

# Jesus Christ: Born to Die

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[ 0 : 00 ] I think you would agree with me that Christmas is the busiest period of the year for individuals and businesses. In our context of the Bahamas, we find that it's a time when many gifts are purchased and exchanged, and many people get into more debt in the time leading up to Christmas than they get into the whole year. In some cases, houses are refurbished and painted and renovated and furniture is purchased.

I always used to think about, how is it that at the beginning of the year, everybody's furniture goes? And just goes, and people get new furniture. But is that what Christmas is all about? Well, I think if an alien were to come to our world, at least the Western world, and without being told anything, if he was to observe, he'd pretty much think that's what Christmas is all about. But all the shopping and eating and drinking and attending parties and swapping gifts and working our fingers to the bone, and all the other practices that harm so many people, financially and emotionally and otherwise, that's not what Christmas is all about. And so, since that is a reality, and I would dare say an increasing reality, one of the things I've sought to do over the years is, as we're approaching Christmas, is to direct our attention to what Christmas is truly about.

[ 1 : 43 ] And I know of no better way than to direct our attention to the biblical account of the birth of Christ. And so, this morning, I want us to consider Matthew's account of the Savior's birth.

So, if you have not turned there yet, please do so. Please turn your Bible to Matthew chapter 1. And this morning, our attention will be given to verses 18 through 25.

The Gospel of Matthew chapter 1, verses 18 through 25. And I'm reading from the English Standard Version.

So, if you have another translation, yours would read slightly differently. But this is God's holy word, and let us open our hearts to receive it.

Matthew chapter 1, beginning at verse 18. Now, the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

[ 2 : 56 ] And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

Behold, the virgin will conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us. When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.

He took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for the privilege that we can easily take for granted, the privilege of having your word and being able to gather to hear it proclaimed.

[ 4 : 32 ] Lord, there are people around the world who do this at their own peril. They take their very lives in their hands to gather as we're gathering and to even hold a copy of the scriptures.

And so, Lord, we thank you for your faithful providence that we are able to gather as we are this morning. And, Lord, would you speak to all of our hearts from your word? We pray and ask you to speak, Lord, because it is only when you speak that we can truly hear.

Speak to us now from this account of the Savior's birth, and, Lord, use it to position us that we may commemorate his birth in a way that honors the truth.

We pray and we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. The account of the birth of Jesus is recorded in two of the four Gospels. Matthew's the first one, which we just read, and the other one is Luke.

The Gospels of John and Mark do not have an account of the Savior's birth. But when we read these accounts of the birth of Jesus, I think we have to be careful that we don't just read them as a historical account.

[ 5 : 48 ] And it's easy to do that. Because a lot of times when we repeat what we know, we don't really think about it as we should, because it's a historical fact.

We know it, and we're just reciting that. But these accounts that we have in Matthew's Gospel and Luke's Gospel are more than historical accounts. They are theological accounts.

They are theological accounts because they tell us a very important truth. Both Matthew and Luke had an aim for writing their Gospel.

And Matthew's purpose for writing his Gospel is to help us to see that Jesus Christ was indeed the Messiah. That he was the Savior who had come into the world in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

And so what we see is from start to finish, this is what Matthew is seeking to do in his Gospel. And he begins at this particular point where he's helping us to see that Jesus is the promised Messiah who is coming into the world.

[ 7 : 00 ] Now, when we bear that in mind, that background, here's what I believe is the overarching point that Matthew seeks to make in this account of the Savior's birth that we just read.

The birth of Christ points ultimately and more importantly to the death of Christ. I think that is what Matthew wants us to see as he records the circumstances of Christ's birth in the way that he has. He wants us to see that the birth of Christ ultimately and more importantly points to the death of Christ.

And see, brothers and sisters, when we lose sight of this, Christmas tends to take on a somewhat different meaning. But when we grasp this, it informs Christmas for us. And we just can't go about it the way we see the world encouraging us to go about it.

