

# The Christmas Story

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 21 December 2014

Preacher: Pastor Kenoyer

[ 0 : 00 ] First of all, let me, for all of your pastors, thank you for your kindness to us and for the Undeserved blessing of privilege of ministry to a people that love the Lord Jesus. Pray for us! And make ministry and shepherding a blessing. And we, each of us, Pastor Saul, Pastor Andrew, and our wives, boy, we want you to know we don't take the blessing of God's kindness here for granted, and we are thankful to Him for it.

Turn in your Bibles. Last week was a very interesting week in that in the frame of Christmas, several years ago, the Lord began to affect my thinking regarding the foundational theology that underlies what we celebrate this day.

And so we have, for the last several years, whether you are aware of it or not, looked in most cases to some aspect of the incarnation because it is foundational to our faith.

And last week's sermon was about a broad overview of the theology of the incarnation. This week, we are going to look to Matthew chapter 1, and we are going to pick up on one of the two particular Christmas stories. And I would imagine that many of you in your homes on the 25th days may have a routine in which you read the scriptures and kind of draw attention to what the day really means before you go into the remainder of the day and the party and the gifts and those other things. And actually, when we think about the Christmas story, we find that the Bible doesn't tell us all that much about it. The passage in Matthew, in which we find the details surrounding the Christmas story, are rather brief. And let me have you look there, if you will, to verse 19 of chapter 1. It says, and her husband, actually 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. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolve 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 will call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. Father God, this morning we take your word in hand.

And we who are people who have been redeemed from the fall, the curse, the absolute burden of sin, we who were once dead are now alive in the Lord Jesus Christ, and we are thankful for the position that you have granted us through your grace. We're thankful also for the enabling of the Spirit of God, by which I trust this morning to preach your word with power and authority, and by which also I trust, Father, that your people would receive it, that it would produce the peaceable fruit of righteousness and blessing. That we, as we study the scriptures together, would grow to know more about the Lord Jesus Christ than to have our affection for him warmed and stirred and our character shaped, that you might be glorified here on earth, even as you are in heaven.

[ 4 : 28 ] And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. As we take up the passage this morning, I want you to look there, if you will, at the very interesting blend of information that Matthew brings to us. Now, prior to this, we're not going to take the time this morning to look at the genealogy, which in essence explains to us the lineage of the Lord Jesus Christ, very important because of Old Testament promise.

But I want you to pick up, if you would, there in verse 18 and just mark what we're dealing with here. First of all, we come face to face with a divine dilemma. And what I mean by that is, as we read the text, we find out that this reality of Christ's birth, Jesus coming into the world, actually posed a very significant challenge to the father and mother, the stepfather of Jesus and his mother.

And so as we look at these opening lines in verse 18, I want you to stop just for a moment and kind of ponder with me, why would the Holy Spirit take the time to give us this detail? I mean, let's stop just for a moment and frame the unbelievable miracle of the incarnation and kind of carry it over into

maybe some mythology or carry it over into a fairy tale. I mean, we remember fairy tales, remember, you know, in the good old days and in the land far away, blah, blah, blah, everything is kind of unbelievably spectacular and everything is perfect until someone, you know, does the wrong thing and everything kind of descends into the abyss. But we're looking here at the Holy Spirit wanting us, we who sit this morning under the hearing of the Word of God, to pick up on some very practical details for our edification and instruction. And so as we look at this, we recognize in verse 18, the startling reality of what actually took place in the incarnation. Now, the birth of Jesus took place 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. And so as you think about why the Word of God takes this time to remind us of this reality, I want you to understand that the truth of the matter is, is that scripture frames the incarnation in the midst of the drama of human life. It's very practical, very real, and very challenging. And so when you look there at verse 18 and you understand what was going on, you can probably understand also how Joseph felt when he discovered. I would assume that Mary was the one who told him, and I'm not sure of that, because in ancient cultures, the communication between man and woman was rather guarded. And it may have been that the communication was not directly from

Mary. I'm not positive. I don't know. But regardless, I want you to think just for a moment of the blow and the unbelievable effect that it had upon Joseph when he heard that the young lady that he was betrothed to was now pregnant. And what we know from verse 18 is that in verse 19, we understand that the two put together that he had not been with her. And we know that that had to be an absolutely stunning challenge to him. We read there in verse 20, it says, and he considered these things, behold, you know, he pondered and thought about it very carefully. And you can kind of imagine just the emotional turmoil that Joseph was going through as he thought through the process of his drawing affection to one particular young woman in the town or wherever he lived, and then thinking about very carefully about, is this the right one? I remember the process of making the decision to marry my bride. And hi, Judith, you're over there. It took me five weeks. Do you want to know that?

