

## Lesson 2

# The Christ in Prophecy (1)

## *Immanuel: God With Us*

### Introduction

“What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?”

– Jesus, Matthew 22.42

This foundational question posed by Jesus in a conversation with the Pharisees is one that every person in every generation needs to answer. How one answers reveals his or her belief regarding the deity of Jesus Christ. When the Jews answered Jesus’ question here, they said he was of the lineage of David, which is correct. But they were thinking only in human terms. When Jesus claimed to be both the Son of David *and* the Son of God, they charged him with blasphemy. The problem of believing Jesus to be a good *human* but not be God in the flesh remains today.

The incarnation of Jesus Christ may have been a doctrine many evangelicals have taken for granted. Many of us simply pass over it quickly thinking this is something so basic it need not even be discussed. This is a mistake. While the growing amount denial regarding the Bible story of Jesus’ virgin birth brings little surprise when considering mainline denominations<sup>2</sup> (Only 71% believe the Biblical account), the drop that should concern us all rests among young adults.<sup>3</sup> A Pew Research Center study revealed in late 2017 that only 54% of those age 18-29 believes in the virgin birth. Among millennials only 44% believe in all four events surrounding the birth of Christ. So, the neglected teaching on this matter is bearing its consequences.

What we must be reminded of is that the essence of Christianity is built on the foundation that Jesus Christ is God in human flesh. It is an essential doctrine, made clear in the gospels that reference the birth of Christ. Jesus’ conception by the Spirit is the Biblical explanation for his supernatural life, including His birth, death on the cross as a substitute for us, His bodily resurrection, and second coming are all a part of His deity. We cannot choose to believe in only one or two of those and leave the rest out. They stand or fall together. All of those realities are a manifestation of His deity ... or they are not. So, again, as Jesus asked in Matthew 22, *whose Son is He?*

As we consider the Jews, many of who missed Jesus, we look no farther at Matthew 1, where Jesus is presented as both the Son of David, as *fully human* (see his lineage posted in Matthew 1.1-17) and the Son of God, *deity* (as presented in the account of the virgin birth in 1.18-25). Jesus, as part of the lineage of David had the right to rule over His people, i.e., He had the legal right to be king. Jesus, being born without a human father, possessed the very nature of God. This is what enabled Him to conquer sin,

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<sup>2</sup> Examples of mainline denominations are Methodists, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Episcopalians, and Congregationalists.

<sup>3</sup> Law, Jeannie Ortega. “Fewer Americans Believe Jesus Was Bork of a Virgin: Study.” *Christian Post*. Online. Retrieved 09/08/22 from: [Fewer Americans Believe Jesus Was Born of a Virgin: Study | U.S. News \(christianpost.com\)](https://www.christianpost.com/news/fewer-americans-believe-jesus-was-born-of-a-virgin-study/)

Satan, and hell thereby redeeming humankind. How can any person who rejects His supernatural origin explain His life, death, and subsequent resurrection?

So what we have in Matthew 1 is a kind of apology by Matthew himself. Here he defends the unique story surrounding the birth of Christ against popular false narratives that circulated during his time. Some claimed Jesus was an illegitimate child, born out of Mary, the son of a Roman soldier who cohabited with Mary. Others said Mary was an adulteress.<sup>4</sup> Here Matthew affirms Jesus' human connection and Jesus' supernatural connection. If Jesus were born from two supernatural parents, he would not have been human at all, and would have been unable to live as one of us. If Jesus were born from two human parents, then He could not avoid sin. Therefore, He was simultaneously the child of a human, yet the child of God. Jesus is simply a person like no other. In all of human history there had never been a virgin birth, nor has there been one since.

