

**After He Was Born**  
**Matthew 1:18-25**  
**Central Baptist Church**  
**Sunday, Dec. 26, 2021**

“So, what do you think?”

Not long ago, I asked a group of kids that question, after I showed them a video depicting the first Christmas as Joseph and Mary searched frantically for a place to have the baby. “How is that different than what you visualized on the first Christmas?”

They had various answers. One kid said, “I thought Mary looked a little young. I always thought she was around 60.” Another kid said: “What’s up with the stable in the side of the rock? I thought it was a small barn or a shed.” Still, another kid said, “The star shining down on the wise men—didn’t do it for me. Looked a little bright. Like a spotlight.”

When we read a book, or a story, we assign images to the information. We picture the scene differently, which is why we often dislike the movie depiction of our favorite novels. Those ten kids had no problems pointing out where the movie got it wrong.

The truth is, we don’t know who is right or wrong. We don’t have a lot of details about that *O Holy night*, when the stars were brightly shining. The Bible provides tid bits of information. We know that Jesus was born in a stable, that angels tipped off the shepherds, that Mystery men brought gifts from the East. And Joseph and Mary, the parents of Jesus were nothing more than peasants—ordinary people overwhelmed by the assignment. Joseph and Mary would parent the Son of God.

I wonder what that was like. They didn’t have to wonder, “What Would Jesus Do?” They would just go ask him? “At what point did Jesus start life-coaching Joseph?”

My weird brain goes to those places because the Bible doesn’t. In the time between Jesus being born and his bar mitzvah, we know almost nothing. Here’s what we do know. One of the well-traveled paragraphs in all of Holy Scripture, Matthew 1:18...

**<sup>18</sup>This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup>Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.**

**<sup>20</sup>But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup>She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” Matt. 1:18-21**

Notice how the story starts: *This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about.* No date or season provided. Today is Dec. 23rd, which means Jesus' "birthday" is in 48 hours. How do we know that? Biblical scholars say that we don't. One archaeologist writes:

**The biblical reference to shepherds tending their flocks at night...might suggest the spring lambing season...Yet most scholars would urge caution about extracting such a precise but incidental detail from a narrative whose focus is theological rather than calendrical.**

Didn't know that was a word? Calendrical. Bonus points if you can use it in the lobby.

We don't know what night of the year it happened. The Bible doesn't focus on the when, but on the what, BUT this doesn't mean that the tradition of Christmas is a sham.

A few years ago, we went to Washington, DC with our kids. And we went here to Ford's theatre the famous spot where Abe Lincoln was shot by the actor. My mind recreated the scene and I saw a version of what happened in my own head, as he pulled the trigger, and jumped from the presidential box.

As we sat in the seats, I looked at that bannister where John Wilkes Booth changed the course of history—the actual banister, where his feet flew off the side. His spur catching the flag and causing him to land funny. I imagined the whole thing. Then, the Park Ranger told us that Ford's theatre had collapsed years after the assassination and this was all a recreation, a replica.

Some people say that about Christmas. The cynic inside of us says "we don't really know if Jesus was born on December 25<sup>th</sup>—it's a replica." Maybe so, but for me, and for millions of others, the joy of re-imagining Jesus' birth is magical. In 336 AD, the Roman Emperor Constantine instituted the celebration of the Savior's birth on Dec. 25, and the tradition was born.

So we don't know the date but we do know some details. Matthew tells us that Mary was engaged to a poor chap named Joseph. They would form the nuclear family for this nuclear gift.

**His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. V.18**

What does "pledged to be married" mean? It means that in the eyes of the Jewish community, they were an item. This was a done deal though they hadn't tied the knot officially. If Joseph had been tragically killed, Mary would have been called a widow.

We are not told how the two of them first met, or about their first date. In those days, arranged marriages were in style. A mom and dad picked a good wife for their son, hopefully from a respectable family in the community. Cultures around the world have done the dating thing differently.

In Jane Austin's *Pride and Prejudice*, the dating scene in 19<sup>th</sup> century England is described. Young women were pressured to marry a man who had social standing, a sprawling estate, and a long list of important pals. Elizabeth Bennet was a rebel, refusing to conform to society--unwilling to dance with Mr. Darcy, no matter how deep his pockets may be.

Finding a spouse has shifted with times and cultures. Joseph and Mary may have had an arranged marriage, but if so, it seems they liked the arrangement. Joseph genuinely cares for her, as his first reaction to her affair is one of protection.

V.19:

**Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. V.19**

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Jesus would say those words 30 years later. His earthly father Joseph seems to meet that description. Joseph appears to be a man of no malice—one who refused to become bitter when life brought him bad cards. One of the most difficult things in life to get over a betrayal.

Pain from the past poisons the soul and sours the face. One of the most famous Hebrew proverbs: "Above all things, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." It seems that Joseph was skilled at that.