I actually delayed about two weeks. I had by that time pretty much figured out, having squandered my youth in the butterfly approach to dating. How many of you understand what the butterfly approach is?

[ 8 : 44 ] Here and there and all over the place, shameful. And I had come to the point of realizing that I desperately needed the counsel of God. And I would imagine that's where Joseph was when he was thinking carefully about, well, who am I going to marry? Well, I'm obvious that the Holy Spirit led him in decision. And so here he is pondering the matter. And now he finds out that the girl that he was betrothed to, and that was kind of, that was an engagement period, very formal. It wasn't just like, well, maybe we ought to be doing this together. It was a formal agreement between two families that this marriage would take place on a future time. And so here is Joseph kind of wrestling with the reality that all those favorable things that had drawn him to marry, her character, her heart, his affection for her spirit. I mean, he suddenly comes to grips with the fact she's pregnant. It's not my child. I want you to recognize the thing that's absolutely stunning is here was Joseph in the midst of this, not overwhelmed emotionally, but thinking about this very carefully and very deliberately. It says there in verse 20, it says, as he considered these things. That word considered that is used here is talking about actually kind of weighing something objectively rather than just getting wrapped up in the emotion of it. And I want you to ponder just for a moment just how normal it would have been to let the emotions absolutely run wild and rampant. That's not what happened in

Joseph's life. He thought about it carefully. He pondered it carefully. I would imagine he asked the normal questions about when and how and who and what's this all about. But underlying that, we recognize that here is a man who in the midst of an unbelievable challenge didn't go off on the subject. In addition to being a very thoughtful and not an angry man, we see that Joseph was rather humble and merciful. While Joseph could have called for an opportunity to absolutely take this publicly embarrassing issue and make something of it in a public venue against Mary, we find here that what it says is that he didn't want to heap shame on her. And so what he decided would be that he would put her away privately. A period of betrothal was something that could not be broken without a divorce. And so it involved this formal responsibility on Joseph's part of saying, hey, I'm not going to carry forward with the marriage and I am finished with this relationship. I want you to

put yourself in Joseph's shoes just for a moment. And I want you to understand that the Holy Spirit wants us to think carefully about Joseph at this point. We're going to look at Jesus in a minute, but Joseph first. I want you to think of how easy it would have been to be sarcastic or absolutely critical of Mary. How easy it would have been to be highly indignant and offended.

I mean, put yourself there. This is the woman you had chosen to marry and you were looking forward to the day that your marriage would be formed and consummated. And suddenly you find out that this person who you have committed to has for some reason or another become pregnant by somebody else.

There's several things I want you to recognize about Joseph that are noteworthy. For one, this godly man is not an emotional bottle rocket. How many of you know what a bottle rocket is? You light that thing and can you guarantee where it goes? You know, up in the air and off and and sometimes we act like emotional bottle rockets, don't we? The fuse gets lit and where we go after that is pretty uncertain and all in a huff and all irritated and all over the place. And it's just a matter of pride and anger. It has nothing to do with a godly heart. I want you to recognize, secondly, here's a godly man, even when he is in the right, that has a merciful spirit in dealing with troubles in the lives of other people. Instead of calling for justice and revenge, we find that here is Joseph with a tempered spirit and one who is interested in not causing a lot of harm. And so I want you to think with me just for a moment. Here in the midst of the drama of the incarnation, the Lord Jesus coming to be our Savior, we are given a little picture of the kind of man that God chose to have as his son's stepfather. There are two little things I want you to take away with you and mark.

[13:34] For one, he showed the father's heart. How do we know that? He was merciful. He had the right to revenge. He had the right of public embarrassment. And by the way, when you find yourself in that kind of predicament, here's a girl that you were willing to marry and you find out she's pregnant with someone else's child, the absolute embarrassment. He says, listen, I'm not about making a big scene out of this. I want to handle this with a quiet dignity and a careful mercy that is reflective of a person who understood God's heart. Second thing I want you to recognize is that as you look there in Matthew chapter 1 verse 24 and 25, we see that Joseph listened to God. Verse 24, 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, what? Jesus. I am struck by the fact that Joseph, in every instance that we have recorded, whenever God spoke to him, he heard it and he acted on it immediately. It wasn't like, well, yeah, I'm not real sure I want to do that. Another instance of when

God spoke to Joseph, remember? God came to Joseph and said, hey, it's time for you to pack and head for Egypt. Joseph said, yo, you're kidding me. My family's around here. I live with people I know.

