

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF VILLA RICA, PCA
THE MIRACLE THAT KEEPS HAPPENING

Matt. 1:18 through Matt. 1:25 **18**Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. **19**And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. **20**But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of 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**Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: **23**BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL, which translated means, GOD WITH US. **24**And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, **25**,but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.

I. THE MIRACULOUS CONCEPTION

A. The 18th verse tells us that Mary was betrothed to Joseph. The word betrothed is not the same as our word engaged. Betrothed is far more serious and binding than what is meant today by an engagement ring. The bridegroom and bride pledged their troth to each other in the presence of witnesses. It was considered such a sacred and solemn pledge that it was essentially a marriage covenant, even though the marriage had not formally taken place. Yet, though the two were now legally Aespoused@ it was considered proper that an interval of time elapse before husband and wife would begin to live together in the same house.

The law provided that unfaithfulness in a betrothed woman was so much a violation of the pledge that both she and the man she had relations with were to be punished with death.

Deut. 22:23-24 **A**If there is a girl who is a virgin engaged to a man, and another man finds her in the city and lies with her, **24**then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city and you shall stone them to death; the girl, because she did not cry out in the city, and the man, because he has violated his neighbor=s wife. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you.

So in the account we have read today we learn that Joseph was betrothed to Mary but before they had actually been married and had begun to live together as man and wife he learns that she is with child. He knew that they had not been intimate. Of course she knew the cause of

her pregnancy because the angel Gabriel had told her that this would happen. Luke gives the account of this in **Luke 1:26-38**.

We don't know exactly when or how Joseph learned that Mary was pregnant. But when he learns of it he knows he is not the father, because they have never had sexual relations. He must have been terribly disappointed to find this out. He loved Mary and yet what is he to think? He thinks the obvious, she has been unfaithful. How else could she be pregnant? He is distressed. But what is he to do? He loves Mary and wanted ever so much to live with her in accordance with the will of God, the God who took so seriously the breaking of the marriage vow. He also is a man of principle and conviction. The scripture says he was a righteous man. It also says that it didn't want to disgrace Mary. He didn't want her to have to face the scorn and contempt of the townspeople, the congregation of their synagogue. As he thought about this matter he reluctantly decided that the best thing for him to do was to privately put her away, dissolve the pledge they had made and release her from her vows. But he deploras having to do this. He loves her and desires ever so much to have her as his wife. He has terribly mixed emotions. He loves her but is afraid to marry her. Then he must have drifted off to sleep.

That same night an angel appeared to him in a dream and told him: **(Mat 1:20-21 NASB) saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. {21}"And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins."**

He is given the same information that had previously been given to Mary, namely, that not in the normal way but by the power of the Holy Spirit Mary had conceived. To strengthen and comfort him the angel addresses him as Joseph, the son of David.

In fulfillment of the Messianic promise Joseph, viewed as legal heir of David and as the one who transmits this honor to Jesus. He is not bypassed. He is important in the scheme of things. His genealogical place in the family tree is an essential part of the divine plan to place an heir of David on the throne once again, only this time for all eternity.

Joseph is told not to be afraid to take Mary to be his wife. This tells us that it was fear of God that kept him from doing so. He really wanted to do so but didn't see how he could under the circumstances and the stern disapproval of the law against extramarital sex.

How relieved he was to know that Mary had not been unfaithful after all. He is not only given liberty of conscience to take her into his home as his wife he is even directed to do so. He must have awakened from his dream full of joy and peace of heart at this great good news. He understood that he could now be Mary's protector, providing for her physical needs and defending her honor against all malicious slander.

B. I want you to notice that Matthew cites this virgin conception as the fulfilling of the prophecy of Isaiah:**(Mat 1:23 NASB) "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD, AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US."**

As I have mentioned in previous messages, the virgin birth of Jesus Christ was essential to the salvation plan of God. The promised Messiah was to be the seed of the woman who would bruise the head of the serpent. He must not be of Adam's seed for then he would be born with a sinful nature, as all men since Adam onward have been born. There had to be a bypassing of Adam's sin, which has been imputed to all his posterity.

The Messiah had to be both human and divine. He had to be born sinless as a human being and at the same time divine in order to accomplish His mediatorial mission. So the virgin birth is essential to bring Jesus into the world without the pollution and stain of original sin. This was accomplished in the virgin birth. He commences a new race of men as the Second and Last Adam.

