

Main Idea: Jesus is in a class all by Himself. This is certainly true of His life, His death, and His resurrection. But it’s also true regarding His entrance into this world, as we’ll see today. In the prophesy of Isaiah 7:14, and in the fulfillment text of Matthew 1:22-23, we learn two vital lessons about Jesus from His birth.

I. Jesus is a prophesied Son (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:22-23).

A. To know who Jesus is, we need to know what Matthew said.

1. He’s the son of David, the son of Abraham (1-17).
2. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit (18-19).
3. He developed as a baby inside of Mary (20-21).

B. To know who Jesus is, we need to know what Isaiah said.

1. The prophesy of Isaiah 7:14 was fulfilled initially in Isaiah 8:4.
2. The prophesy of Isaiah 7:14 was fulfilled ultimately in Jesus.

II. Jesus is a virgin-born Son (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:24-25).

A. Joseph was His legal father (24).

1. That placed Jesus in David’s kingly line.
2. That meant Jesus was raised as a Law-keeping Jew.
3. That meant Jesus learned to be a carpenter.

B. Mary was His biological mother (25).

1. The Bible teaches Mary’s virgin conception.
2. The Bible does not teach Mary’s perpetual virginity.
3. The Bible teaches that Jesus grew up with siblings (Mark 6:3).

Take Inventory: Two vital questions we all need to consider...

1. Do I believe what the Bible says about Jesus?
2. Do I believe in the Jesus of the Bible?

We’re spending time in Isaiah this month with a mini-series, “*He’s Coming! Isaiah Helps Us Prepare for Christmas.*” Last week, we surveyed Isaiah’s book and learned something significant about the baby in the manger scene. He is the King, the Revealer of God, the Servant, and the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This is the One who is coming, says Isaiah. And indeed, two thousand years ago, He came.

This morning we’re going to zero in on the prophesy of Isaiah 7:14, and then on the fulfillment text of Matthew 1:22-23, and learn two vital lessons about Jesus.

*Scripture Reading: Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:22-25*

Is the virgin birth important, and if so, why? According to *The Apostles’ Creed*, it’s important, as God’s people have affirmed for hundreds of years.

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, **born of the Virgin Mary**, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic\* Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

Notice those words. *Born of the virgin Mary*. This is what the church has affirmed for centuries. But of course, God’s truth is always under attack. There are those who want to debate the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, or flat out deny it. How could a baby

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\*\* Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> For a previous look at what Isaiah says about the coming Christ, see messages preached at WBC on 12/22/96 and 12/11/05 PM.

come into existence inside of a woman without a human father? That's scientifically impossible, and it makes no sense to the natural mind.

The reality is, when you let science determine what the Bible means, you eventually remove anything that you can't reproduce using the scientific method. And so you have commentators like William Barclay making statements like, "This is a doctrine which presents us with many difficulties; and our Church does not compel us to accept it in the literal and the physical sense. This is one of the doctrines on which the Church says that we have full liberty to come to our own conclusion."<sup>2</sup>

While it may be true that *the Church says* so, in Barclay's case, the Church of Scotland which was infiltrated by modernism, does the *Bible* say so? Does the Bible say we have the liberty to come to our own conclusions regarding the virgin birth?

And does it really matter anyway? What difference does it make whether we believe that Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary?

It doesn't if you're a universalist, as William Barclay was. Though Barclay's commentaries are filled with helpful historical information, he confessed this openly in his autobiography, "I am a convinced universalist. I believe that in the end all men will be gathered into the love of God."<sup>3</sup>

If you believe everybody is going to heaven, it doesn't matter what you believe about the virgin birth, or anything else for that matter. But if you believe that hell is a real place, and that only those who believe in Jesus are saved from it, as the Bible teaches and Jesus claimed, then you must come to know and affirm the truth about Jesus.

Jesus is in a class all by Himself. This is certainly true of His life, His death, and His resurrection. But it's also true regarding how He entered the world, as we'll see today. In the prophesy of Isaiah 7:14, and in the fulfillment text of Matthew 1:22-23, we learn two vital lessons about Jesus from His birth.

