

Jesus the Savior

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[0 : 00] Lord Jesus, you came. Speak to us now from your word. Exalt your name.

Fill us with gratitude and praise for what you have done. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.
Matthew chapter one, verses 18 to 25.

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.

And her husband, Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. 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.

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us.

[1 : 35] When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. He took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son, and he called his name Jesus.

This is God's holy and authoritative word. In Western cultures, many parents choose their children's names not based on their meaning, but for other reasons, such as to preserve the name of a relative or for the way it sounds.

But in many other cultures in the world, including the Jewish culture that we find here in chapter 1 of Matthew, parents chose their names based on their meaning. And at crucial points of the Bible, God names certain individuals.

For example, in Genesis 17, 1 to 6, God renames Abram to Abraham because God will make him a father of many nations. And in Genesis 32, 28, God renames Jacob Israel because he wrestled with God to ensure, to secure a blessing that will become, and he will become the father of the nation of Israel.

So in our passage, Jesus is named after his birth, and in his name, we see clues to his identity and mission, namely that Jesus is the divine Messiah who saves his people from their sins.

[2 : 59] We'll explore that further by looking more specifically at Jesus' identity as the Christ and as God and as Savior. So we'll follow that outline. That Jesus is the Christ, he's God, and he's Savior.

So let's first look at his identity as Christ. By beginning his gospel, as we saw last week, with the genealogy of Jesus, Matthew showed us that Jesus really is the promised, the prophesied Christ, the Messiah.

He was the son of Abraham and the son of David. There was a slight problem, however, in that genealogy, because after carefully tracing Jesus' lineage from Abraham and through David to Joseph, Matthew noted in verse 16 that Joseph is the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born.

He specifically didn't say that Joseph is the father of Jesus. That was the pattern that was followed all throughout the genealogy, so-and-so, the father of so-and-so, but here he deviates from that to show us that Joseph was not Jesus' biological father.

Now, since the lineage is traced through the father, how can Jesus be the Christ if he is not a child of Joseph who is descended from King David, and the Messiah is supposed to be a son of David?

[4 : 23] So Matthew answers that question in our passage by telling us that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, and that Joseph adopted him and made him a son of David, in a sense, through that adoption.

So let's look at verses 18 to 19. It says, 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, and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. So some of you might be wondering at this point, if they were only engaged, why did Joseph need to divorce Mary?

For Jews during this time, the marriage process had two formal steps. The first stage was the betrothal. It was an agreement to marry, formalized by the exchange of the bride price in the presence of witnesses.

And after that engagement, the woman was considered legally married, legally to belong to the man. And they were referred to as husband and wife. And so if you are to, so it's not like the engagements nowadays, which is very public, but does often get broken off.

[5 : 39] The breaking off the engagement was considered a divorce, which is why after Joseph finds out that Mary is pregnant, he resolves to divorce her. So betrothal is the first stage of the marriage process, and the second stage was the actual wedding ceremony and the consummation of the marriage through physical union.

Now, we know that Joseph and Mary were at the first stage, but not yet at the second stage because verse 18 tells us that Mary was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit before they came together.

That's the second step. Before they had conjugal relations. So this tells us clearly that Mary was a virgin. She was not pregnant from union with a man.

Rather, conception was from the Holy Spirit. But Joseph, at this point of the story, is not aware of the fact that she had conceived from the Holy Spirit. And you can imagine how distressing the discovery of Mary's pregnancy would have been for Joseph.

Imagine yourself in his shoes. Here is a woman whom he loved, whom he courted, a woman who had been engaged to him, who belonged to him, and he to her, the woman he cherished, was looking forward to a lifetime of marriage with and before their wedding day, before they had enjoyed conjugal relations, he or she is pregnant.

[7 : 08] Under normal circumstances, that can only mean one thing, infidelity. She had betrayed Joseph's trust and given her body to another man, is what Joseph would have thought.

