

The Coming of the Savior

Matthew 1:18–25

Looking through news this week I ran across an article that mentioned good news in the headline. Since we are looking at the good news of the birth of Jesus, I thought, *Ah, maybe this is something pertaining to the coming of Christ.* Here is the good news the article was touting: “The price of goods, measured through the personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index, dropped 0.1% in November.”¹ This is not the good news we are celebrating this morning! No, I bring you good news of great joy which shall be to all the people!² Now, if our greatest problem is that the price of goods is up, then I guess the greatest good news is that prices dropped. But if our greatest problem is that we are estranged from, and at war with holy God, then the greatest news was already proclaimed and we repeat the sounding joy this morning: “... unto you is born ... a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”³

We read Luke’s account of Jesus’s birth at the Call to Worship. Let’s read Matthew’s shorter account.

Matthew 1:18–25 — 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. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel”
(which means, God with us). ²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

As we consider this familiar story let’s pray for help that we come to it with fresh eyes and receptive, obedient hearts, knowing that this is the living, Word of God, fixed forever in the heavens.

PRAY

¹ KPAX.com

² Luke 2:10

³ Luke 2:11

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During this season of Advent we have now considered

- The need of a Savior as we saw the weight of our sin through the first chapters of Isaiah
- The promise of a Savior who will redeem us, not because we are making progress and deserve it, but rather he comes in the middle of our rebellious, sinful brokenness.
- Today we examine his entrance into the world, his debut in the flesh, if you will.

I am prone to skip the introduction in the front of books. It's a bad idea because the author often tells you why he wrote the book so you know what to pay attention to, what to look for. We've already spent time on the introduction of Jesus in Isaiah. Those passages announced what he would be like when he came. Today he steps on to the world stage. Let's meet the newborn King!

Matthew begins writing that the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. Quickly note that **Jesus** is his *given name* — we will look more at that in a moment. But the title **Christ** — that's not a "last" name. In our culture, when we see two names we think of them as first and last name. **Christ** is his title. You will recall from our study of Mark that **Christ** is the Greek term for Messiah, the Anointed One — the one God has promised to redeem Israel. That's big information we need to know! Good thing we aren't skipping the intro!

Matthew notes four players as the Lord enters the world's stage: Mary, Joseph, the triune God in the distinct persons of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and an angel of the Lord.

Let's see how the Savior's coming unfolds through each of these persons.

Mary, the Mother of the Incarnate Christ

We don't have much information about Mary from Matthew other than what is here. Most of the other references are at Jesus's death and resurrection. We see she is betrothed to Joseph — a much higher level of commitment to marriage than engagement in our culture. v 21 tells us she will bear a son. This son is the fulfillment of the **proto euangelion** — the first telling of the Gospel good news in Genesis 3:15. A son will come and crush Satan's head. The curse of sin passed on by the first Adam is undone by the Second Adam, the Messiah, now in flesh in appearing.

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We know from the prophets, and from this text, and from Luke 1, that she was a virgin — she has never been with a man.⁴ Looking further in Luke, we see that she was of humble estate⁵ — she was poor — and that the Lord’s favor was on her. We are given hints about why she was favored, but none of those are things that would fit the requirements of a head-hunter hiring someone to be the human mother of the incarnate Christ. She is a humble servant of the Lord; she is obedient. As Gabriel told her the news that she would bear the Messiah, she can’t piece it all together, but she obeys because it’s what God said. **Let it be to me according to your word.**⁶ Whatever you say God, that’s what I’ll do it. We will see that same obedience in Joseph in a moment.

Let’s make application to our own lives: It pleases God to use those who obey him. It pleases God to use those who obey. If we come to Christmas and look in a replica manger and think, “Wow, that was really something.” Well, it was something! But let’s remind ourselves of what we already know: Mary and Joseph are both very regular people. Not credentialed. Not people of wealth or influence. They are people who know and obey God. If we want to know and be used by God it will come as we obey him. I’m not suggesting there’s going to be another Bethlehem and another manger, but I am saying that God uses human instruments to make his salvation known and embraced around the world. Humble obedience puts us in a place of seeing eternal God do his mighty works through our lives. The Lord turns his face and favor toward the obedient. Humbly do what God says.

The Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity

At the end of **v 18** — **Mary was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.** As at the creation of the sinless world, the triune God is at work overcoming sin and restoring what was lost. The Holy Spirit who was hovering over the waters as the earth was being formed in Genesis 1:2 now hovers over Mary to produce in her the promised God-Man Messiah. This is supernatural. Last week we saw God given a specific prophesy to King Ahaz in Isaiah 7. A young woman who has never been known a man sexually will conceive. That is not natural — that can’t happen. Supernatural work is required and our supernatural nature God now does exactly what he promised. It is a stunning miracle. But it is not too hard for the God who created the world *ex nihilo* — out of nothing. God the Father sent his Son. God, the Son, set aside the glory of heaven and came. And God the Holy Spirit wove his human body together in the womb of a virgin. Is there anything too hard for God? What is impossible with man is possible with God. Behold your God! Believe Him. Obey Him, and know his power in your life.

