

God With Us

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: 25 December 2022

Preacher: Jonathan Chancey

[0 : 00] As we continue to reflect on the birth of the Savior, let's take our Bibles and open them up to the book of Matthew this morning. The book of Matthew. If you're using the pew Bibles there in front of you, you can find that on page 757 of the Bibles there in front of you.

And we will read from verses 18 through verse 25 this morning. Matthew chapter 1 verses 18 through 25. 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, 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.

[1 : 27] Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us. When Joseph woke from his 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 his son, and he called his name Jesus. Jesus, and this is the word of God. Let's bow once more and pray as we open it up this morning.

Lord, again, we thank you for the birth of Christ that we've just read about. We thank you for your unfailing word and the many ways that you've promised his coming, and promised his coming, and promised his coming, and now he's here.

And we pray now as we reflect on these words that, again, Lord, you would stir our hearts to worship you. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Sadly, I don't have the best memory in the world, but I do distinctly remember the birth of each one of my children.

We have three boys. You can probably hear them from time to time. And from time to time, Amanda and I will flip through pages of old pictures and old videos from when they were just born, and it brings back just the flood of memories of what it was like as we were getting ready for them to come.

[2 : 51] Were we ready? Were we prepared? Did we have enough supplies? Did we have enough diapers? Was there enough of the things that we needed into the house?

We remember the trip to the hospital and me trying not to complain about how cold the room was or how hungry I was while Amanda was working hard to bring these babies into the world.

And then, of course, the sheer joy of finally laying eyes on our newborn baby, holding him into our arms. There's absolutely nothing like it.

And we had glimpses along the way. There were pictures and ultrasound images along the way.

There were the kicks and the bumps that told you that a child was coming.

But that moment when he finally came and you could look him in his eyes, hold him in your arms, look him right in the face, you just can't take your eyes off of him. And there's almost no words to express how beautiful of a moment that is.

[3 : 52] And we've been through the same experience now three times, but for us, each one was unique and special and just as exhilarating and exciting as the last.

But, of course, as special as those births were to us, in the grand scheme of things, they are not really all that unique. About 385,000 babies are born every day on our planet.

That's over 140 million babies per year. And all of the stories of how these babies were made, how they were carried, how they were brought into the world are all, for the most part, going to be fairly similar.

But here at Christmas, we tell the story of the most unique birth in the history of the world.

And this was a birth that was unlike any other. It was certainly the most unique birth story in the story of mankind. And if you don't understand what makes the birth of Jesus just so special, you might be asking this morning, why in the world do Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus in the way that we do?

[5 : 08] Why this one baby out of all the babies born every day throughout the world, all the babies throughout church history and the history of mankind, why do we make so much out of the birth of this child, especially here at Christmas?

What makes this birth so special? And so the answer, of course, is that there has never been a child born like this. Never has there ever been a child born like this.

So this morning, I want to focus our attention on this question. What makes this child so special? Why do we celebrate the birth of Jesus?

What makes this child so special? Why do we fix our attention on this birth? Why do we worship this child? And what we'll see this morning in our time together is three answers to that question this morning.

This will be our outline if you're following along, taking notes. Three answers to this question. It's that he was miraculously born, he was biblically foretold, and he was purposefully sent.

[6 : 21] Three reasons this birth is so special. He was miraculously born, biblically foretold, and purposefully sent. First, this child is special because he was miraculously born.

In verse 18 of our passage, it says that 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.

Now, some of you, I know you get so tired of television shows, things that you watch on television, books that you read, because they're just so filled with drama, and scandal, and tension, and so you close, you turn off the shows, and you open up your Bible instead.

But here in the very first moments of Jesus' story, it's a scandal, drama, and tension. Mary and Joseph were betrothed, and this was similar to our engagement period, but it was much, much more formal than that.

People in our culture, they break off engagements all the time, and although that is serious, there's really no consequence, it's not such a big deal, but here in this culture, to be betrothed, it meant that you were legally bound to be married.

[7 : 44] So you weren't husband and wife quite yet, but you were legally heading that way, and since they were not officially yet husband and wife, they were not to come together as husband and wife, until that moment came.

Yet, even though they were not officially husband and wife yet, according to Mosaic law, any sexual unfaithfulness during this betrothal period constituted adultery, and if punished to the fullest extent, would result in the death penalty, by stoning for the guilty party.