Stop and think about your heart for as second:

Heart Questions:

- Am I harboring bitterness in my heart toward another person?
- Do I secretly resent those who have more than me?
- Do I often rehearse the negative experiences of my life?

Your answers to those questions indicate the purity of our heart. Above all things, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

Joseph guarded his heart. When his fiancé did him wrong, but he resolved to do right. Kicking up no dust, he would divorce her quietly. But his plans shifted in one night of sleep:

**<sup>20</sup> But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.**

If you're new to the Bible, this is an important moment right here. It's called "virgin birth," a central tenet of the Christian faith. For 2000 years, skeptics have struggled with this miracle in particular.

Some say that Gospel writers got a little carried away with the pen. They embellished the truth. How could a baby be conceived by the Holy Spirit?

You might wonder: who even cares? Why difference does a virgin birth make anyhow?

Let's think about that. Consider all the ways God could have brought His Son into the world. Jesus could have just appeared one day, a full-grown man riding into town on a stately white horse. Adam and Eve were fully grown on their first day of life. Why not Jesus? Yet, he arrives as a fragile infant.

Or what if Jesus had been born of Mary and Joseph, but weeks later took on god-like status? What if the text said he was born in a manger, and when the wise men arrived, a glow from heaven suddenly appeared over the boy's head, upgrading him to the divine. In that case, Joseph and Mary would have been his full-blooded parents.

Or what if a baby had shown up on their doorstep, and they adopted him. A little note: Raise this boy. He's God. If that were the case, Jesus would have no DNA from his parents. Mary would not have been the true mother of Jesus.

There are countless ways that God could have introduced Jesus into the world, but in his infinite wisdom, he chooses to combine the human and divine.

### **Jesus was born human and divine.**

Sort of a holy hybrid. Here was God in human skin. From earth and from heaven. Born a human, he could relate to our struggles, our pains, our weaknesses. Yet, born of God, he could qualify as the perfect sacrifice for human sins. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, John would say.

Every good Jew knew was sacrificial lamb was all about.

#### **Show sacrificial lamb.**

The way to deal with your sin was to slaughter an animal at the steps of the temple. The creature had to be perfect in appearance, with no blemishes or broken bones. Any imperfection would disqualify the offering. Jesus was the perfect lamb sent by God.

He would be the substitutionary sacrifice, the once-and-for-all atonement for our past due bills. Which moves us, of course, from Christmas to Easter.

#### **Show the cross.**

On the cross, God offers the sacrifice to end all sacrifices. Jesus would say with his last breath, “it is finished.” If you read the New Testament, you will notice how little is actually written of Christmas compared to what we call “Easter.”

Don’t get me wrong—I’m not diminishing Christmas. I love Christmas. I’ve been playing Pandora Christmas since before Thanksgiving, which is the unforgivable sin, according to some. I love the carols, and the generous giving, and the sweaters, and the clip-on ties.

But the Bible says so very little about Christmas when you compare it to Easter. There are four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—all telling the story of Jesus. Two of them skip Christmas altogether, saying nothing of his birth day or shepherds or wise men. All four Gospels, however, devote a massive final section to the crescendo leading to the cross.

Why does the Bible focus on his last days, and not his first days? Because one of these days, you’re going to have your last day, and then you will meet God. And in that moment, there is only one thing that will matter about you. Did you receive the sacrifice offered for your sins?

V.21:

**She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. V.21**

He was born to die. He came to save sinners. Who are the sinners around here? Let’s talk about that.

This is where countless people get it wrong. Scores of Americans would say the basic message of the Bible is: Be a better person. Behave. Don’t drink, cuss, or chew, or run with people that do. Baptists would throw in dancing but it ruins the rhyme.

Better behavior is not what the Bible is about. Soul transformation, and sin cancellation—that’s what it’s all about. How does a person’s soul become like new? How do we deal with the poison that sits inside of us—which spoils our relationship with others and with God?

Mary bore a son, his name was to be Jesus, because he would save human beings from their sins.

He came to that which was his own, but his own would not receive him, but to those who received him, He gave the right to become the children of God.

So in order for a Savior to matter, sin has to matter. Sin has to be a thing, and not a culturally contrived concept.. The Bible has a unique take on sin.

Scripture does not say that we become sinners when we sin. If you believe that, you haven’t really read the Bible. Nowhere in the New Testament do you find a description of a person that

was perfectly behaved until the age of 37, and then they sinned and got sideways with God. We are born broken.

Romans says:

**<sup>19</sup>For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.  
--Romans 5:19**

Now don't miss this. Because of the sin of Adam, human beings are born corrupted. That's bad news. But because of the righteousness of Jesus, human beings can be transformed. They can be born again. And unless you are born again, you cannot enter the kingdom of God. If you take Jesus' word for it.