### I. Jesus is a prophesied Son (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:22-23).

Let's start in Matthew's gospel, in chapter one. When Matthew presents the story of Jesus' birth, he does it through the eyes of Joseph. He tells us about Joseph's *discovery* in verse 18, Joseph's *dilemma* in verse 19, and Joseph's *dream* in verses 20-21. His discovery was that his betrothed wife, Mary, was pregnant, and he knew he wasn't the father. His dilemma was what to do with this woman he loved, and he purposed to divorce her quietly. But then he had a dream in which an angel appeared and told him that the child Mary was carrying was conceived by the Holy Spirit, that he should go ahead and marry her, and then name the child *Yeshua*, meaning "the Lord saves, because this child was going to save His people from their sins.

That brings us to verses 22-25 where Matthew presents us with Joseph's *decision*. The decision? As you know, Joseph didn't divorce Mary, but in fact did marry her. Yet why? Joseph did what he did because he learned from the angel two life-changing truths about Jesus, first, that He is a prophesied Son.

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<sup>2</sup> William Barclay, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> William Barclay: A Spiritual Autobiography, pg 65-67, William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1977.

Notice verses 22-23, “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’—which means, ‘God with us.’”<sup>4</sup>

Matthew inserted this quotation as his own Spirit-guided commentary on the events. He wants us to know that there’s a prophetic background to the angel’s amazing claim that a virgin conceived.

*All this took place to fulfill what the Lord said through the prophet.* Those words remind us that the Bible comes from two sources. It is *what the Lord said*, and He said it *through a human instrument*, in this case, *through the prophet*. As 2 Peter 1:21 explains, “Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

Matthew loves the phrase, “This happened so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled,” and he uses it nearly a dozen times in his gospel, and six of those in the first four chapters. As Bruner observes, “Matthew loves the idea that *Jesus* is what the whole Old Testament is about.”<sup>5</sup>

So Jesus is a prophesied Son. He didn’t just come into the world. The Old Testament *prophesied* His coming. That’s what Matthew says. Let’s look at this prophecy from two perspectives, first from Matthew’s point of view, then from Isaiah’s.

**A. To know who Jesus is, we need to know what Matthew said.** What does Matthew tell us about Jesus in this first chapter? Essentially, three things.

1. *He’s the son of David, the son of Abraham (1-17).* Matthew began his gospel on this note in verse 1, “A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham.” Matthew uses the genealogy to show Jesus’ connection to David’s line. This is *King* Jesus. He concludes the genealogy on the same note in verse 17, “Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ.”

What else does Matthew emphasize about Jesus?

2. *He was conceived by the Holy Spirit (18-19).* Verse 18 makes that clear. “Before they came together she was found to be *with child through the Holy Spirit*.” So Jesus’ conception occurred, not as the result of natural relations, but by the supernatural work of the Spirit. And there’s something else Matthew wants us to know about Jesus.

3. *He developed as a baby inside of Mary (20-21).* In verse 20 the angel said, “What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit,” and then in verse 21, “She will give birth to a son.” God could have sent His Son into the world as a full grown man, but He didn’t. I want us to think for a moment about the nine months between those two events of Jesus’ conception and Jesus’ birth.

It’s staggering to ponder, but the Infinite Son of God chose to enter the world by going through the gestation process. The Bible says, “The Word became flesh,” and He actually became flesh as an invisible to the eye fertilized egg inside Mary’s womb.

Take a look at these power point slides. You’ll see photographs depicting the development of a baby inside its mother’s womb. Think of Jesus as you look at them.

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<sup>4</sup> Who is speaking in verses 22-23, the angel or Matthew? The NIV closes the angel’s quotation at the end of verse 21, but of course, there are no quotation marks in the Greek text. It’s possible that the angel is still speaking, that the angel actually cited Isaiah 7:14 to convince Joseph. We know that Satan quoted the Bible. Could not a good angel do the same? Perhaps.

<sup>5</sup> Bruner, p. 29.

Ponder the fact that in order to save us from our sins the Son of God went through this development inside the virgin mother's womb.<sup>6</sup>



At seven weeks from conception, notice the tiny features. It's not a blob of tissue. It is indeed a baby. You see his nose, his fingers, his toes, already in place, even though he won't leave the womb for another seven months or so.