While there's much to rejoice about in Christmas, there's much to be sobered about in Christmas. The birth of Christ points ultimately and more importantly to the death of Christ.

[ 8 : 19 ] That's what Matthew wanted his original audience to see, and I believe it is what God wants us to see this morning. Now, how are we able to see this truth from this text?

I think there are three important aspects of the birth of Christ that are highlighted in this account by Matthew. The first aspect is the nature of Christ's birth.

The very nature of the birth of Christ points us to the death of Christ. And we see the nature of Christ's birth beginning over in chapter 1.

At the beginning of chapter 1, we have this genealogy, this genealogy that begins in verse 2 and finishes in verse 16.

And what you should note is that there's a formula that is found in this genealogy starting in verse 2 where we read Abraham was the father of Isaac and Isaac the father of Jacob and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar.

[ 9 : 36 ] And it goes on and has this formula of saying this one who's the father of this one who's the father of this one and it continues down. But when we come to verse 16 we'll notice that the formula changes.

In verse 16 we read and Jacob the father of Joseph it doesn't say it doesn't then go and say the father of Jesus instead it says and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary not the father of Jesus the husband of Mary of whom Jesus was born who is called the Christ.

That's a very clear break in this pattern and it's there for a reason. The explanation for that the reason it is there we find that explanation the text that we just read in verses 18 through 25.

So notice in verse 18 Matthew writes now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. He needs to explain the birth of Jesus.

He needs to explain why it is that he would give an attribution to every single person in this lineage as having a father but when it comes to Jesus he doesn't say that.

[ 11 : 07 ] Mary is inserted as the husband of Joseph and then it is stated that he was born of Mary. So what we read in verse 18 is that now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way when his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph before they came together she was found to be with

child from the Holy Spirit.

Here what we see is that the scriptures are telling us that Jesus was conceived by the creative action of the Holy Spirit while Mary was engaged to Joseph and before they had sexual relations. And here I think a brief description or a brief explanation of this circumstance of betrothal says that she was betrothed to Joseph they had this what we would call it was like an engagement like we have it but it was binding that engagement was really it was a contract in those days if you gave your word your word was considered to be your bond and so when a man pledged to marry a woman they had this betrothal period which lasted about a year or so and it was considered legally binding that he was going to follow through on that and if he didn't follow through on that and the only two circumstances legitimately allowed were death or a proper divorce and so we would see that even though they were not married Joseph is still referred to as her husband and Mary is being referred to as his wife and that's the reason for that that this woman if you got engaged to someone you were as good as the husband she was as good as the wife even though the marriage had not yet been consummated as I was preparing this sermon

I remembered a number of years ago my brother did my brother BJ wrote a play that he produced called if you were Joseph and I was thinking about Joseph's dilemma Joseph no doubt loved Mary but he also knew that it was biologically impossible for Mary to be pregnant with his child he knew they had not had sexual relations he knew that she couldn't be pregnant with his child but he also knew biologically that she could not be pregnant otherwise than through sexual relations now we don't have a record of the conversation we don't know what exchange took place between Mary and Joseph but I think our common sense would tell us they talked they had some conversation Mary had to say something to

Joseph and I think at best Mary would have told him exactly what happened Gabriel came to me and Gabriel told me I was going to bear the son of God that the Holy Spirit would enable me to conceive will cause me to conceive this child who is going to be the savior of the world and I think that she assured him Joseph I've not been unfaithful I'm still a virgin I've never slept with another man we don't know what Joseph said but here's what is clear what is clear is that Joseph did not believe her and we know he didn't believe her because the scriptures tell us that he decided to divorce her quietly he decided to divorce her which was an appropriate step under the law we wasn't slight Joseph on this because Joseph the scripture says he was a just man and even in face of that

[15:14] Joseph was not interested in shaming Mary he was going to put her away he was going to do it quietly and it could have been done publicly or privately all you needed was two witnesses it could be done privately and he chose do it privately!

