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MATTHEW 1:18-2:12

The Bible records some amazing and spectacular births.

For example, we know that Isaac was born to Sarah who was nearly 100 years old.
We know that Samson was born to a couple who had given up on ever having a child.
We know that that Hannah was barren for so long when God allowed her to become pregnant with Samuel.
And we know that John the Baptist was born to Zecharius and Elizabeth when they believed they would never have children.

But the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus surpasses all these other amazing and spectacular births. Jesus wasn't merely the son of a previously barren woman...Jesus' birth was unique in that He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin.

Matthew 1:18-25...

There are issues about which Christians may differ. But there are issues about which Christians must all agree. The power of the Gospel is that God became man and that, by being both fully God and fully man, Jesus was able to reconcile man to God.

The **virgin birth** of Jesus, the **substitutionary death** of Jesus, the **resurrection** of Jesus, the **ascension** of Jesus, the **imminent return** of Jesus...are all interweaving aspects of the deity of Jesus. **They stand or fall together.** If any one of these teachings...all of which are clearly taught in the New Testament is rejected...then, the entire Gospel is rejected.

We cannot choose to believe some of these truths and reject the others. If all are not true, if one is proven to be false...then how can we trust in anything else Scripture says about Jesus? How can we trust in and believe anything else the Lord Jesus said about Himself?

Jesus claimed equality with God and He did this because it was true and it was true because He was conceived...not of man, but of the Holy Spirit of God!

The first part of **Matthew 1** gives us the human lineage of the Lord Jesus Christ. It traces His royal descent from Abraham through David and through Joseph, His legal father.

Of the four gospels...only Matthew and Luke give us the genealogy of Jesus. Luke begins with Jesus and **goes back** through David and Adam and shows **Mary's lineage**. Matthew begins with Abraham and **comes forward** through **Joseph**.

Both are essential...Luke's record validates the actual bloodline through Mary and it goes through David's son, Nathan, and Matthew's record follows the royal line through David's son, Solomon. Jesus therefore was the blood descendant of David through Mary and the legal descendant of David through Joseph.

Remember that Matthew wrote his Gospel to the Jews who knew that the Messiah must be a direct descendant of King David. If the royal lineage of Jesus could be questioned, the Jews would have all rejected Jesus without a second thought.

With all that understood...we need to know that although the

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Jewish leaders of the New Testament times acknowledged that the Messiah would be of the royal line of David...history also tells us that **even the conservative Pharisees didn't generally believe that the Messiah would be divine.**

And therein was the big problem...if Jesus had not claimed to be **more than the son of David...**He may have convinced some of the Jewish leaders that He was indeed their Messiah. It was when He claimed to be God that they completely rejected Him!!

And it's the same today, isn't it? Many people today are willing to recognize Jesus as **a great teacher** or even **a prophet from God** and **a man of high character**...but, if Jesus were no more than those things, He could not ever have conquered sin or death or Satan. He could not have saved anyone.

Jesus once asked the Pharisees a question about Himself that men have been asking in every generation since then...

"What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?"

Well, Matthew has answered that question for us in the passage we just read.

Jesus is the human Son of man and the divine Son of God.

If Jesus had been born of a human father, He would have been a sinner, incapable of saving anyone, even Himself, but that's not the case. Jesus was born of a virgin, conceived of the Holy Spirit of God and lived a sinless life!!

To put it simply...**If Jesus was not virgin born, He is not God.**

If Jesus is not God, His claims are lies.

If His claims are lies, there is no salvation.

If there is no salvation, you and I are absolutely and completely without any hope!!

Having established the fact of the virgin birth...I'd like us to think of what we see in today's lesson from several different perspectives...

First, let's look at those directly involved...

Mary's Perspective

Betrothals during that time and in that culture were much different than today...

It was legally binding, as legally binding, in fact as marriage.

If at any time during the betrothal period, either party violated the vows, or became unchaste, a formal divorce was required to nullify the marriage contract. Absolutely no physical contact was permitted during the betrothal period.

So, with that in mind, and all its ramifications if violated, let's try to see things from the perspective of a young Jewish virgin...hearing from God through Gabriel that she had been chosen to bring forth the baby Jesus who would save His people from their sins.

The Gospel of Luke really gives us a much better picture of Mary's perspective. Luke tells us that Mary's response to God was,

"Behold, the bondslave of the Lord, be it done to me according to Your word."

Mary didn't ask for a sign. She didn't put out a fleece. Mary was simply obedient to the will of her Heavenly Father.