At eight weeks from conception, the formation of organs is complete. His heart has been beating for more than a month, his stomach produces digestive juices, and his kidneys are functioning. Cartilage begins to change to bone.

At eleven weeks from conception, he's been able to respond to sound and touch for 8 to 10 weeks. His birthday is still a good six months away.

At twelve weeks from conception, his features are now becoming defined. His lips open and close. He can wrinkle his forehead, raise his eyebrows, and turn his head. His eyes are covered by eyelids. Tiny fingernails and toenails grow on his hands and feet.

At fourteen weeks from conception, his heart pumps several quarts of blood daily. Fine hair grows on his head. Lungs function and vocal cords are formed. If he had air, you'd hear him cry. Growth of the head slows down and the rest of the body catches up proportionately. The neck is formed and legs and arms lengthen.

At sixteen weeks from conception, he is six inches long and has begun to crowd his living quarters. The first thin transparent layer of skin begins to replace the temporary protective membrane. His nose, eyes, lips and ears are taking on their permanent shape.

At twenty weeks from conception, he is about 12 inches long and weighs roughly one pound. His mother can feel movement as the baby jumps, hiccups, and sits upright with back straight. He may pedal his legs, make crawling movements, roll over, or turn somersaults.

And this little baby still has another twenty weeks to go. Just think. In Jesus' case, he probably still hasn't left Nazareth yet to ride on a donkey inside his mother the seventy miles to Bethlehem.

Do you see the humility of God in this? Here's Paul's commentary on Christmas in Philippians 2:6-7, "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,<sup>7</sup> but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, *being made in human likeness.*" And of course, He didn't stop there, for as Philippians 2:8 says, "And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"

But Matthew tells us something else about Jesus. He tells us that these things happened *to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet*, namely, the prophet Isaiah. So let's look back.

**B. To know who Jesus is, we need to know what Isaiah said.** Isaiah ministered in Judah during the eighth century BC. In 745 BC the nation of Assyria began an aggressive campaign to take over the Middle East. In response, in 739 BC the northern kingdom of Israel formed a coalition with Syria to stand against the Assyrians.

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<sup>6</sup> "Windows to the Womb," Provided by Baptists for Life. Used by permission of Life Issues Institute, copyright © 2001. Photographers: Andrzej Zachwieja and Jan Walczewski

They also tried to force the southern kingdom of Judah to join their coalition, but Judah refused.

That's when the prophecy of Isaiah 7 was given. Isaiah was a prophet in the southern kingdom and lived in Jerusalem. According to commentator, John Oswalt, the key issue facing God's people was *trust*. Isaiah challenged his people, "Who are you going to trust to get you out of the mess you're in? Egypt? Or Assyria? Or God?"

In Isaiah 7:1, King Rezin of Aram (that's Syria) and King Pekah of Israel attacked the southern kingdom of Judah at Jerusalem. As you can imagine and as verse 2 indicates, the invasion put intense fear into the heart of King Ahaz and his people, and their hearts "were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind."

You say, "So a king was attacked. That happens all the time. What's the big deal?" The big deal is who this king was. Though Ahaz was a wicked king, the text specifically says "the house of David," the Messianic line, was in danger.

At that point, says verse 3, the Lord sent the prophet Isaiah to meet Ahaz "at the end of the aqueduct," perhaps because Ahaz was there inspecting his water supply in preparation for the impending siege. You can read God's message to Ahaz in verses 4-6, but in essence, it was this. "Don't worry about Syria and Israel. I'll take care of them, and any other threat to the Royal line."

And then the Lord gave Ahaz an instruction in verse 11, "Ask the LORD your God for a sign." God intended the sign to encourage Ahaz that He would protect and take care of His people.

By the way, does a sign from God have to be miraculous? Not necessarily. In the Bible some are, but some aren't. In Isaiah 20:3 the Lord told Isaiah to strip himself and go barefoot for three years "as a sign." In Isaiah 8:18 Isaiah's children are called "signs," a point that I think is critical to understanding 7:14.

Notice Ahaz's response to God in verse 12, "I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test."