But then we see in verse 20 that there's a dramatic turn of events look at verse 20 it says but as he considered these things behold an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying Joseph son of David do not fear to take Mary as your wife for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit that's a small miracle that Joseph was even able to sleep it's a small miracle that he was able to sleep in the midst of this because I think we all know lesser things have broken our sleep but he was asleep and the angel appeared to him in a dream and told him hey Joseph it's okay she's telling the truth she is carrying a child who's been conceived of the Holy Spirit and he is going to be the child is a boy the child is his son and so we see in verse 24 that

Joseph gains perspective from the angel he understands what's going on Mary was not unfaithful she's pregnant with the savior of the world who will be called Jesus and he takes her to be his wife I think it's easy to overlook Joseph's dilemma but Joseph's dilemma is instructive for all of us I think the truth is that without divine intervention none of us could believe the virgin birth we sang about it this morning I believe in the virgin birth but friends that doesn't come from reading this account in scripture alone that doesn't come from our ability to do that we humanly speaking we think about it this way if the man who knew Mary best knew her knew her character knew everything about her if he knew her best how is it that he wasn't able to take her word that she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit and an angel bringing a message from God had to be the deciding factor for him to believe that why would we remove from that and without divine help why would we believe this account when Joseph didn't believe it and the truth is that the same way that Joseph needed divine help he needed divine intervention to cause him to believe that so do we so do we when we have conviction of heart that Jesus was indeed conceived of the Holy Spirit let us not for one moment think that's because we just believe because we believe no we believe because the Holy Spirit has

enabled us to believe!

there's nothing in us nothing about us that is so morally good that we would believe these things on our own the Holy Spirit enables us to believe he opens our eyes he gives us faith he enables us to believe and so an important question for all of us to consider this morning is do you believe the virgin birth and when I say believe it's not a mental ascent it's not yeah I believe that because it's in the Bible no it is with deep conviction of heart you know today I almost guarantee if you're on Facebook if you were to put on your page that you believe in the virgin birth I will guarantee you if you have any reasonable number of friends or even people who just pass by your post many will laugh at you and say that's superstitious and that's foolish and all the other kinds of things so [ 19 : 46 ] I'm not just talking about mentally assenting! to something I'm talking about having a deep conviction! scoffers to scoff and the mockers to mock because we believe deep within our soul that Jesus was a unique one in this lineage of David and Abraham that he was a unique one who is stated as not having an earthly father but born of a Jewish virgin and one of the ways that we can really test and be honest with ourselves this morning as to whether we believe in the virgin birth if we believe in the virgin birth if we believe that Jesus was indeed conceived of the Holy Spirit that he was the one who came into the world to save people from their sins we would put our trust in him if we're not trusting in

Jesus then I would dare say that we do not truly believe that he is whom the scriptures say that he is that he was born of the virgin Mary that he came into this world to save his people from their sins if we believe that we run to him as a savior we run to him for rescue because we are the ones he came to save true belief in Jesus will result in that true belief in Jesus also helps us to recognize that we are sinners that's why he came and he's the only one who's able to save us from our sins notice in verses 22 and 23 Matthew helps us to see that this wasn't something that just happened by chance Matthew tells us that this was an ancient prophecy that was being fulfilled and he is quoting in verse 23 he's quoting the prophet

Isaiah but first of all look at verse 22 he says all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet and then in verse 23 he quotes from the prophet Isaiah now these words would have been spoken about 700 years before the birth of Christ 700 years 7 centuries more than 7 centuries before the birth of Jesus Christ!

Just think about that fact alone that God moves on a prophet by the name of Isaiah and prophecies that Christ is going to be born that the Messiah is going to be born and 700 years later he fulfills it and not just to say he is going to be born but he is going to be born of a virgin!