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Surely Mary must have felt fear and concern about what Joseph would do...what her family and friends would think...but it didn't keep her from total submission to the Lord's will! She willingly placed herself at God's disposal and simply trusted Him to work out the details.

Don't you wish we could say we would have done the exact same thing if given that opportunity?

Joseph's Perspective

Now we can only imagine Joseph's confusion, bewilderment and the fact that he must have felt betrayed!

Actually, Joseph had two options...

- 1) Joseph could make Mary a public example. He could charge her with adultery in a public court. At best, Mary would have been convicted and her reputation ruined forever; at worst, Mary would have been stoned to death...

or

- 2) Joseph could very quietly write a bill of divorce before two or three witnesses and thus end their relationship. Mary would simply go away secretly and have the baby.

Joseph loved Mary. Joseph didn't want Mary disgraced. So he decided on the second option.

But God intervened!! God took away the cloud of doubt and suspicion and betrayal Joseph had been dealing with. And that brings us to our third perspective...

God's Perspective

Aren't you glad God sees the beginning, the middle and the end of all things?

God wouldn't abandon Mary...and God wouldn't abandon Joseph!

God sent an angel to Joseph in a dream and assured him that Mary's baby wasn't the result of adultery. Mary's baby was the result of a miracle!

Can you imagine Joseph going to bed that night with all this on his mind and waking up the next day knowing that God Almighty had sent His own angel to reassure him?

Notice, too, that "Joseph kept Mary a virgin until the birth of Jesus..."

Our Catholic friends teach that Mary remained a virgin the rest of her life, but Scripture doesn't agree with that. Scripture also doesn't teach that Mary, herself, was miraculously conceived. Had Mary been miraculously conceived, she would not have needed a Savior and in her song in **Luke**, she refers to Jesus as her Savior.

God does all things well...He always has the perfect plan...

He chose a young woman who loved Him, believed Him and without hesitation submitted to Him.

He chose a young man who loved Him, believed Him, loved Mary and submitted to Him.

God wanted His Son to live in a good and godly home...not rich as the world counts riches, but rich in love and obedience to Him.

Well, having looked at the perspectives of those **directly involved**...let's look at the perspectives of those **indirectly involved**.

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Matthew 2:1-12...

The Magi's Perspective

Little is known about these men. Scripture tells us they were "from the east." Scripture also tells us that they came with the purpose to worship the One born King of the Jews.

According to most theologians, these men are said to be from the land of Babylon, the Mesopotamian region...the area of modern day Iran.

These folks were Gentiles and they believed in sorcery, astrology, the occult, and wizardry...

So...How did these men know the significance of this star?

Maybe they had heard from Jews whose ancestors had chosen to stay in Babylon hundreds of years before that a Messiah would come.

Maybe these men were students of prophecy as well as students of astrology and astronomy...

Maybe God, Himself, had revealed more to these men than Scripture tells us.

The fact is that these men knew that this "star" meant the King of the Jews had been born and they knew it meant something special for them as well!

At any rate, they left whatever wise men do on a daily basis and they came to Jerusalem...and when they got to Jerusalem they reported they had seen this "star".

Apparently this "star" wasn't visible to everyone, or else there would have been many, many more folks who were as excited as these wise men.

This star was different from all the other stars. This star appeared, disappeared and reappeared.

I believe this "star" appeared to them and they began their journey, but this star did not go before them on the first "leg" of their journey...because they went to Jerusalem, not Bethlehem. Then, the "star" led them on the next leg of their journey, and it stood over the place where Jesus was. By the way, we're going to see in a few minutes that they didn't come to Jesus as He lay in a manger...they came to Jesus when Jesus was about two years old.

Getting back to this "star"...

This "star" sounds very much like the pillar of fire and the cloud that led the children of Israel in the wilderness, doesn't it?

This "star" sounds very much like the glory of God as it departed the Temple in the **Book of Ezekiel**, doesn't it? Remember how it reluctantly left the Temple, and how it stood over the threshold of the Temple and how it then went a little farther and then it hovered over the mountain that is east of Jerusalem?

This "star" sounds very much like the glory of God that shone round about the shepherds as the angels announced to them the birth of the Lord Jesus, doesn't it?

In fact, I believe that's exactly what this "star" is...I believe it's the Shekinah glory of God pointing the way to the blessed Savior!!

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Despite the paganism and superstition of these men...they recognized God's voice when He spoke. Despite their lack of spiritual enlightenment, they recognized God's light when it was shone on them.