Why not? Was Ahaz was godly man who was exhibiting great faith? No, just the opposite. Ahaz didn't want to believe God and His Word because his mind was already made up. He was already planning to appeal to Assyria for help, and that's what he did. Instead of trusting in the Lord, he put his trust in Assyria, who helped him with this battle, alright, and then shortly thereafter, attacked and just about destroyed Jerusalem.

Now watch how Isaiah responded to Ahaz's refusal. He says in verse 13, "Hear now, you house of David [notice the Messianic connection again]! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also?"

Isaiah knew that God was *not* pleased with Ahaz and his refusal to trust Him. So he said this in verse 14, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign." In other words, the prophet told Ahaz, you're going to get a sign anyway!

But he changes something. To whom was the sign given? Isaiah addressed "the house of David." The "you" in verse 14 is plural. This sign was not only for Ahaz, but for the nation of Judah. And what is the sign? There are four elements to it.

First, in verse 14 he says, "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." So there's a special boy coming. He will be called *Immanuel*. The name "Immanuel" was a rebuke to Ahaz, like saying, "If God is with us, Ahaz, why trust in Assyria?!"<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Observation by commentator Herbert Wolf.

Isaiah gives the second element of the sign in verse 15. He says the boy will eat “curds and honey,” which is the simple diet of those living off the land. That seems to suggest this child is going to be raised in a time of national calamity due to enemy occupation.

We find the third element in verse 16. Isaiah says that before this boy “knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right,” in other words, before he reaches the age where he knows right from wrong, say around the age of 3 or 4, “the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.” What two kings is he talking about? Apparently, the kings we met back in verse 2, the kings that were attacking Ahaz, the kings of Syria and Israel. What’s going to happen to those two kings? Their land is going to be “laid waste.” By whom? According to verse 17, by Assyria.

Then comes the fourth and final element of the sign. After Assyria destroys the land of the two kings, it’s going to destroy the land of Judah. Assyria is going to “shave your head and legs,” says Isaiah in verse 20. Not a pretty picture.

So there’s the sign. Did it take place? Yes. When?

1. *The prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 was fulfilled initially in Isaiah 8:4.* Right after Isaiah delivered his message to Ahaz, the Lord gave Isaiah a personal message in chapter eight. He told him in verse 1 to write on a scroll the name Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, which means, “quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil.” In verse 3 Isaiah had intimate relations with “the prophetess,” apparently a young woman he just married.

Then the Lord told him what to name the child. Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. And said this in verse 4, “Before the boy knows how to say ‘My father’ or ‘My mother,’ the wealth of Damascus and the plunder of Samaria will be carried off by the king of Assyria.” He mentions “Immanuel” in verse 8, and again in verse 10.

Sound familiar? That’s what the Lord said would happen back in chapter seven. And history tells us that’s what did happen. A son was born. Shortly thereafter in 732 BC, the Assyrian king, Tiglath Poleser III, destroyed Syria and Israel, and for the next thirty years, Judah became a vassal of Assyria.<sup>8</sup> It all happened just as God said it would happen through Isaiah.

So, at least *initially*, the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 was fulfilled in Isaiah 8:4.<sup>9</sup> The word Isaiah used for “virgin” (Hebrew *almah*) can mean “a virgin about to be married.”<sup>10</sup> From Isaiah’s perspective, the “virgin” of 7:14 refers to his fiancée. Although it’s conjecture, apparently his first wife had died, and he was betrothed to another the day he stood before Ahaz. They had never had sexual relations. But after leaving Ahaz, Isaiah did as God instructed and fathered a son.

Isaiah himself seemed to affirm this in 8:18 when he said, “Here am I, and the children the Lord has given me. We are signs and symbols in Israel from the Lord Almighty.”

Now, why did I emphasize the word *initially* a moment ago? Here’s why. I agree with Gleason Archer and Herbert Wolf’s suggestion that there are two levels to the fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14.

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<sup>8</sup> 2 Kgs 16:7-10 says Ahaz went to Damascus to meet the Assyrian ruler, copied an altar, and brought it back.

