

Matt 1:18-25
December 19, 2010
Lynchburg, Virginia

EXHORDIUM

It is the week before Christmas and we celebrate the arrival of our Savior from heaven, Jesus the Christ. He was born a King and proved to be such through a sinless life, a faithful death and a powerful Resurrection.

He is God with us but He is also the perfect man with us. The wonder of the Incarnation is more than we can fathom. How can God be a man? How can a man be God? But Jesus is both fully God and fully man. The reality of this is most stark in the events surrounding His birth. He was to be called Emmanuel, God with us and the Son of God but He arrived in a stable, the son of a couple of little means, vulnerable to the circumstances of poverty. He was truly man.

God has done something that no one expected, not Mary nor Joseph, nor all the scribes trying to understand all the prophecies. God has done something completely marvelous in the birth of our Savior, Jesus.

EXEGESIS

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

Mary and Joseph were betrothed but not yet married. They were promised to one another and the promise was binding. It required a divorce to separate from the agreement. Of course, one reason an engagement can be broken off is if there is infidelity or sexual fraud. This is what Joseph assumes when he finds out that Mary is with child.

What he does not know is that she is with child without being with a man.

In such cases, the law calls for the woman to be stoned to death. Joseph assumes that she has committed, not only a disgraceful sin, but also a capital crime. But we should also learn how the law works, with divine comment from Scripture.

Deut 22:21-24 22 If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then they shall both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel. 23 If a damsel that is a virgin be betrothed unto an husband, and a man find her in the city, and lie with her; 24 Then ye shall bring them both out unto the gate of that city, and ye shall stone them with stones that they die; the damsel, because she cried not, being in the city; and the man, because he hath humbled his neighbour's wife: so thou shalt put away evil from among you.

19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily.

Joseph could have called for Mary to be made public spectacle. He thinks she has committed fornication and since they were espoused, it would amount to adultery. The law clearly allows for him to call for her execution. Of course, the Holy Spirit speaks to him to straighten things out before he does any actions against her. But we should examine the actions that he plans against her.

The Bible says that Joseph was a just man. That is, he was concerned about justice. Someone who was very strict and conservative in their views, may then react and say that the full measure of the law should be carried out against her. She deserves to die. She shall die.

But that is not Joseph's response and the Bible holds him up and his response up as justice. Instead of seeking to have Mary killed in the public square to keep other women from committing such acts against their betrothed spouses, Joseph attempts to put her away privately.

He did desire to divorce her and that is just, too. In fact, the divorce and not the prosecution in this case, is a mercy to her.

So, we know from this case, as well as others in the Scripture, that the strict letter of the law is not always required. We can read those laws as maximum penalties and sometimes it is wise and just to enforce the maximum penalty. But sometimes it is wise and just to do something considerably less. In this case, it appeared the Joseph wanted no civil penalty at all to be enforced against Mary. Being with child and without husband would be penalty enough.

So, the law can be used to its fullest measure but it can also extend mercy when mercy is appropriate. This takes wisdom from those who would prosecute and it takes wisdom from those who judge or sit on a jury.

20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

Joseph was thinking on these things. No doubt, he was praying and in perplexity as to exactly what to do. The assumed act of Mary no doubt seemed completely out of character for her, as indeed it was. So, Joseph needed divine help to solve the riddle. God sends it to him.

An angel comes to him, likely Gabriel, who also spoke to Mary. The angel appears in a dream. Did he dream about the angel? Or, did the angel do an Inception? Joseph had not yet seen an angel, so he could not have concocted a vision of Gabriel. So, it appears that angels can enter dreams or that God can plant the thought of a particular angel in your mind.

We should be careful from reading too much into dreams but maybe we should also be careful from reading nothing at all into them, either.

Joseph needed reminded that he was of the lineage of David. The promised King was to come from that line. The house of Joseph had sunk to common laborers. No doubt, Joseph had any inkling of the connection between himself and the rule of Israel. But being reminded, he takes a different view of God's workings with Mary.

Joseph then believes that she has conceived of the Holy Ghost. This is mysterious and miraculous. We do not know how the Lord accomplished this and, as Mathew Henry says, we should not seek too closely into these things. However, it is good for us to remember that she remained a virgin. The Holy seed was delivered to her in a miraculous way. Furthermore, it is fair to point out that the taint of sin did not come from Mary's egg. It seems fair to me to assume that the taint of sin is passed through the man's seed. In this case, no human seed, no sin.

But even though Jesus does not sin, there are still affects of the Fall. He grows tired. He is hungry. He is subject to the elements and even death as a baby. He needs protected. He is fully God but not completely God. He

is fully man but not completely man. He is both God and man. So, the human form of Jesus is subject to human weakness. It would have been likely that had Jesus not died in the prime of life, He would have grown old and frail. Mankind, even with God in man, was subject to decay and death. That could only be fixed in the re-creation and then ultimately and finally in the Resurrection, the full re-creation.

