowing what had happened. It was done secretly.

Now this wasn’t necessarily God’s pattern, but this was what was allowable in the laxness of the day in which Joseph lived. So he had those options. By the way the word “put her away,” you see it says he “was minded to put her away privately.” Put her away is *apolou*. It’s the New Testament word for divorce. He had to divorce her because the betrothal was constituted as marriage. And he said, “Well, I’ll put her away privately.”

He just couldn’t bring himself to making Mary public example. He just couldn’t bring himself to public scorn and public shame. So he wanted to put her away privately. But he had a hard time doing that.

He just couldn't get it to the very act. So it says in verse 20, "And while he thought on these things, - " stop right there. No doubt he went to his bed in his own home in Nazareth. They're still in Nazareth here. And he was meditating. He was mulling over what he had to do. And while he was mulling it over, he fell asleep. He fell asleep. And then we find the virgin birth clarified. Clarified.

The virgin birth clarified in verse 20. Look at how he falls asleep. He's confronted it. It's confusing him. He falls asleep. And "behold, an angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, - " Now I just want you to understand something. This is not a dream like you have a dream. This is not a dream where what you see isn't real, it's imaginary. Somehow in someway in a dream kind of revelation, the dream turns into something real. It was a real angel and he really saw that angel.

And by the way, this is not uncommon to Matthew. There are at least six – in fact there are only six – other times where we find this kind of communication. Matthew chapter 2 has several. Matthew, yeah, Matthew 1 here, Matthew 2, Matthew 27, and the other one is in Acts 2:17, where it's prophetic. So this is not in a totally isolated situation. God sometimes uses an angel in a dream.

And Joseph wasn't dreaming it in the sense you think of. He fell asleep, began to dream, and his dream turned to a reality. And the angel said to him, "Joseph, thou son of David, - " and I know why he said that second part, just to reinforce, just to reinforce the lineage and the line of David. Boy, that must have been something to hear. "Thou son of David." He says this, "Don't be afraid to take unto you Mary your wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." You don't have to be afraid, Joseph. "That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit."

This is the great reality, people, of the virgin birth. There was no human father. This is the birth of God in human flesh. He is both man and God, and that's why, for example, in the Old Testament he's called *tsemach*, which means "the branch." And did you note that he is called "the branch of David" in one passage and in another one the branch of Jehovah. See? He is the offspring of David and he is the offspring of God.

Did you know in Isaiah 9:6, he is called "wonderful counselor, the mighty - " what? " - God, the father of eternity." And so Joseph was to know that he had no fear in taking Mary, for what was conceived in her was of the Holy Spirit. And verse 21 gives him further instruction. "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus:" In Hebrew, Jeshua, Joshua, Jehoshua, which means "Jehovah shall save." And his name will be Jesus, "for he shall save his people from their sins."

Now I want you to know something about verse 21. She shall bring forth a son." You notice he didn't say, "And Joseph, you will have a son. To thee will be born a son." She brought forth that child, "and his name shall be Jesus, for he shall save his people from your sins."

You know, the Bible is very careful about never naming Joseph as the father of Jesus. I don't know if you know that. For example, in Matthew 2:13, it says, “Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt.” Always the mother. Why didn’t he say, “Take your child and your wife”? Why “the child and the mother”? Always Joseph is removed from the actual fatherhood. 2:20 of Matthew, “Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel:” It’s always the child and his mother, never Joseph as the father. Virgin born.

And his name, Jeshua, Jehoshua, Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins. Beloved, that’s the reason he came, isn’t it? And that’s why the book of Acts in 4:12 says, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Only the name of Jesus, the one God-man. It is God alone who saves.

Like Psalm 20 says, there are some people who trust in horses, and some people who trust in chariots, and some who trust in physical strength, and some who trust in their knowledge, and their intuition, and their reputation, and their prestige, their position, machinery, friends, whatever it is, education, but only Jesus can save. He shall save his people from their sins. Only he is mighty enough to save.

So the virgin birth conceived, confronted and clarified. Fourth, and we’ll hurry to a close. The virgin birth connected. The virgin birth connected. Just so it doesn’t appear as some last minute afterthought, some deal grabbed out of the air like the critic said, some floating myth that was attached to Jesus,

Matthew comes in with a commentary in verses 22 and 23. The narrative breaks here. The angel isn’t speaking anymore. Matthew talks and this is what he says. And he does this all through Matthew, in fact 50 times in the Gospel of Matthew he quotes the Old Testament, 76 additional times he alludes to it. And this is a formula that he uses.

“Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet - ” and whenever the prophet spoke, it was the Lord “ - saying, - ” And he quotes Isaiah 7:14, “ ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.’ ” There is the virgin birth connected to the Old Testament. This is not an afterthought. This is not the pulling of the legend out of the air. This is the promise of God fulfilled, a tremendous thing. They should have known.

Now all this was done that it might be filled up, that it might be made full, that it might be accomplished just exactly as Isaiah said. Now we could have a great big long, drawn out thing about what did Isaiah say and why did he use the world *almah* instead of the word *bethulah* and did he mean “virgin” and blah, blah, blah, and on and on and on.