## Jesus' Birth Story

Joseph and Mary had been engaged for some time. No indication is given as to how long. The process of marriage in Jewish culture involved two main parts: the betrothal period and the marriage. At the beginning of the process, two families came up with a contract that promised marriage between a son and daughter. It was a binding contract, where a couple was treated as if they were legally married even though there had been no physical relationship take place. During this period (usually around a year) if a person violated the contract they could be officially divorced. The purpose for this stage was to prove the bride's virginity and the both parties purity. At the end of the betrothal, the marriage happened, which was a celebration that lasted for 7 days. At the conclusion of this event the bride and groom enjoyed all the pleasures of marriage, and the couple was regarded as husband and wife. It was during the period of betrothal that Mary came up with child, 1.18.

This is a major problem for Joseph. He knows he has been true to his vows. Now, he has a decision to make, knowing full well what the law required. He loved Mary. He couldn't bear to see her deal with the reproach. Before he could follow through on the decision, an angel appeared to him in a dream and explained:

“Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1.20b-21)

## ***All This Fulfilled Isaiah's Prophecy***

As verse 22 begins, Matthew is speaking again. He says all of this was a fulfillment of what God said through Isaiah and then quotes Isaiah 7.14. Matthew loves to do this by the way. Fifty times in his gospel he quotes the Old Testament to prove Jesus' fulfillment of prophecy in some way. He alludes to the Old Testament another 76 times. What he explained regarding Jesus' birth was not happenstance, it was not some tall tale made up for a legend, ... it was real and factual ... and it was a promise of God fulfilled.

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<sup>4</sup> MacArthur, John. “The Virgin Birth.” *John MacArthur Sermon Archive*. Panorama City, CA: Grace to You, 2014.

## ***A Look at Isaiah 7.14***

Assyria is on the rise and dominating the area of the Fertile Cresecent. Judah, Israel, and Syria are all threatened by the rising tide of Assyrian aggression. Israel joined forces with its northern neighbor, Syria to defend themselves. They wanted Judah to join in as well, of which King Ahaz resisted. When he did, Israel and Syria threatened to depose King Ahaz of Judah and replace him with a more friendly person on the throne. The only problem for them was that God would now allow them to attack, Isaiah 7.1-2. The people, including King Ahaz were greatly alarmed. So God sends Isaiah to the king to encourage him to trust Him. God wanted to be his ally. God told him to ask for a sign, proving His power and faithfulness. Instead of trusting God, Ahaz wanted to go another way. In verse 14, God says He will send a sign of His saving presence, regardless of what Ahaz wanted:

Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel, Isaiah 7.14.

As you keep reading the text, we learn that the fulfillment of this sign was linked to Isaiah's own day, 7.15-16. The prophecy predicted the birth of Maher-shalal-hashbaz, Isaiah's own son. In 8.1-4 we learn that Isaiah's son was connected to the fall of the alliance between Israel and Syria. The message of this young boy's life was that "God is with us." The enemies of Judah were doomed because God is with His people. There is nothing miraculous in Isaiah 7.14 about the sign itself. The knowledge of the future which is revealed to Isaiah in connection with the sign is miraculous.<sup>5</sup>

But, the ultimate fulfillment of the passage is in Matthew 1.23.

See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel, which is translated "God is with us."

Isaiah 7.14 prefigures the birth of Christ. Matthew, via inspiration, focuses on the meaning of "Immanuel" and sees Jesus as the fulfillment of *God being with us* as we face the alliance of sin and death. The name Immanuel represents the possibility of deliverance by trusting in the presence of God, a possibility which God assures his people is real. God is with us bringing us ultimate salvation. As is said just before this, *She will give birth to a Son; and you shall name Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins*, Matthew 1.21. The meaning of Immanuel is found in Isaiah 8.10: *God with us*. It is a name that identifies the divine.

It is also important to know that as the Immanuel of Isaiah 7.14 and 8.1-10 bears witness to the judgment that will come upon those who choose not to trust God, so Jesus brings judgment as well as salvation, John 12.48. The fulfillment of Immanuel this affirms God's words to Ahaz:

If you do not stand firm in your faith, then you will not stand at all, Isaiah 7.9b.

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<sup>5</sup> Briley, Terry R. *Isaiah*. The College Press NIV Commentary. Joplin, MO: College Press Pub., 2000-, p. 124.