This was a scandal. It's a young, unmarried couple, a pregnant wife-to-be, the threat of death, public embarrassment, and Joseph, being a much better man than me, verse 19, says he resolved instead to divorce her quietly.

He didn't want to bring any public shame on Mary. But as he considered these things, an angel of the Lord came to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, 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.

In other words, this birth, this child, is not the result of infidelity. This child is unique.

[9 : 15] There's something special here that's utterly unique to Jesus. No other baby in the history of the world came into the world like this. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit, not by natural means, but conceived of the Holy Spirit, and born of a virgin.

And of course, theologically liberal scholars have gone to town with this, coming up with reason after reason after reason why this just could not be true.

Nobody is born of a virgin. Simple science tells us that that is impossible. Virgins don't have babies. So this is just a story that the church has come up with to promote the name of Jesus.

And in one sense, we have to agree with them that, yes, this is not ordinary, or natural, or scientifically probable.

It is, by definition, a miracle. And without it, this baby would not be worthy of our worship.

[10:25] Scientifically speaking, I'm not sure if you've had this talk yet or not, but here we go. Stick with me. Every child has to have both a mother and a father. You've got to have both.

Both of those are required to have a baby. And babies come into the world with characteristics from both their mother and their father. So they might have their father's eyes, and their mother's nose, and their father's ears, and their mother's hair.

And as they get older, you start to see that develop in their personality as well. So people that know the family well might say something like, wow, she talks just like her, mom. Or a grandparent might say, I remember when you used to walk around and do exactly what he's doing.

All of us, born of human flesh, we inherit what we call a sin nature. We are born into sin.

So every man, every woman that is descended from Adam, we inherit from our father, we inherit from our father, Adam, his sinful nature.

[11:29] And so we act like our father. We talk like our father. We think like our father. We get his sinful ways passed down to us. But not Jesus.

Not Jesus. Jesus was different. He was born of a virgin. He was born of a virgin. He was born of a virgin. He was born of a virgin. Conceived by the Holy Spirit. Joseph, although he was not the physical father of Jesus, he adopted Jesus as his own.

He was not his biological father. He did not inherit Adam's sin nature. Jesus was totally God and totally man.

That is a miracle. And unlike you and me, he did not come into this world with a nature corrupted by sin. He came in with a real humanity inherited from his mother's side.

And on his father's side, he was as he has always been. The eternal son of God. Infinite. Eternal.

[12:37] Unchangeable. Holy. And righteous. In this birth, God became man. He took on our human nature.

The eternal son of God stepped into our mess. He took on our weak human flesh to live in our place. And see, because he did not have a sin nature like you and me, he was able to resist it.

To overcome it. But because he was fully human like you and me, he was able to redeem sinful man. He was able to succeed where Adam and you and I have failed.

He was able to live perfectly in the place of sinners like you and me who have failed over and over and over again. And without this perfect life from a perfect sinless child, we could not have any hope of salvation.

Without the virgin birth, we could not be saved. If he was just another child born in just an ordinary way, descended from Adam, born into sin, friend, there would be no hope of salvation.

[13:55] There would be no reason to make much of this birth. There would be no reason to celebrate the birth of Christ. But we praise God that this child is special and his birth was miraculous.

Second, this child is special because his birth was biblically foretold. Matthew highlights this for us in a couple of ways here.

One is by just repeatedly telling us that this child is a son of David. He's a son of David, son of David, son of David. Matthew has that track on repeat for us here.

In verse 20, the angel appears to Joseph and refers to Joseph as Joseph, son of David. The beginning of the book of Matthew, the genealogy.

He traces the genealogy of Jesus Christ. What does it say? The son of David. Verse 17, it says the generations from Abraham to David.

[14:55] You see where he's focusing our attention here. From Abraham to David were 14 generations. And then from David to the deportation to Babylon, 14 generations. And from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ, 14 generations.

It's so easy to skip over that part of Matthew and just pass right by it. But Matthew is going out of his way to show us that this child, even though Joseph was not his physical father, because Joseph adopted him as his own, he has full legal claim to the throne of David, the king.

And this was significant, of course, because God had promised David something in 2 Samuel chapter 7. Back in the Old Testament, thousands of years before Christ arrived, he promised David a child from his line who would come and reign forever.

The throne of his kingdom would be established forever and his kingdom would never end. Matthew, in his own way, is drawing a line, as it were, from this promise in Samuel all the way to the birth of Christ, saying, this is him.