She's going to have this child and his name will be called Emmanuel and the translation of that means God is with us and understand I think we do understand this that God could have given him all kinds of names but he gave him this name to communicate to us God's coming to us God's love for us God's drawing near to us in the person of his son that when Jesus came into this world the meaning of that for us is God with us God with us in all of our brokenness God with us in all of our fallenness God with us in all the darkness of this world he's come into it and he's with us and we must remember that whatever difficulty we may face whatever darkness we may face whatever trials we may face

[ 23 : 55 ] God has condescended to us in the person of his son sending him and through his coming is saying to us I'm with you I'm with you in the midst of it all!

now let me just pause here and make a side point in in this before I move on to the next point and that is you'll notice in verse 25 that we're told that Mary was a virgin at the time of giving birth to Jesus we're told it says but he knew her not until she had given birth to a son and he called his name Jesus so it seems as if to be doubly sure that there could be no hint of wondering about the possibility of how Jesus was conceived Mary was a virgin throughout her pregnancy it wasn't that Joseph said well okay you're pregnant now so it can be for me we can engage in relations no that didn't happen scripture says for the entirety of her pregnancy up until the time of birth there was no sexual relations between

Joseph and Mary yet the Roman Catholic Church tells us that Mary was a perpetual virgin that Mary had one child it was Jesus she and Joseph had no sexual relations and even though scripture says that Jesus had brothers and sisters they say well those were his cousins those were not real they were not brothers and sisters they use that word to include cousins as well but of course we know that that that is not the case Mary was not a perpetual virgin she was a virgin until she had given birth to Jesus and that's what the until means so after that she and Joseph would have had normal

sexual relations as couples do okay so what again is the overarching point behind Matthew making this great effort going into this great detail about the circumstances of Christ's birth to show its miraculous and its nature it's the point behind showing us that this is a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy he wants us to see that Jesus is unique he wants us to see that Jesus has unique role in human history he was born of a virgin because of his unique role Jesus is the only person who was born to die every single one of us we were born to live God brought us into this world and the idea is that we live we were not born to die we were born to live it is only because of the fall that we die but!

Jesus was born to die well that's the first point the second aspect of the birth of Christ that points us to the death of Christ is seen in the meaning of his name seen in the meaning of Christ's name that name points to his death look at verse 21 the angel told Joseph that he was to call Mary's child Jesus she she will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus the name Jesus is is the Greek form of the Hebrew word Joshua and both mean the

[ 28 : 02 ] Lord saves Jesus means the Lord saves Joshua means the Lord saves and the name Jesus has theological significance because through it what God is saying is I'm the one who saves I'm the only one who saves and what is interesting to note is in the Old Testament there are two Joshuas who are mentioned the first Joshua is the commander of Israel's army the one who took the nation of Israel into the promised land and the second Joshua was the high priest who served at the time the children of Israel were returning to the promised land after they had come out of captivity and both of these men prefigured Christ both of these men are Old Testament figures of Christ Joshua the commander that's the type of Christ our commander the one who defeats our greatest enemy

Satan and sin and the same way that Joshua in the Old Testament defeated the enemies of Israel and brought them into the promised land Christ does the same for us and he brings us into the promised land of salvation and then you have the type of the Old Testament Joshua the priest and he would be the one the high priest who would atone for the sins of the people by offering the sacrifices of animals year in and year out that's what he would do he offered these sacrifices and that was a prefigure of Christ but the difference is that Christ did not come to offer the sacrifices of animals he came and he offered himself he offered himself the perfect lamb the lamb it to be offered only once not year after year but once and for all and to atone forever for sin friends the meaning of

Jesus reminds us of this critically important truth in scripture that the Lord is the one who saves that salvation comes from the Lord and it's a very important truth yet many people overlook it many people don't realize it and so they set about to save themselves doing all the good they know to do attending church and maybe serving in the church and giving to the needy and doing all kinds of other good and wonderful things maybe stopping bad habits things that they know are not good but those things can't save us they cannot save us it is the Lord who saves and it is the Lord who saves because he wants us to know that we are saved not by works of righteousness we are saved by his grace and by his grace alone and the way that God is able to save by his grace alone is that some 33 years after his birth