When I was born in Illinois, in September of 1976, I was born a sinner, for whom Christ came to die. It didn't my parents long to figure out what they had. They did not teach me how to roll my eyes in mockery, or to make up lies to get off the hook. All that stuff came naturally.

We are all born broken, and the older we get, the brokenness becomes more obvious—BUT there remains on the table the hope of the great reversal, a supernatural change of heart. Jesus didn't come to start a winter tradition; he came to change your cold heart.

The back of the bible is a collection of correspondence, letters from pastors to baby churches, explaining how to think and live. The most famous of those pastors was Paul, and he wrote this the following words to a church that had gotten off-track...

**<sup>3</sup>For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup>that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup>and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. 1 Cor 15:3-5**

When summarizing the core of the Christian faith, Paul doesn't mention Christmas. He does point out the death of Christ for sinners! In another place, he says:

*Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst. 1 Tim. 1:15*

That is what this book is all about.

So, you have probably not taken to heart anything I've said this morning if one of the following statements are true of you:

Would you say?

- I have ruled out the idea of an afterlife.

- I have no guilt from the past that pains me.
- I have no sense of longing for something beyond this world.

If those three statements are sincerely true for you. If you think death is a dead end, if you think guilt is something your mother puts on you, if you think you were born to die so enjoy it while it lasts, then you will celebrate Christmas on Tuesday as a national holiday, and eat lots of cookies with extra icing.

But if you ever wince at the way you've treated people in the past, if you ever feel deep inside that there's something beyond those clouds, then keep reading the story of Jesus and the wonder of his love.

### **The Six Main Things That Happened After Jesus is Born**

Here is the rest of the story....The New Testament in Five Minutes:

#### **1. The Holy Spirit comes upon Jesus around his 30<sup>th</sup> birthday.**

Returning from a time of temptation, Jesus Christ is filled with the Holy Ghost. He becomes a man infused with a divine mission. He goes public with his identity by walking into a Jewish synagogue, reading aloud an ancient prophecy about a Savior, and then says, "That's me." They tried to throw him off a cliff that day, but you can read that on your own. Jesus was better than Jason Bourne at escaping.

#### **2. Jesus calls 12 men to himself.**

They were known as the disciples. Through their ordinary lives, the extraordinary would happen. Jesus would build the most powerful religious movement in human history on the shoulders of shoddy leaders. Peter, James, John and the rest of them were like little ducklings following him for three full years, and disappointing him along the way. They were slow to grasp spiritual things and tempted by turf wars and power plays. But Jesus said, "Through you, I build my church."

#### **3. Jesus mesmerizes people with his words and miracles.**

The hot shot teachers of the day were instantly jealous of his ability to hold a room, the crowds that would gather by the sea, forcing him to hop into small boats and push back from the beach. There was something about the way he talked that messed people up and disturbed them inside. The main Jewish teachers were not ready to share the stage, and looked for ways to discredit him. When he started healing people and pronouncing forgiveness of sin—they took it up a notch and worked a plan for removal.

#### **4. Jesus is betrayed by Judas, condemned by the Jews, hung on a Roman cross.**

This all happens within 24 hours. A puppet-politician named Pilate is put on the spot and would not compromise his career for the sake of letting Jesus go.

At 9 AM on a Friday, he was fixed on a cross, suspended for six hours until his beaten body began to fade. The soldiers grabbed clubs to break his legs and finish him off before the Sabbath began, but when they approached him, he was gone. The sacrificial lamb suffered no broken bones or blemish.

#### **5. Jesus rises from the grave and appears to 500+ people.**

When the body went missing, the rumor mill went wild. A few ladies said they saw Jesus alive. And then a few more. And then the disciples. For 40 days, Jesus comes in and out of the community, to prove not only that he lives beyond the grave, but that they can too.

On the 40<sup>th</sup> day, he flew to the clouds before their very eyes, and for ten more days, they sit and wait. The disciples wondered if it was over. Then on the 50<sup>th</sup> day, a Jewish holiday called Pentecost, the Holy Spirit comes upon the followers of Jesus, and they are infused with boldness and power.

#### **6. Jesus begins a global movement by sending out his disciples.**

It's called the Great Commission. The church of Jesus started spreading and infecting people, like a virus in a preschool. And it continues to this day. We didn't start a church here in Arvada, we just threw on another wing to the existing one. The Church of Jesus has been alive since Pentecost, and it's not going away.

We sit in a building today, but the church is not a building. It has never been a building. The church of Jesus is a spirit-filled people, not a spirit-filled room. What gives us power is the unity around the truth—that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, to provide forgiveness.

And he comes again. We find great comfort in his words:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. John 14:1

Do you believe? Are you believer?

Celebrate this Christmas, as a Christian, why don't you? And then you will embody what it's all about. It's all about Jesus.

Conclude with Gospel presentation.



