

THE CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

Matt 1:18-23

INTRODUCTION

The first recorded date of Christmas being celebrated on December 25th was in A.D. 336, during the time of Constantine, the first Roman Emperor to profess to be a Christian.

17 years later in A.D. 353, the Bishop of Rome, Julius I, declared the birth of Jesus should be celebrated on the December 25th.

Abolitionist and first professor of German at Harvard University, Charles Follen, lit candles on what some say was the first Christmas tree in America in 1832.

It is a long time since 1832, longer still from 353, longer still from that dark night brightened by a special star in which Jesus the king was born. As we approach December 25th again, it gives us another opportunity to consider the event of Christmas and the person whose birth we celebrate.

READ Matt 1:18-23

Proposition: Answer 2 Questions:

- I. Who is this Child?**
- II. And Why did He Come?**

So That: We may understand the true meaning of Christmas.

1st Question ...

I. Who is this Child? Matt 1:18-20

Illustration – Much as in America, Christmas is a big commercial success in Japan. A television interviewer was walking the streets of Tokyo during Christmas time and stopped a young woman on the sidewalk to ask, “What is the meaning of Christmas?”

She responded, “I don’t know. Is that the day that Jesus died?”
→ Sadly, there is some truth in this answer.

Without the incarnation, Christianity isn’t a very good story. And most sadly, without the incarnation, Christianity means nothing.

Point – Virgin born God-Man and King who will be Savior

Proof –

“¹⁸Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.”

“¹⁸Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows” – this word translated as birth is the same word as “genealogy” in 1:1 – γένεσις

Matt 1:1-17 → Jesus Christ is King

“When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph”

Betrothed here means much more than what “engaged” means in our Western culture. They were essentially married in the eyes of the culture and the law, without having had the ceremony or consummated the relationship. They are considered man and wife without being physically joined together yet.

They are poor. We know this because when they present their 8 day old new-born son to be circumcised, they offer two young pigeons (Luke 2:24). We know from the Old Testament this is the sacrifice of the poor.

“before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit” – it is a virgin birth

1:23 – “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a Son” (in fulfillment of prophecy from **Isa 7:14**)

- all the way back some 800 years before the birth of Christ

Phil 2:6-8 → this is the denial of self – a willingness to release, to sacrifice

- His glory was veiled in His humanity
- He “**emptied**” by putting off and He “**emptied**” by putting on
- When He entered this world He laid aside the garb of heaven.
- In life, Jesus wore the clothes any man working in a carpenter’s shop would wear.

Great Incarnation Verse – **Ps 2:7** – “You are my Son; today I have begotten you.” There is no “today” in eternity. God the Son has eternally existed as God. But when God the Son was born as a baby, that is when God the Father said that He has begotten Him.

Christ is eternal → Day of Birth

Mic 5:2 – “But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *Too* little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity.”

This is why Jesus was born in Bethlehem, even though his mother and Joseph were living in Nazareth when she got pregnant.

Why did God choose this small village for Jesus’ birthplace? God chooses something small, quiet, out of the way, and does something here that changes the course of history and eternity.

In Micah 5, the Great city of Jerusalem is defeated. The victory and rescue comes from lowly Bethlehem.

So our Lord was “Jesus of Nazareth.” Nazareth was even smaller, even more remote and rural. He was never “Jesus of Bethlehem.” Blind Bartimaeus was told, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.” Peter, preaching at Pentecost told the people of Jerusalem, “Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God.”

The Resurrected Christ appeared to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus and introduced Himself, “I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.”

Pilate nailed the superscription on the cross, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.” Even the demons cried to him, “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth?”

Illustration – Like Phoenix, Gilbert, and Strawberry - Phoenix is the largest and most powerful city. Gilbert is smaller than Phoenix but larger and more influential than Strawberry which is yet smaller and more insignificant as a town from a human perspective.

Application – God chooses the weak and despised things of the world to shame the wise and strong. To make us rely on Him.

The littleness and insignificance of Bethlehem (compared to Jerusalem) and the even lesser status of Nazareth shows that God does not save us on the basis of greatness, merit, or achievement.

We get the joy. He gets the glory.

“¹⁹And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her, desired to put her away secretly.”

The Old Testament law was that if a woman or man committed adultery, even in betrothal, the punishment was death (Deut 22). Another punishment was a public divorce, and the public shaming of the adulterer. Joseph did not want either of these for Mary. He wanted to put her away discretely.

→ Compassionate! He loved her.

“²⁰But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.’”

It is very likely that this angel was Gabriel, who brought a message from God to Daniel (Dan 8 and 9), to Zacharias, and to Mary (Luke 1).

Illustration – From the song *Mary Did You Know?*

Mary, did you know
That your baby boy will one day walk on water?
That your baby boy will save our sons and daughters?
That your baby boy has come to make you new?
This child that you've delivered, Will soon deliver you.

Mary may not have known every detail, but she did know more than we might think.

Luke 1:46-47 – “My soul exalts the Lord,⁴⁷ and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.” → Yes. Mary knows the child she is going to deliver, will soon deliver her.