There's no reason to argue about that at all. Suffice it to say that the word *almah* in Isaiah 7:14 is best translated "virgin," best translated "virgin." And the people, the critics, the slanderers can come and go and try to erase it but they cannot erase the commentary of Matthew on it who used the word *parthenos*, which meant "virgin." Matthew knew what it meant, even if they don't. And it's a little tough to get around the virgin birth when it says over and over that the lady Mary had no relationships with a man. Why do they want to argue about *almah* in Isaiah 7:14? Why don't they listen to God's commentary on it?

The setting of Isaiah's prophecy is very simple. king Ahaz was terrified that the kingdom of Judah might be destroyed by Syria and Israel. Ahaz is sitting down in the bottom of the southern kingdom and he's worried about up north here's Israel and over here is Syria. And he's afraid they're going to come down and they're going to wipe out the kingly line. So he's really afraid they'll lose the kingly line.

So God comes along and says, "Let me give you a promise. Nothing's going to happen to the kingly line. Nothing is going to take away the kingly line. Here's a sign. A virgin shall be with child and that child will be Immanuel, God with us." He says, "You look down the corridors of history and there will be a virgin born child and he will guarantee you that David's line will never be broken."

And Jesus came into the world as the fulfillment of that prophecy given by Isaiah to Ahaz, to show that God will keep his promise and the throne of David will never be broken forever and ever and ever and ever. So the virgin birth is clarified.

By the way, they shall call his name Immanuel, which being interpreted is what? God with us. El, the last two letters of that word, are the name for God, El. El Shaddai, El Elyon, El Maqoddeshkim, all those names for God, El. Immanu means "with us." God with us.

Now, you say, "But they never called him Immanuel." No. That is not his title as far as a name is concerned. That is a description of who he is. And many times the title is not necessarily the name. He was called lots of things, as well he is called Immanuel. And so the virgin birth is clarified, and then it's connected to history past.

Fifthly, the virgin birth consummated. Verse 24. "Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:" Don't you think that was a wonderful thing? Don't you think that was the best nap Joseph ever had?

When he got up and it was all clear, oh, it isn't just Mary. I'm not just marrying Mary. I'm getting the Son of God thrown in on the deal. Boy, he must have been a good man. Can you imagine the almighty God of the universe depositing his only Son in the home of a man who wouldn't be a good

father? Can you imagine that? I can't imagine that. I just feel bad that not more is said about Joseph. He must have been dead by the time Jesus died, because he doesn't appear anywhere.

And at the cross, do you remember what Jesus did? He looked down at John the Beloved and he looked down at Mary, and he said, "Mary, behold your son." And he said, "John, behold your mother." And, you see, he gave somebody to Mary to take care of her. He's going to be gone. And no doubt Joseph was long dead.

We don't know much about Joseph, but, oh, I imagine he was a wonderful man, because I know God wouldn't deposit his one and only Son in the home of a man who wouldn't be a good loving father. He must have been a wonderful man to deal with a perfect son. Can you imagine, fathers, the frustration of that? "No, dad. It's this way."

When I get to heaven, two people I want to meet: Joseph and Mary. Don't you feel that? Bless Joseph's heart. What joy there must have been when he woke up. And he took Mary and they had the chupah, the wedding ceremony, but not until after Jesus was born. He didn't know her until she had brought forth her firstborn son, and then he did what the angel said. The angels said do what? "Call his name Jesus."

The virgin birth consummated. They had the wedding, but he never touched Mary physically until after that baby was born. There's an interesting footnote. People always say, "Well, do you think they had other children?" I know they had other children. The Bible gives the names of the other children. In John 7 talks about Jesus' brothers.

But there's an interesting little footnote. In verse 25, the literal Greek is "and he was not in the habit of knowing her until she had brought forth her firstborn son." And the implication is that once she had brought forth her firstborn son, he was in the habit of knowing her. That's the rendering of the Greek. They had a normal human relationship physically which produced many other children.

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." And that's the fact.

At the start of his life, the Jews said Jesus was the son of a man who seduced Mary. At the end of his life, they said the disciples stole his body and faked the resurrection. And Matthew begins with the answer to the first slander and ends his Gospel with the answer to the last slander and spends the rest of the middle of it fighting all the other slanders against the dear Lord Jesus Christ.

He was none other than God in human flesh. And 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 care ridden, to free them from care, with the lepers, to cleanse them, with the diseased, to cure them, with the hungry, to feed them, with the handicapped, to restore them, but most of all, he says that he came to dwell with the lost in order that he might seek and what? 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 some day come to take us to be with him. No wonder the apostle Paul said, “Through his poverty, we are made - ” what? “ - rich.” Well, let’s pray.

Father, what a wonder, what a wonder it is that Jesus was thus born, the God-man, miracle of miracles, that he should be man and yet God. Thank you for the lesson, too, Father, that when you want to do your special works, your mighty works, your supernatural works, your miraculous works, you always find some humble, faithful, trusting, righteous people like Mary and Joseph. Thank you not only for the theology of the virgin birth, but for the example of what happens when God uses two simple people. May we be so righteous, so useful for that which you would do today in our world in revealing yourself.

Thank you that you have chosen the weak things to confound the mighty. Thank you that we who have nothing to offer can be used by you. What a mystery. May it so be that everyone gathered here comes to know that precious Lord Jesus who came to save people from their sins, and that in knowing him would become humble, submissive, trusting, available people who can be used again to do your work in this world and will give you the praise. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

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