God promises us in His Word that He would allow men to find Him if they search for Him with all their hearts and quite literally, this is an example of folks responding to spiritual light and God giving them even more light!

The fact that these Gentile wise men, however many there were, came all the way from Babylon to worship the King of the Jews...this alone should show us that we serve a Lord whose power to save is all-encompassing!

They came, they saw, and they worshiped Jesus and they presented gifts to Him, didn't they?

And, that's exactly what **we're** supposed to do, isn't it? We're to come to the point that we see Jesus...that He is exactly who He says He is and we are to worship Him with the offering of ourselves.

Paul puts it this way... ***"...present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."***

Well, let's look at one last perspective...

Herod's Perspective

Herod was a "puppet king" put in place by the Roman government. This was the practice of the Romans. They believed the people could be more easily controlled if they were governed by one of their own...

But that was the problem...Herod was not one of their own. Herod was an Idumean. Herod was an Edomite. Herod was not a descendant of Jacob, Herod was a descendant of Esau.

Let me just tell you a little about how cruel and how inherently jealous and wicked he was.

His wife's brother, Aristobulus, was the high priest and he was jealous of his power, so he had him drowned, and provided a magnificent funeral for him and then pretended to weep and grieve for him. He then had Marianne, his wife killed, and then her mother and two of his own sons. Five days before his death (about a year after Jesus was born) he had a third son executed. Shortly before his death, he also had most of the distinguished citizens of Jerusalem, including members of the Sanhedrin, put in prison. The reason he did this was that he feared no one would mourn for him when he died, so he ordered these prominent folks of Jerusalem be executed the moment he died, in order to guarantee that there would be mourning in Jerusalem...

Well, Herod was terrified when he heard that a King had been born to the Jews. All he could think of was that he must find Him and do away with Him.

He certainly didn't have any qualms about killing Jewish babies, did he?

God's purposes, however, are never ever thwarted!

Verses 13-15...

God had a plan that would not only protect His Son, but would also fulfill prophecy. Remember when Joseph wound up in Egypt? That was to fulfill prophecy and now Jesus going to Egypt fulfills prophecy...

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Verses 16-18...

Here we see Herod as he slaughtered hundreds of innocent babies! The least of Herod's intentions was to fulfill prophecy...Jewish prophecy...but that is exactly what he did!!

There are many "Herod types" in this world today...men who aren't willing to relinquish their **career**, their **power**, their **pride**, their **prestige** to the Lord Jesus...and these men will suffer the same eternity as Herod.

Well, let's see what happened after Herod died...

Verses 19-23...

Again, we see the divine protection of God the Father upon God the Son...

Archelaus was as evil as his father. Archelaus had already executed three thousand Jews, so Joseph had good reason to fear him.

So, God told Joseph to take his little family to the little town of Nazareth and there they would live for the next thirty or so years...

What we've rushed through today tells us that

The Creator and Sustainer of this universe willingly left His home in heaven, laid aside His glory, and came to be conceived and confined for a time in the womb of a woman. God humbled Himself to bring salvation to man!!

He came to be born in a stable and then to be carried secretly from place to place because Satan was working overtime in order to kill Him!

Isn't it an incredible thing that the King of kings and the Lord of lords would do that for you and for me? And He did all this so that we could have the joy that His cleansing and His healing and His restoration gives us...

Before we leave this morning, I want us to notices three responses here...

- 1) Herod's response...Herod responded to Jesus in hatred...he was **infuriated**.
- 2) The chief priests and scribes...they who knew all the "right things," but showed no interest in Jesus...they were **indifferent**.
- 3) The magi...these men searched and found and worshipped Jesus and gave Him gifts...they were **enthused!**

Those are basically the same responses we see men have toward Jesus today. Some men bristle at the very name of Jesus. They don't want to hear about Him at all.

Some men are just indifferent...they couldn't care less about the things of God. Jesus means nothing to them one way or the other.

And some men are excited...they're enthused about the opportunity to find out all they can about Jesus!

Wise men (and women) do still seek Jesus! (I love the sign on MECA's building every Christmas.)

Aren't you glad we can be counted as wise even though we may

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be uneducated?

Aren't you glad we can be counted as saved even though we
really deserve hell?

Aren't you glad God allows us into His presence when we've done
nothing to merit it?

My prayer for you and for me and for our families is that tomorrow we'll not get so caught up in the gifts and the cooking and all the "extras" that we'll forget the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace...whose birthday we celebrate.

My prayer for you and for me is that this coming year will find us seeking Him and serving Him and worshipping Him and knowing Him in a deeper way than we ever have before.