⁴ Luke 1:34

⁵ Luke 1:48

⁶ Luke 1:38

Joseph, son of David

If what we know about Mary is scarce, what we know about Joseph is even scarcer. We know he is a just man — he does what is right.⁷ He is from the line of David — that’s the angel’s salutation: “Son of David.” This must’ve been encouraging to Joseph on multiple levels. It would have been an honor to be in the line of David. But as the angel addresses him, but more than that, Joseph immediately knows that God sees and knows all about him. As it was for him, it is a reminder to you: God knows you. He wove you together in the secret place. You cannot flee from his presence. He knows your name. He knows your history. He knows you need a Savior, and so he has come.

The mention of his lineage also underscores the fulfillment of prophecy, the promise made to King David in 2 Samuel 7, that David would never fail to have an heir sit on his throne. It’s echoed by Isaiah in Isaiah 9. “Son of David” is not a throw-away phrase because the Angel needed more words. It’s a prophetic receipt, if you will, that God keeps his word. These things are summarized in vv 22–23 where Matthew reminds us “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken...”

So Joseph is given two assignments in this dream invaded by an angel. First, he is not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife. Check. He does.

The second is fascinating. He is told what to name the child. Normally parents get to name their children. You and your spouse likely had significant conversations about what to name your children, filled, no doubt, with bright hope for what they would do, or become. God exercised the Father’s right to name his Son. He, too, did this with the certainty of what Jesus would do and become. The son of God was coming to save the world, therefore, give him the name “***the Lord saves.***” That’s what the name **Jesus** means, and the angel and Matthew make sure we don’t miss that. Call him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. It’s so simple a child can understand it, yes? And it’s so profound that it touches and heals and transforms the depths of the human heart, particularly when we realize how great our need of a Savior is.

V 21 is loaded! **Jesus, the Messiah, is on mission to save.** Jesus is the promised Savior. This is his mission: to save his people from their sins. So we learn what we are saved from.

⁷ Matthew 1:19

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First, His Mission: He shall save his people... This baby is on mission to save sinners. That's our greatest problem. People under the boot of Rome thought their greatest need was deliverance from a wicked government. An affluent society like ours may think our greatest need is deliverance from inflation. Many think education is the answer for the human race. The Lord was not just a teacher. If our root problem was lack of knowledge, surely the information age in which we live, with more data than anyone can track, would fix us. A review of internet search histories simply exposes how wicked we are. He did not come to primarily teach us to love, though as we experience his love we certainly learn to love each other.⁸ His mission was not to coach us to stop acting badly. He did not come to make bad men good; he came to make dead men live. Moral goodness is can only be formed when we are given a new heart, when we are saved from our sins. Ignorance, hatred, law breaking — these don't chain us in captivity to sin — these are out-workings, the fruits of being captive to sin. We must be saved from our sin. He comes on mission to do that.

This is **Good news of great joy!** The newborn King will willingly lay down his life to save those who turn to him, who believe him, who place their faith in him and his atoning sacrifice.

The tri-part nature of his salvation is comprehensive. He saves us from the penalty of sin, the power of sin, and ultimately the presence of sin.

The penalty of sin for sinners. In the beginning, Genesis 2 tells us that God told them they may not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you do, you will die. They sinfully rebelled. Romans 6:23 restates that the wages, the penalty of sin is death. The Savior comes to pay the price of sin. This is justification. He does this by taking on our sin and the death that goes with it as he dies on the cross. He dies paying the penalty of sinners. That is what we are. **Romans 5:6–8** captures this for us — For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Children of wrath become children of God by adoption.⁹

He saves from the power of sin.

⁸ 1 John 4:19

⁹ John 1:12; Ephesians 2:3

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He gives a new nature that produces love for God and the things of God rather than despising them. Sins power is not only that it produces spiritual death in us, but it changes us in desire to love the things that kill us. The prophet Ezekiel wrote, in 11:19b–20, that God will give them one heart, and a new spirit. He will remove the heart of stone and give a heart of flesh, that they may walk in his statutes and keep his rules and obey them. The power of sin is broken by the power of the Lord's cross where he frees believers from the grip of deadly sin. Those saved by Christ no longer walk as darkness, but as children of light.¹⁰ This is sanctification.

Lastly, **he ultimately saves us from the very presence of sin.** One day we will be free from indwelling sin and all its brokenness and destruction; we will be like him.¹¹ He will undo the curse of sin by transforming our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.¹²

Is the power of sin at work in your life? If you were outside of Christ, it's possible that you don't even realize this. Or if you do, you don't see it as a problem, but if you come to grips with reality that there is a holy God to whom you will give account, your love of sin would terrify you. Here is good news, and we proclaim it with the angels: Christ came to break the power of sin and give us a new heart that loves him and loves his life-giving Word.

I don't think William Kirkpatrick was thinking Christmas as he wrote this hymn text, but it fits so well.

We have heard the joyful sound: Jesus saves! Jesus saves!
Spread the tidings all around: Jesus saves! Jesus saves!
Bear the news to every land, Climb the steeps and cross the waves;
Onward!—'tis our Lord's command; Jesus saves! Jesus saves!

Give the winds a mighty voice, Jesus saves, Jesus saves;
Let the nations now rejoice. Jesus saves, Jesus saves;
Shout salvation full and free, Highest hills and deepest caves,
This our song of victory, Jesus saves, Jesus saves.

— *William Kirkpatrick (1838-1921)*

PRAY

¹⁰ Ephesians 5:8

¹¹ 1 John 3:2

¹² Philippians 3:20–21