You think I want to have that long? No, off he went. And the outcome was survival of his family. And so as you think about Joseph, give credit to this man because he showed his father's heart and he also heard his father's word. So let me carry that over in some practical terms for what we as God's people want to take away from this in our own lives. For one, you who are sitting here, who are dads and moms, I want to encourage you to raise children that show the father's heart and hear the father's word and get it. Secondly, you who are fathers in particular are thinking about your daughters marrying somebody eventually. Guess what kind of young man you want to look for? You want to look for a man who has a heart for God's word and also shows the character of God. And here in the midst of this wonderful story of the incarnation, the spirit of God chooses to give us a little picture, a little picture of the character of the one that God would use to be the stepfather of Jesus. That brings us to a second piece that I want us to recognize here in the text.

There in verse 20, it says, as he considered these things, behold, the angel, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in dreams saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife.

[16:29] For what that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. Well, that's a rather spectacular announcement. Angel to Joseph. And you can imagine the turmoil.

Do you think he laid awake at night wondering what had happened? I don't know for a fact, but you can imagine what happened. What, what, what? You know, I mean, in the midst of this, the, an angel of the Lord comes to him and says, Hey, Joseph, don't be afraid. Go ahead and take Mary as your wife because the child that is in her is conceived by the Holy Spirit. I want you to step forward if you will, and understand that the truth of the matter is the scripture makes it very clear that the child in Mary's womb was conceived by the Holy Spirit. The moment of conception, divinely ordained

plan before the foundation of the world and part of God's plan of redemption and salvation. And here's the truth. God chose to take his son and make him all flesh, all man for our sake. And he did it through a woman and through the conception of the Holy Spirit with that woman. Amazing. Amazing.

And so we understand that the child in Mary's womb, child of the Holy Spirit. And here is God choosing to bring the savior of our lives into the world through the simple process of birth. Nine months. And then Jesus making the same journey from the warmth of his mother's womb out into the cold and broken world. And I appreciate John, the song we were singing this morning as I was listening and thinking along, away in a manger.

I mean, hey, you know, we kind of fantasize what mangers are really like. But the truth of the matter is, mangers are incredibly stinky places. Isn't that true? And the only reason Jesus was there is because there was no other place that was open to him. And here comes the Lord of glory, the savior of this world. And he ends up being born into that squalor. And I want to tell you something, that squalor makes no comparison. When we think about the squalor of a manger, we cannot imagine heaven's glory. Do you follow that? Stepping from heaven's glory into squalor is quite a bit different than you and I living in the squalor we live in and going down to a hog farm somewhere in Indiana. Okay? It's just a small step. For him, it was infinite. I can only imagine the wonder that Joseph and Mary had when Jesus came into the world. Can you understand that? Just think with me for a moment. Here, God had said to Mary, you're going to have the savior of the world. God had said to Joseph, the son that your wife is going to bear is the savior of the world. And out comes this little, well, who knows, six and a half to eight and a half pounds. I have no idea what Jesus weighed. But there he was, probably had to have a slap on the rump like every one of us. And the first thing he did was announce to the world, I'm here.

[19:50] I remember when our first child was born, it was the first time I've ever been in a, well, it's not the first time I've ever been an observer in delivery. But first time that it was so important to me.

You understand that, right? Out comes this little baby and Heather was blue. And for just a couple seconds, she wasn't drawing breath. How many of you have ever tried to breathe for somebody else?

It's really, get with it. And I remember the doctor inviting her to the process by stimulating a little bit. Pow! And off she went. She was fine. I just imagined that. Joseph and Mary. This is our savior. It must have been incredibly hard. And yet by faith to accept that this infant was going to be their redeemer. There's something else in our text that just affects me as I think about it.

You look there in verse 21, it says, she will bear a son and you will call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. Here's what I want you to think about this morning.

And the truth of the matter is, sin is something we need to be saved from. Isn't that right? I mean, the truth of the matter is, we're profoundly comfortable with our own sin. Now, we're pretty irritated periodically with other people's sins, right? But ours is like, oh well, you know, you do those things you do and other people just ought to buck up and accept it.