Fear not-Joseph feared to take her since she had seemingly been unfaithful to him. But once he realizes that the child is conceived by the Holy Spirit, he would fear to take her and father such a holy child. But the angels tell him not to fear to take her. He is encouraged and exhorted to receive this child and to take his role as the child's earthly father.

21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

Jesus is Joshua. We know that Jesus is a prophet, priest and king. Joshua was the replacement for Moses when they went into the promised land. He was a military commander but had assumed the role of Moses, the prophet.

When Israel returned from the exile and the temple was rebuilt, Joshua was the high priest.

Jesus Christ is the new prophet, like Moses, that was promised. He is the abiding high priest but now after the order of Melchizedek. Finally, He is the Son of David, who is the King that will reign eternally.

To be saved from sin is to be saved from the dominion and domination of sin. Christ is our Savior. A Savior delivers His people and sets them free from tyranny. Apart from Christ, we are slaves of sins and the powers of the dominions of the Earth, the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. But Christ, our Captain has come and thrown down those powers. We are thus, no longer slaves of sin. We have become slaves of our Master Jesus, who rules the Earth according to His own goodness.

He saved us from our sins in multiple ways.

1. Only God could do what Adam failed to do. Adam had life for humankind and lost it through sin, thus death entered the world through sin. But Jesus Christ is God in the flesh, able to fulfill what Adam could not. He thus maintained life for mankind.

2. He paid the debt of sin, that is, the death that was owed. In the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die. And mankind did, indeed die. But Jesus Christ paid the debt of death that no man could ever pay. This price bought back mankind from sin and delivered him into the Kingdom of His Father. Not everyman partakes of this new humanity but only those who embrace the grace of Christ by faith.
3. He delivers us from sin as our champion against sins relentless accusations. The devil is the accuser. Jesus is our advocate. The devil accuses us and Jesus defends us. Jesus's defense is always more powerful than the devil's accusations.

What's in a Name?

Jesus-Jeshua, Jehoshua, He Will Save. He is primarily a Savior.

22 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, 23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

Proto-evangel, the seed of the woman. But not the seed of the man.

Emmanuel- God with us. No doubt, the ancients assumed this meant that God would be with us in the power and the might of the Savior. We often make the mistake of misinterpreting Scripture. We take literal passages as figurative and figurative passages as literal. It is not completely our fault. Think about the disciples. Jesus constantly switched from literal forms of speaking to figurative. The disciples try to operate in the figurative realm and totally miss His points. Or they try to operate in the literal realm and totally miss His points again.

So, it is not surprising that those waiting for the Messiah would assume that this man was going to be the means of God's salvation to them. But that they had no conception that He would literally be God with them.

EXHORTATION

Two applications from the life of Joseph.

24 Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:

- 1. Justice requires you to do the right thing without having all of the information.** Joseph was not motivated by carrying out the letter of the law precisely. He was interested in justice. This takes a humble and merciful man. This sort of man is teachable. Once the angel arrives in his dream, Joseph is easily convinced. Had he been a stubborn man, fully convinced of his own righteousness and her wickedness and need to be justly punished, the dream sequence could have gone another direction. Maybe he might have concluded that it was sent by a demon to delude him of seeing and doing the truth. But a just man can see wisdom when it comes to him. Once Joseph gets more information, still not all, he does what the angel required. He takes Mary to wife. He still did not know what all of this meant but he was willing to do what is right and trust the rest to the Lord. This is a mark of great faith.

25 And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.

- Joseph is not a man who stands on his rights. He is a humble man and willing to obey and to serve. Luke tells us that Mary was still his espoused wife at the time that Jesus is born. But that is from Joseph's perspective. He is honoring God as the true Father of Jesus. No doubt, he took Mary as wife as soon as the angel woke him up. He had to do this to help protect her reputation. If Mary was already pregnant, they had to have a quick marriage so that it would not be obvious that she was with child before she was married. So, he had conjugal rights but he was a just man who did what was right and did not assert his rights. There is often a right that is better to do than what you can 'by right' do.

Incidentally, he knew her not until Jesus was born. After Jesus's birth, Joseph and Mary were husband and wife, with all the rights of husband and wife. There is a great deal of speculation about who

Joseph was and who the other children of this couple were. Many, through the ages, have asserted that the other children of Joseph and Mary, were his children from a previous marriage. But that is silliness because of a low view of marriage and the marriage bed. The Bible makes no apologies about the marriage bed. In fact, the opposite, it defends it. It did not defile Mary or Jesus, for Joseph to be married to her. The marriage relationship, and of its rights, is a holy trust and not the result of sin. Mary knew Joseph and had several other children, Jesus's half brothers and sister.

3. Joseph called His name Jesus. That is, Savior. Joseph is obedient but he also exhibits faith. This all still seems so unlikely but it is clear that God has done something utterly miraculous here and Joseph believes and acts on that belief.

Jesus is both Emmanuel and Jesus. God with us and He who saves. It is not too difficult to come up with the formula that Jesus Christ is the God who saves us.