II. THE MIRACLES KEEP HAPPENING

A. At Christmas we remember the wonder of Christ's virgin birth and praise God for the fulfillment of all the prophecies that predicted not only his birth and the place of his birth but also the Davidic line that is finalized in His birth. He is the promised Messiah who will sit on the throne of David to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore.

B. But there is something else that needs to be said, **the miracles keep coming**. Since that miraculous birth of Jesus Christ through his conception in the womb of the virgin Mary sinners by the thousands and millions from every tribe and tongue and nation have come into a saving knowledge of Him as Savior and Lord and have been miraculously born into a new life in Him. They are given a new nature by the same power of the Holy Spirit that created a human body in a virgin's womb. This is called regeneration, a new birth, a resurrection of the soul. As Paul wrote the Corinthians: **(2 Cor 5:17 KJV) Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.**

We are now espoused to him. We are his chosen bride and we are betrothed to Christ. He is preparing a Bride for the most fantastic wedding day that has ever been. We have been invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. But the marriage is not yet consummated. We are not yet in heaven. We are still on the earth in these same bodies that we were first born with but we are promised a new body suited to our new condition when he has completed his work of salvation in us.

He doesn't make over that old person you or I were before we were saved by him, he makes us a new creature. I am a new person in Christ and so are you. We see that old nature slowly but surely being put to death. As Paul says, **(Gal 2:20 KJV) I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.**

We are called and empowered to live this new life in Christ. We would never be able to do it without His enabling grace. But let me put you in mind at this Christmas

season of that new life that is imparted through Christ and that is making you and me into that one day perfect person we must be in heaven. We are not in heaven yet. We are not perfected yet. We are perfect in our legal standing, which we call justification, but we are not perfect in our sanctification. This is the ongoing process of salvation and we are participants in it. We must struggle against sin in that old man that is not yet completely dead. We are to resist temptation. We are like diamonds in the rough; we have some rough edges that God is going to grind on until they are smoothed out, some spots and wrinkles that will have to be removed.

I remember a time when I was wearing a shirt my dear wife picked out for me and I was driving my old diesel Oldsmobile. That car used more oil than any car I have ever driven and I have to check the oil regularly. So I checked the oil while in my dress clothes. Not too smart a thing to do. Lo and behold when I finished I looked down and my shirt was spotted with that black engine oil that is very hard to remove.

Well, I changed my shirt and didn't tell Judy about the black oil spots until I had a chance to work on them with some cleaning substances. I scrubbed and rubbed and seemed to get some of the black out; then I put the shirt in the washing machine using cold water so that if the spots didn't wash out they wouldn't set in any worse and maybe a dry cleaner could get them out.

Judy was still able to find a few spots I missed. So I'm not yet done cleaning that shirt.

Sanctification is like that. We are still in need of some more scrubbing and rubbing, cleaning and polishing. We won't be perfect until we are glorified with the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven. But we are in the salvation program. We have the enablement and energy of the Holy Spirit to show us our sin and convict us of remaining sin. He leads us to repent of whatever God shows us is in error or in need of cleansing.

The process of sanctification can be compared to an iceberg, which is almost 90 percent under water. As the sun shines on the iceberg, the exposed part melts, moving the lower part upward.

In the same way, we are usually aware of only a small part of our sinfulness and need for more sanctification. We are only able to deal with some of our remaining sin at any one time. However, as the Holy Spirit continues His work in our lives revealing to us those fleshly attitudes and ways that need to be crucified and put away we will grow more and more into His likeness. We are told to be imitators of God, as beloved children. Paul wrote to the Ephesians in 4:22 - 22, **in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,**

23and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

25Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. 26Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27and do not

give the devil an opportunity. 28He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. 29Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. 30Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Eph. 5:2-5 2and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

3But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; 4and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. 5For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

This Christmas season let us again rejoice in the birth of Jesus Christ. Let us also rejoice in the new birth formed in us. He has begun a good work in us and He will complete it at the day of Jesus Christ. But knowing who He is and who we are in Him we can willingly and gladly participate in that good work he has begun in us and pray that our witness for him may be pleasing in His sight and fruitful in His service.

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