This is the one. This is the king that we've been waiting for. This is the Messiah. This is the long-awaited ruler of the world whose kingdom will never end.

[16:25] This is the birth of the promised one. He also draws a line to a prophecy from Isaiah. We've been spending some time reading from Isaiah last night and this morning.

Here in verse 22, he says, all of this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us.

You see, the writers of the New Testament, they did a much better job interpreting their Old Testament than we tend to. Right? We read our Old Testament, we tend to read it just as stories with morals, kind of disconnected stories about what God has done and events that happened in the past.

But what it really is is a story of preparation for the coming Messiah. So ever since the entrance of sin into the world back in Genesis chapter 3, God has been making promises that he would one day send a child.

One who would break the curse of sin. One that would crush the head of the serpent. One who would come and rule and reign and redeem what has been lost by sin and all the way through the Old Testament there were these faint images, bumps, and kicks of a child on the way.

[17:58] And now Matthew says that time has finally come. The child is here. He's here. The promised one has come exactly as God has told us again and again and again.

He has come exactly as the word of God has foretold. You see, the Old Testament is written in the key of anticipation. It's constantly leaning forward and waiting and anticipating this promised coming Son of God.

We have to read it and understand it this way, leaning towards the promised Messiah. J. Barton Payne, he says that there are as many as 574 verses in the Old Testament that in some way point towards the coming Messiah.

Alfred Edersheim, he says that there are 456 verses in the Old Testament that in some way anticipate this coming Messiah. And even the most conservative estimates say that there are at least 300 prophecies that Jesus fulfilled.

and I would be inclined to go on the high end of those estimates. And I just want you just to stop and think about how incredible that is for a minute. Maybe you've never thought about this or maybe it's been a while since you've thought about this.

[19:24] And maybe that you don't even believe a word that I'm saying or maybe you're getting ready to leave here and go spend some time with family who you know don't believe a word that we're saying here. Listen to this.

I've never been great at math and I'll leave that to the experts but some mathematicians have taken it upon themselves to try to mathematically understand the probability of just one person fulfilling these prophecies about the Messiah.

Dr. Peter Stoner was one of them. You may be familiar with his work with this story. Dr. Stoner was the chairman of the departments of mathematics and astronomy at Pasadena City College and was the chairman of the science division at Westmont College.

In other words he was way smarter than me. Okay? One of those big brain academics. And he set out to find the probability mathematical probability of one person fulfilling just eight of the clearest Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah.

Just eight. In other words he wanted to make this as agreeable as he possibly could to non-believers to skeptics so the clearest possible eight messianic prophecies in the Old Testament that undeniably happened in Jesus' life put the two together.

[20:52] What are the odds that one person could fulfill just eight of these prophecies? So for those of you who are keeping score this is what they looked for. What is the probability that one individual would be born in Bethlehem as Micah 5.2 foretold?

That there would be a forerunner of that individual a prophet who would come announcing his coming as Malachi 3.1 said? That this individual would enter Jerusalem on a donkey as we see in Zechariah 9.9 that he would be betrayed by a close friend as we see in Psalm 41.9 that he would be

betrayed for just 30 pieces of silver as Zechariah 11.13 tells us.

That this same individual would remain silent during his trial although the consensus would be that he later would be deemed innocent as we see in Isaiah 53.7 and that this same individual would eventually be crucified on a cross as Psalm 22.16 foretold.

What's the probability of one person doing all of this exactly as these eight prophecies foretold? And again it's undeniable just from a sheerly historical standpoint that all eight of these events were true of Jesus' life.

This was as conservative as he could possibly get. What are the odds that one person could fulfill eight undeniable Old Testament prophecies?

[22 : 29] And they determined this. This is what he said. The chance that any man might have fulfilled all eight prophecies is one in ten to the seventeenth.

That would be one in one hundred quadrillion. Okay? So if you're writing down notes that's one with seventeen zeros followed at the end of it. One with seventeen zeros at the end.

Just to put that in perspective for you the odds of us any one of us getting struck by lightning sometime in our life is one in fifteen thousand three hundred. The odds of any of us winning the Powerball jackpot are one in two hundred ninety-two million.

That's just six zeros. The odds of one man fulfilling just eight of these prophecies. One in one hundred quadrillion.

Ten to the seventeenth. Stoner says that if we were to take ten to the seventeenth silver dollars and lay them over the face of the state of Texas they would cover the entire state two feet deep.