[21:32] I mean, after all, it's you. The fact of the matter is, sin is incredibly horrible, both to the sinner and to the glory of God. And I want you to think with me just for a moment about how the Bible presents sin. Because to read here what we do in verse 21, where it says, he's going to save his people from their sins. If we have no abiding understanding of the horror of sin, there's no real need for the savior. When you take sin out of the equation, you also reduce the significance of needing to be saved from it. Do you understand that? And so when you hear people today diminish the reality of what sin is, you recognize that whether they're doing it thoughtfully or not, regardless, they're diminishing the necessity of the savior. So let's think carefully about what the Bible tells us about sin. And I want to give credit where credit is due in that some of what I'm going to share this morning really comes from Martin Lloyd-Jones in one of the sermons that he preached on Romans chapter 1. So I want you to go with me just for a moment to one of the best little pictures of what sin is really like over in Romans chapter 1. And we're going to do a little mini lesson on Romans chapter 1, verse 18 through 32. You may remember that when we preached our way through Romans, it probably took us three weeks to get through here. And I'm making a moderate promise that we'll do it in just a couple minutes. You're going to say, well, why don't we do that all the time? It won't happen. Romans chapter 1, verse 18 through 32. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

I want you to put your finger on the word suppress. I want you to maybe underline it in your Bible so that one of the things you understand is that sin is not an accident. It is deliberate. When we sin, we sin deliberately. We choose to sin. It's not something that, oops, didn't mean to do that.

You didn't mean to get caught. You did intend to sin. And we go back to the book of Genesis just for a moment in our thinking at least, and we recognize that when sin first entered the world, it came with a conscious and deliberate appeal, temptation, and Eve consciously and deliberately thought through the matter. And her choice was deliberate as was Adam's. I want you to look at what it says there in verse 18.

It says they suppress the truth. Then in verse 21, it says they did not honor him. Hey, I'm not doing that.

I don't want to. I remember reading earlier this, well, I guess it was this morning as I was kind of scoping something. That was yesterday. How many of you understand that there were two police officers that were executed in New York City? And de Blasio, the mayor, has made some pretty inappropriate comments about the turmoil and tension. And the police officers have kind of turned their backs on the on the mayor and said, listen, you're not very supportive of the responsibilities we have of enforcing the law. I understand there's a mess. But it was a conscious and deliberate choice those officers made to turn their back on the mayor. When we sin, we choose to turn our back on God.

[ 25 : 10 ] I want you to recognize also as you look at that passage, it says here, they exchanged the glory. Look at verse 23. They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Isn't that disgusting? Stop and think about that. You go back to the book of Isaiah in particular, and Isaiah really whacks at this, as Jeremiah does as well. Talks about the fact you walk out into the woods, you chop down a hunk of timber, and part of it you carve to make yourself a god, and you have to use nails to hold it in place. It's going to tip over and fall.

The rest of it you use to warm yourself and heat your food with. And I, you know, the prophet says, what's the deal? Don't you get it? The truth of the matter is, is there is a deliberate choice, men choose to sin. Second thing that I want you to see as you read further in Romans, picking up there in verse 24 through 28, sin is destructive and debasing.

Sin is destructive and debasing. Sin always leads people further and further away from their own good to their own harm and loss.

Sexual sin, I want you to understand as you look at this passage, and we're not taking the time to break it down, but I do want you to recognize that sexual sin is not the only area in which sin creates harm. It harms you every place that you engage in it. The man who chooses to lie harms his integrity. The man who chooses to lie progressively develops a habit of being a liar, liar. And what is the benefit of being a liar? How many of you, when the used car salesman comes trucking out from his smoky office and says, hi, I'm really glad to meet you. What's your first thought?

[ 27 : 16 ] Yeah, right. Okay. The guy has, has already picked up that kind of aura of you. Yeah. I don't believe a word you say. This is the best car on the lot. Uh-huh. You know, a liar is someone who is characterized and disrespected. Let's talk about another one, anger. What happens when a man allows his anger to become a progressively dominant part of his life? Do you know what happens? How many of you get close to a skunk? I remember several years ago, walking outside, let my dog out. My dog had never visited a skunk before. And my dog thought the skunk was someone who was violating the integrity of our yard.

And our little eight pound dog or 12 pound dog decided that it was appropriate to take on the responsibility of protecting our property. And there was only a momentary little skirmish and my dog came yipping in the house and, uh, it was all ugly from there on out. Now I want you to understand something.

All sin harms people incredibly. It's destructive. All sin is destructive. And as you look at this passage in Romans chapter one, and it gives us a picture of what happens in sexual misbehavior. I want you to understand that happens in every area. Sin harms the sinner. The third thing that I want you to see as you look at this passage is that sin is ultimately disgusting. Sin is disgusting.