<sup>9</sup> If we’re going to make understand Matthew’s purpose for quoting Isaiah 7:14, we need to see it in light of the whole context, from Isaiah 7:1 to 9:7.

<sup>10</sup> Wolf, p. 258.

2. *The prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 was fulfilled ultimately in Jesus.* That's what the Holy Spirit said through Matthew. "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord said through the prophet." What fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy? *All this* did, says Matthew. The virgin Mary's conception. The announcement to Joseph that her child would save His people from their sins. That's the ultimate fulfillment.

And I think that even Isaiah knew this ultimate fulfillment was coming. Why do I say that? Listen to what Isaiah said in the very next section of his book. In 9:1, "In the future he [God] will honor Galilee of the Gentiles." How will God honor Galilee? Notice 9:2, "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light." What light? The one in 9:6, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this."

What child is Isaiah talking about here? It's certainly not Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. It's the Messiah. "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse," says Isaiah 11:1. "The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him," says 11:1. "He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth," says 11:5. "The wolf will live with the lamb," says 11:6. "In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples," says 11:10.

So it's sort of like climbing in a mountain range. You journey to the top of one peak only to find there's another higher peak on the other side. This prophecy has two levels of fulfillment, an initial one in Isaiah's day, then an ultimate fulfillment in Christ.<sup>11</sup>

Jesus, indeed, is a prophesied Son. Let's talk application for a moment. Perhaps you can relate to Ahaz. You're in a jam right now. Maybe it's not two nations breathing down your neck, but it feels like it. The question is, who are you going to trust? Maybe you've been trusting in your own abilities to work things out, and it hasn't been going so well. I have good news for you. The God of the Bible is trustworthy. It's why He offered Ahaz a sign, and why He fulfilled that sign even though Ahaz didn't believe Him.

The question is, will we? Will we take God at His Word today and *trust Him*? Specifically, will we put our trust in the One of whom Isaiah prophesied and Matthew says has arrived, King Jesus? God sent Him to rescue sinners like you and me, and to bring righteousness to our lives and to the world. That's why He went to the cross, and conquered death, and why He's coming a second time. Will we trust Him?

This is the first lesson. Jesus is a prophesied Son. Here's the second lesson.

## II. Jesus is a virgin-born Son (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:24-25).

Listen again to Isaiah 7:14. "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." He will be a virgin-born Son, says the prophet.

And so He was, says Matthew. Notice Matthew 1:24, "When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife."

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<sup>11</sup> We find another example of a dual layered prophecy in Matthew 2:15, "Out of Egypt have I called My Son." To whom does Matthew say "my son" refers? To Jesus. But when you read the text he quotes, you find that Hosea 11:1 says, "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out..Egypt." To whom was Hosea referring when he said "my son"? The nation of Israel. In fact, I doubt anyone reading Hosea would have suspected that the verse would refer to the Messiah. Yet Matthew used this verse, and heightened its application, and said it pointed to the Messiah.

So Joseph burned the divorce papers and took Mary and the baby she carried to his house. Here's a descendant of David who, unlike Ahaz, trusted God!

Why are we told this about Joseph? Matthew wants us to know that...

**A. Joseph was His (Jesus') legal father (24).** Joseph *took Mary as his wife*, says the text, which means the child she bore was legally his. That's significant in three ways.

1. *That placed Jesus in David's kingly line.* What gives Jesus the right to be the King of Israel, of the world, and of your life and mine? God made a promise to David, and Joseph's obedience put Jesus in place to fulfill that promise.

2. *That meant Jesus was raised as a Law-keeping Jew.* How did Jesus learn God's law? He learned it from His earthly parents, didn't He, like every Jewish boy did. Luke 2:52 says that as a child Jesus increased "in wisdom and stature." Joseph taught him as they worked in the shop. So did Mary as she tucked Him in bed at night. At meal times they explained God's law to the Law-giver. And when He started asking questions they couldn't answer, they introduced Him to the teachers of the law in the temple who were "amazed at his understanding" (Luke 2:47).

Indeed, Jesus was "born under the law," as Galatians 4:4 puts it. Why was that necessary? "To redeem those under the law." We who have violated God's law, and that's every person on the planet, needed someone to keep the law in our place. And Jesus did. He lived His entire life as a Law-keeping Jew, a Law He learned because Joseph was His legal father.