[23 : 38] And then he says now mark one of these silver dollars stir the whole mass thoroughly blindfold a man and tell him he can travel as far as he wishes and just pick up one silver dollar and it must be the one that was marked.

What chance would he have of getting the right one? He says just the same chance that the prophets would have had of writing these eight prophecies and having them all come true in one man provided they were writing in their own wisdom.

But as we know they were not writing in their own wisdom. These were the very words of God foretelling promising anticipating waiting expecting the birth of this son of God.

When is the last time you just marveled at what a miracle that is? The word of God promising a Messiah.

And just thank God for sending his son his faithfulness to promise and to fulfill and to speak and to send. Church we worship this child because he is the promised Messiah foretold by the scriptures and sent into the world by God in order to redeem it.

[25 : 06] Which is the third reason this birth is so special. The third reason this birth is so special is because this child was purposefully sent.

Purposefully sent. He was born with a redemptive purpose. We worship this child not just because of how he came into the world miraculously but because of what he came into the world to do.

Most of the time in our culture it's a pretty big deal to name a child. You spend months and months and months thinking about it. Oftentimes the mother has already had a name picked out since she was a child and so the husband doesn't have to do too much thinking about it at all.

But there is always thought and purpose and significance to the name that is given to each individual child. The same is true for Hebrew culture but even more so in a strange way a lot of times biblical names are not only descriptive they're also prescriptive.

In a strange way they sometimes tell us a bit about what a person will be like. For example Jacob you see it means heel or trickster and of course he was a trickster.

[26 : 27] He tricked Esau out of his birthright. Jonah means dove it was a word in that culture for foolishness fleetiness and as we know Jonah the prophet was told to go one way and he fled and went the exact opposite away from the call of God.

Moses it means to pull or to draw out and as we know the birth story of Moses he was drawn out of the water but also he would be the one to draw Israel out of slavery in Egypt and here we're given two names for the Christ child two names that tell us not only who he is but what he came to do.

The first of course is the name of Jesus. Look there to verse 21. The angel came to Joseph to talk him off the ledge convince him not to divorce his wife that his child was no product of infidelity but rather this is the promised Messiah come into the world and look at what he says in verse 21.

She will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins. As we know the name of Jesus it literally means the Lord saves.

It means the Lord is salvation. The Lord has come to seek and to save the lost. We see a second name given here in verse 23 as Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah.

[28 : 03] The angel makes this connection that this child in the manger his name shall be called Emmanuel which means God with us. You see baked into his very name is his purpose.

Not just who he is but also what he came to earth to do. We celebrate the birth of Jesus because this child has come to seek and to save the lost.

His birth was no accident. He was sent with a purpose. He was sent to die in the place of sinners. He was sent to restore what has been broken and lost by the curse of sin.

He's come to put an end to suffering and disease and distress and death and to rise from the dead to finally put an end to sin and death and the grave for all who come to him and know him and love him by faith.

That's why he's come. Because we have strayed far from God. God has taken it upon himself to draw near to us in Christ.

[29 : 20] I can think of no better way to honor him this Christmas than to honor the purpose for which he came. He came that we might believe and by faith in his name that we might have our sins forgiven.

Receive the gift of eternal life. Have you received that gift? Are you rejoicing in it this Christmas? See Christmas time is a time when we remember that out of his unfathomable mercy and grace God looked down upon our sinful state and said they can't come to be with me.

Their sin is too great so I will send my son down to them to bring them up to me. So we worship this child because he is Emmanuel.

God with us. Come to save his people. from their sins. Church this is a story of a birth like no other. As we ponder the miracle of the birth of Christ this Christmas let's give him honor and glory and praise and worship him as he deserves.

[30 : 35] And as we go from this place this morning to whatever we have planned to do for the rest of the day let's do as Mary did and treasure these things up in our hearts.

Take this miraculous story of this incredible birth and behold this child. Hold him close in wonder and rejoice and then go and spread the word that the Savior of the world has come.

Amen. Let's pray. Lord we do rejoice that the Savior has come and we do rejoice that out of your sheer mercy and grace not because of our goodness not because of anything in us but because of your mercy and grace you took it upon yourself to send your son to save sinners like us.

What good news of great joy. And we pray Lord that as we go from this place that those words would be fresh on our lips as we gather with friends and family as we reflect on the birth of Christ. Help us to be quick to share the good news of what you've come to do. We love you. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.