You know, give you an illustration. There are people, I even see people that are professing evangelicals today, uh, seem to have no hesitation in talking about the acceptability of just a letting people love who they want to love. Do you understand that? I mean, that's kind of the mantra with, uh, the current movement towards homosexual acceptance. Do you understand that right behind

that is pedophilia that is coming on center? And lest you are not aware of it, the state of Ohio, I think is number four in America in human trafficking. And by the way, do you know what human trafficking is talking about? It is talking about taking advantage of children and women sexually. Sin is disgusting. And as you look at the last little part of Romans chapter one, you find there that as Paul rattles through the argument, uh, let me just give you a case of picking up there in verse 29, they were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetous malice.

They were, they are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, maliciousness. They're gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insulin. And as Paul rattles this list off, do you know what his intention is? His intention is to give you that kind of staccato punch of this is what sin is like. And the intent is to bring us to the point of saying, man, the world is a mess and sin causes problems.

[ 30 : 32 ] And why do I bring that to your attention? Going back to the passage in Matthew, I want you to understand when the Holy Spirit, when God spoke to, uh, to Joseph and said, listen, the little child who is going to be born to your wife is going to be the savior of the world. He is coming into the world to save you and all mankind, to take care of the sin problem, to deal with it. You shall call his name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins. That had to be the most liberating and most wonderful piece of news to Joseph and Mary if they were afflicted deeply by the reality of their sins.

As I think about the blessing of, uh, of being a pastor over the years, some of the most enjoyable moments in my life without question have been those times when in the preaching of the word or in sharing the gospel with individuals, I have seen the spirit of God draw an individual to that point where they say, man, I desperately need Jesus to do something about my sin problem. And I have no hope and no remedy in myself. I can still remember the incidences where people have come down to the front here and said, I need Jesus as my savior. Do you know what? They didn't get there without first of all, absolutely coming to see the bankruptcy of their own soul and understanding that salvation is not of mankind's making, but is the work of Christ alone. That brings us to this point that I want you to recognize there. You shall call his name Jesus. And so I want you to understand as you think about this this morning, only Jesus can save men from their sins. That's the truth. You have a problem.

I have a problem. And apart from Jesus, I can't solve it, nor can you. That's why people have to come to that point where they are broken with the reality of the darkness of their soul and the misery of their sin. And they come to the point of saying, I can't do anything about this. I desperately need Christ to be my savior.

The unbelieving world is full of ideas of how to save people. Climate change, communism, income redistribution, improve the education. Let's go with common core.

I rattle off one thing after another. And the truth of the matter is, is that nothing that man ever will produce is going to make a little difference ultimately in the soul of man.

[ 33 : 21 ] Mankind labors under an incredible weight of a soul that is darkened by the depravity of sin. And man cannot save himself. And so think with me in very simple terms just for a moment.

A single sin against the infinite glory of a holy God is infinitely offensive. God sent his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to pay the infinite penalty for sin by dying on the cross in my place in my place and in your place.

And when in Matthew chapter 1 we hear the sweetness of the Christmas story, do you know what it is? God willingly sent his son Jesus to take upon himself the form of man.

Why? What it tells us in Hebrews chapter 10, He did this so that he could be our sacrifice for sin. He died in my place. One of the things that I enjoy saying in a funeral, and I can tell you at my father's memorial, I probably won't say it, I don't know for sure, but I enjoy saying in a funeral, Jesus died your death.

That's true for a believer. Do you follow that? Jesus died your death. He took my place and he died in my place. Yes. That I might have his righteousness attached to my account.

[ 34 : 57 ] And so this morning as you listen to the Christmas story, here's where it really comes down to. You're in hearing this morning under one of two conditions. You are here this morning and you either know Jesus Christ as your Savior, and as you think about the fact that God sent his son, the Lord Jesus, to be the Savior of the world, you're thinking, wow, man, am I blessed.

Or you're sitting here this morning under the burden and the guilt and the shame of a cloud of darkness that represents the weight of judgment of God on your sin.

You know what the purpose of the Holy Spirit is in ministry at this moment? It is to call you to the cross and saying, listen, you cannot save yourself.

That's why God sent his son into this world. And the question for you to come to grips with is this. Will I say yes or no to the free gift of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ who came, was born, who died and rose again?

Let's pray. A gracious Father, this morning as we think about the sweetness of the Christmas story, we understand that it presents to us an undeniable truth that all men are sinners and stand justly condemned before a holy God.

[ 36 : 28 ] That we cannot save ourselves. There is nothing, there's nothing we can do that can remedy the broken, despicable heart that we have.

And yet Jesus Christ came into the world to be the Savior of the world. And we recognize this morning that the work of the Spirit of God is to draw people to the cross and we would ask that that would happen now.

That believers would rejoice and sinners would be convicted. That Christ, who is the Savior, would be glorified among us. And we ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Let's stand together as we close.