3. *That meant Jesus learned to be a carpenter.* "Isn't this the carpenter?" said the people in Mark 6:3. That's the life Jesus knew for thirty years, the life of a carpenter. And where did the One who built the universe learn these building skills? He learned His trade from Joseph, His adopted father (Matt 13:55).

Critics have said that if Jesus didn't have a human father, then He's not truly human. I like Bruner's comment, "If the first Adam was without human parents and yet was truly human, why cannot the last Adam be without a human parent and be truly human? 'Is anything too hard for the Lord?' (Gen 18:14) 'With human beings, to be sure, this is impossible, but with God absolutely everything is possible' (Matt 19:26)."

Of course, Jesus Christ was truly human, and here's why...

**B. Mary was His biological mother (25).** That's what verse 25 says, "But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus."

Let's talk about Mary for moment. We need to clarify three things...

1. *The Bible teaches Mary's virgin conception.* While we talk about the miracle of the virgin birth, it's really the virgin *conception* that's the miracle. How did Mary conceive? It wasn't by Joseph, insists Matthew. How then? "Through the Holy Spirit," says the angel to Joseph in verse 20.

Mary, of course, received her own message from an angel, which tells us even more about the virgin conception. Listen to Luke 1:26-35:

"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" <sup>29</sup> But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his



name Jesus.<sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,<sup>33</sup> and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”<sup>34</sup> And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”<sup>35</sup> And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.”

It’s important to clarify something that the Bible does *not* teach.

2. *The Bible does not teach Mary’s perpetual virginity.* That’s the teaching that says that not only was Mary a virgin when she conceived Jesus, but she remained a virgin for the rest of her life, a *perpetual virgin*.

The Roman Catholic church insists on this doctrine. How do they support it? For starters, their Bible offers a different translation. Here’s how the Online Catholic Bible reads for verses 24-25, “When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home; he had not had intercourse with her *when* she gave birth to a son; and he named him Jesus [italics added].”

Notice the word ‘when.’ “He had not had intercourse with her *when* she gave birth.” And the *when* leaves the door open for saying *he never did*, as the doctrine of perpetual virginity teaches.

The problem is, the typical sense of the Greek word *heos* is not when, but *until*. Matthew’s point is that Joseph and Mary refrained from sexual intimacy during Mary’s pregnancy all the way *until* she gave birth to Jesus. But the clear implication is that after she gave birth, Mary experienced what God intends every wife to experience, the intimacy of physical union with her husband.

It’s worth noting that in addition to Roman Catholics, several Protestant leaders, from Luther to Wesley, believed in Mary’s perpetual virginity.<sup>12</sup> But as always, our ultimate authority is the Bible, not the church fathers. Even Luther himself said in his famous “I will not recant” speech, “Unless I am convinced by Scripture and by plain reason and not by Popes and councils who have so often contradicted themselves, my conscience is captive to the word of God. To go against conscience is neither right nor safe. I cannot and I will not recant. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me.”

So the real question isn’t, what does the Catholic Church teach, or what do the church fathers teach, but what do the Scriptures teach? They teach that Joseph did what the angel instructed in verse 20, “Do not be afraid to take Mary home *as your wife*.” Verse 24 says that’s what Joseph did. He “took Mary home as his wife.” The simple reading of Matthew 1:25 is that Joseph refrained from sexual union with Mary *until* Jesus’ birth. But after that? He had union with his wife.

The Bible teaches us something else that helps clear up the confusion, namely...

3. *The Bible teaches that Jesus grew up with siblings (Mark 6:3).* We see this in a couple of passages. One is Mark 6, but let’s look at Matthew 12:46-47, “While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him.<sup>47</sup> Someone told him, ‘Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.’”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Bruner, p. 37.

<sup>13</sup> See also Matthew 13:55ff.

I remember a Bible study I was leading a few years ago, when a man made it clear to the group he was Catholic. I mentioned that Mark 6:3 says that Jesus had brothers and sisters. “No way!” the man insisted. So we looked at the passage, and he read it, and then blurted out, “Well, my eyes see it, but I still don’t believe it!”