Jesus would go to a cross a cruel Roman cross that he would lay his life down for sinners that's the way the Lord saves he doesn't save simply by saying okay you're saved no he saves us by his grace because he's able to do it because Christ paid the price he paid the penalty he became a substitute he died the death that sinners deserve to die so that God can justly save them it's not sent his son that's the way he saves us he saves us from death through the death of his only son and so in the name of Jesus God was pointing to his salvation pointing to his salvation saying I'm the one who saves but the painful truth is that salvation comes through the death of

Christ and this brings me to my final point the final aspect of Christ's birth that points to his death is the purpose of his mission the purpose of Christ's mission what was his mission why did Jesus come did he come to be a good example for us to follow did he come to be a good moral teacher did he come to heal the sick no he did those things but that's not why he came we're told why he came in verse 21 he came to save his people from their sins he came to save his people from their sins that's his mission that's why he came he came to save sinners and this mission points to the end of his life but notice this is why he was born he was born for this particular purpose he was born to save his people to give his life as a ransom for many and this mission should help us to rightly interpret the life of

[ 33 : 49 ] Jesus all that he did since this was the mission at the end everything in between led to that everything in between pointed to that that Jesus would be the God man the one to mediate between God and man he would be the one to reconcile God and sinners in verse 23 we see that his mission was to be Emmanuel to bring God again to dwell with man only possible through his cross only possible through his death on that cross and this is why the incarnation took place this is why God came in flesh and dwelt among us to die to save his people from their sins we cannot embrace the mission of

Christ without embracing a hard reality about our own selves Jesus came to save his people from their sins and the hard reality about that that we must all accept is we are sinners sinners who are in need of a savior we are sinners who are the objects of Christ saving work and his saving mission and so my question to all of us this morning not making any assumptions is have you personally embraced the purpose of the life of Christ the mission of Christ have you embraced that you are a sinner in need of a savior and this is the only way that sinners are saved he is the only savior through whom sinners are saved scripture says there is no other name given unto heaven whereby we must be saved!

another sober reality is to realize that the death that Christ died points to the seriousness of our sin Jesus could have died some other way but he died the death of a criminal he died between two thieves he died with God himself turning his back on his son and darkness engulfing him showing the hideousness and the seriousness of sin our sin your sin and my sin deserved every bit of that and if there were a better way if there were an easier way then

God would have been cruel to do that God would have been cruel to display his son in that way and punish his son in that way yes the Roman hands were the ones who crucified him but ultimately God slayed his own son and he did it for sinners and it communicates how serious sin is and it communicates the depth to which God has gone through his son to reconcile!

sinners back to himself and friends this morning our only hope our only hope from sin and from death is through turning to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord saying Jesus when you went to the cross you did it for me you took my sins you stood in my place you took my sins I can receive now your righteousness and so again we were all born to live Jesus Christ was born to die and born to save his people from their sins and so as we celebrate this Christmas as we celebrate every single Christmas let us pray that God would give us the awareness of mind the soberness of mind to realize that that's what it's all about it's not about all the busyness and the toil and the worry and the accumulation of things and the getting ourselves into debt it's not about that it is about being reminded of this amazing truth that

[ 38 : 49 ] God sent his son to die he was born to die for sinners who put their trust in him and so even as we think of the manger and we purposefully have a manger seen in the foyer but beyond that manger is a cross and that's really what Christmas is all about let's pray together heavenly Father we are grateful this morning that you send Jesus Christ to save his people from their sins we ask Lord that you would help us in the midst of our time of commemorating Christmas in about 10 days but even as we lead up to it Lord remind us that

Jesus came to die not in a vacuum but he came to die for the sins of his people I pray this morning for those in particular who don't know Christ I ask that you would speak to their hearts I ask that you would convict them of their need for Christ and you would draw them by your Holy Spirit and bring them to yourself pray and ask in Jesus name Amen Yes