Application – That is the answer to the question “Who is this child?” → Virgin born God-Man and King who will be Savior

2nd Question ...

II. Why did He come?

Matt 1:21-23

Point – based on **2 names** given by God through the angel

→ “**Jesus**” and “**Immanuel**” → **Forgiveness** and **Fellowship**

A. Forgiveness by God → “**Jesus**”

Point – It has been said that if our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an **educator**; If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a **scientist**; If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an **economist**; If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an **entertainer**.

→ But our greatest need is **forgiveness**, so God sent us a **Savior**.

Proof – “²¹**And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins.**”

Gabriel gives Joseph the meaning of Jesus' name: *Jesus* comes from the Hebrew *Joshua*, or *Jehoshua*, means "YHWH will save."

"**sins**" – plural - appears 193 times in Scripture

→ singular word "sin" appears 480 times - greater prevalence because ultimately our sins are symptoms of our sin nature.

Point – Sin makes us **dirty**. Sin makes us **guilty**. We need to be saved - saved from the **pollution** of sin, from the **penalty** of sin.

We sin because we are sinful.

Because we are sinful, we need a Savior.

God entered into this sin-stained world as a baby – to set His people free, to rescue those held captive to sin and fear of death.

The very heart of the true meaning of Christmas is a promise of salvation — full and free redemption from the guilt and penalty of sin "for all who believe" (Romans 3:22). This is the "good news of great joy that will be for all the people" (Luke 2:10).

If we miss this, we have entirely missed the true meaning of Christmas.

Application – Friend, maybe you think your sin is so great you have excluded yourself from Christ and grace and the gospel forever.

In the same way, the baby Jesus was as approachable as anyone ever in that humble manger, you are welcome in this place. No one is authorized to keep you away.

Jesus was born in a place that was freely accessible to all who came to it, needed it, and wanted it.

If God has not shut you out of the stable, don't shut yourself out. The door is open and there is room. If you come to Him with a humble heart wanting to be forgiven for your sins.

B. Fellowship with God → “Immanuel”

Point – Garden of Eden - banished because Man is sinful and God is holy and perfect

- Exodus 33:20 - “But He said, “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!”
- because God is holy and Moses was not

Proof – “²²**Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying,**”

→ prophecy from Isa 7:14

Proof – “²³**Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which translated means, ‘God with us.’”**

You can condense all the truths of Christmas into these three words: → “**God with us.**”

- We tend to focus our attention at Christmas on the infancy of Christ. The greater truth of the holiday is His deity.
- More astonishing than a baby in the manger is that this baby is the Creator of the heavens and the earth!

First Christmas → Mary carries the baby ... kisses the face of the baby ... kisses the face of God!

You see, there’s a side to the Christmas story that isn’t often told:

- These soft little hands, fashioned by the Holy Spirit in Mary’s womb, were made so that nails would be driven through them.
- These baby feet, pink and unable to walk, would one day walk up a dusty hill to be nailed to a cross.
- This sweet infant’s head with sparkling eyes and eager mouth was formed so that men would one day force a crown of thorns into it.
- This tender body, warm and soft, wrapped in swaddling clothes, would one day be ripped open by a spear.

→ This perfect little back would be shredded by whips.

→ Jesus was born to die.

But, the Christmas message:

When Mary later dies, Her Son carries her – not in her old age, but in her sin. He picks her up and carries her through the gates of heaven.

Luke 1:43 – “My spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.”

James Montgomery Boice – *“If the death of Christ on the cross is the true meaning of the Incarnation, then there is no gospel without the cross. Christmas by itself is no gospel. The life of Christ is no gospel. Even the resurrection, important as it is in the total scheme of things, is no gospel by itself.*

For the good news is not just that God became man, nor that God has spoken to reveal a proper way of life for us, or even that death, the great enemy, is conquered. Rather, the good news is that sin has been dealt with (of which the resurrection is a proof); that Jesus has suffered its penalty for us as our representative, so that we might never have to suffer it; and that, therefore, all who believe in Him can look forward to heaven”

CONCLUSION

One day the ruler--the King of kings and Lord of lords--will return. The great Christmas carol “Joy to the World” will finally be fulfilled:

He rules the world with truth and grace

And makes the nations prove

The glories of His righteousness

And wonders of his love.

Matt 1:1-17 → Jesus is King.

Illustration – To approach a throne you need to show the guard at the gates your invitation; you need to be instructed in royal protocol, what to wear, where to stand, how to address the King.

Many would tremble to approach a King.
But who trembles to approach a feeding trough?

As He grew into manhood, never on earth or in heaven was anyone more approachable than Jesus. There were no armed guards around him to push away those who came with their petitions. The hem of his garment was always within their reach. His hand was always ready to stretch out to the sick. And His ear is always open to your cries.

Application – The invitation to come to Jesus is free to all and, therefore, free to you personally.

You cannot buy Jesus; the price is more than all the universe and heaven combined, but He offers himself freely to you.

Merry Christmas!