Why would people want to maintain Mary’s perpetual virginity? For several reasons. For some, it’s a faulty view of spirituality, thinking that the physical is bad, that the most spiritual person is the ascetic who refrains from normal human experiences like marriage and the marriage bed. But Hebrews 13:4 says, “Marriage should be honored by all.” It’s not more spiritual to remain single and God is glorified when a husband and wife enjoy physical intimacy with thanksgiving (see Eph 5:3-4).

For others, it’s a faulty view of Mary. For some, Mary is not only a “blessed” woman, which the Bible calls her (Luke 1:42), but *more than a woman*, almost deified and in the company of God Himself. And so devotions are addressed, not just to Jesus, but to Mary too. And prayers are offered, not just through Jesus, but through Mary, too.

Look at the artwork and décor in many Roman Catholic churches. Where is Mary? She is high and lifted up, even above Jesus in many cases. As Bruner observes, “Mary has tended to replace the tender, compassionate side of Jesus in some popular Catholic piety: Jesus has been Judge, Mary the mediator.”<sup>14</sup>

But the Mary of the Bible will have none of this. She is like John the Baptist, who “wishes to decrease that Jesus may increase.”<sup>15</sup> In her own song Mary proclaimed her need as a sinner for a Savior and praised God for sending the Savior (Luke 1:46-47).

Should we honor Mary? Yes. We should agree with Elizabeth who said, “Blessed are you among women (Luke 1:42).” But we bless her as one who is *among women*, not above them, nor set apart from them.

And quite frankly, we don’t honor her when we deify her and turn her into something she’s not. We honor her when we affirm what the Bible says about her, that she was truly a remarkable, God-fearing, obedient woman who glorified God *as a woman*. She did so in her years as a virgin, refraining from intimacy with any man. And she did so in her years as Joseph’s wife, by enjoying intimacy with her God-given husband God, and then by mothering those precious children God gave them to rear.

I agree with Bruner when he says, “In my opinion this normalization of Mary dignifies her: she becomes a real woman rather than a plaster saint, a true and therefore a model mother.”<sup>16</sup>

And this comment by Bruner, “After Jesus, Mary became a complete wife to Joseph; she lost her virginity but gained God’s normal will for the wife of a husband—intimate knowledge of her husband, the gift of other children, and a means of the mutual expression of tenderness and love. Shouldn’t the holy family be a real family?”<sup>17</sup>

Let’s take inventory by asking ourselves two vital questions...

### Take Inventory: Two vital questions we all need to consider...

1. *Do I believe what the Bible says about Jesus?* Do I believe that Jesus is the prophesied Son and virgin-born Son that Isaiah predicted and Matthew presented? Do I believe everything that the Bible has to say about Him? Do I believe that He was

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<sup>14</sup> Bruner, p. 38.

<sup>15</sup> Bruner, p. 39.

<sup>16</sup> Bruner, p. 39.

<sup>17</sup> Bruner, p. 38.

conceived by a virgin named Mary? Do I believe that He lived a perfect life of obedience to the Law of God? Do I believe that He died on a cross to pay the penalty I deserve to pay for my violation of God's Law? Do I believe that God raised Him from the dead on the third day? Do I believe that He returned to heaven, that He's preparing a place for His people, and that He will return to earth? Do I believe that there is coming a day of judgment when we will stand before Him and give an account? This is what the Bible says about Jesus. The question is, do I believe it?

2. *Do I believe in the Jesus of the Bible?* I ask this second question because it's possible to answer yes to the first question, yet perish eternally. It's possible to say, "Yes, I believe what the Bible says about Jesus," and yet never truly believe in Jesus. It's one thing to say, "Yes, I believe that Jesus died for sinners." It's another to say, "Jesus died for *me*, and I believe in Him with my whole being!"

Friends, let's not do what Ahaz did. He didn't want Immanuel. He had Assyria to fix his problems. And so he led his country right into destruction. Beloved, if God is with us, and He is in the person of His Son, then it's our privilege to *trust Him totally*.

**Closing Song:** #155 "Once in Royal David's City" (all four verses)