And according to Old Testament law, Deuteronomy 22, 13 to 24, a woman who was discovered not to have been a virgin at the time of her wedding, or a woman who slept with another man during her betrothal period, was to be stoned to death to purge the evil from among them.

And since under Roman rule, Jews had no right to mete out capital punishment, by the first century, the usual punishment was not death, but divorce.

So at this point, Joseph had a couple obvious choices before him. He could have hidden Mary's pregnancy to save face and just married her and then despise her for the rest of his life.

Or he could expose Mary's infidelity through a public trial and divorce her, which would have been a normal process. That would have brought great shame not only upon Mary, but also on Joseph and Mary's entire family.

[8 : 25] But Joseph opts for neither of these options. Verse 19 says, and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. The fact that he was a just man does not mean that he was merciful or considerate toward Mary.

The word just means righteous. It means to do what the law requires. And because Joseph was a just man, Joseph resolved to divorce Mary.

That was the right thing to do. The lawful thing to do. However, because he was unwilling to put her to shame, Joseph resolved to divorce her quietly.

So the conjunction translated, and there is probably better translated as an adversative, yet or but. Her husband Joseph, being a just man, yet unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

That's exactly how the New International Version translates it. It says this, 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.

[9 : 33] Joseph was a just man and yet a merciful man. He's a great guy to be named after. He had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But if Joseph actually divorced Mary, that would have been a disaster because Jesus, being the messianic son of David, depended on him being adopted legally by Joseph, who was descended from David.

So the angel of the Lord intervenes, verses 20 to 21. 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.

She will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. It was the legal responsibility of the father to name his child and in naming the child, he was acknowledging that the child is his heir.

And so that was the official process. And so we see that concept displayed in the Old Testament as well. In Isaiah 43, verse 1, what does God say to his firstborn Israel? He says, I have called you by name to the nation of Israel.

[10 : 49] I have called you by name, you are mine. It's by naming that you claim an heir as a child, as a son. And so the angel here addresses Joseph specifically as a son of David to confirm exactly what is at stake.

Nothing less than Jesus' very Davidic lineage, his messianic heritage, is at stake. And this is why Joseph's role in this birth narrative is indispensable.

So despite Joseph's reservations, the angel commands him to do this, do these things. Take Mary as your wife first and then name the son she will give birth to Jesus. I know there are some of you who have been adopted.

I think it's cool that our Savior was adopted in this way. Verses 24 to 25 tells us of Joseph's obedience by echoing the angel's commands.

It says, when Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. He took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son, and he called his name Jesus. It's by Joseph's naming and claiming Jesus as his own that Jesus officially becomes the son of David.

[11 : 59] And as we saw last week, Jesus is the one who fulfills in this way God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7, 12 to 14. I will raise up your offspring after you who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.

He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. Jesus is the one who establishes God's kingdom forever.

Jesus is the prophesied Christ. He is the king, the anointed one, the ruler. His subjects, then, we exist to honor him, to love and serve him.

Those of you who have put your faith in Jesus Christ and are therefore living, or those of you who have not done that and are now living in disobedience to God are under the tyranny of Satan. You're still under the dominion, the domain of evil, the evil one.

And that's why this world is full of rebellion. Everywhere we turn, we meet cultural forces that are hostile to God and his purposes and priorities.

[13 : 05] Everywhere we turn, we meet, we hear the name of our king, Jesus, used as a curse word. Ministers of the gospel are but of a joke, and the word of God is scorned and mocked.

But we are a people who must plant our flag and declare that we follow a different king, that we have the king, Jesus, the Christ who has come.

We're no longer under the rule of the prince of the power of the air, the evil spirit. In other words, nations and kingdoms, geopolitical entities, militaries, political parties, various philosophies and ideologies that clamor for our allegiance, that clamor for our votes and our subscriptions, our money, and our obedience, that fight for our allegiance to their flags, must recognize and hear our declaration that we have pledged allegiance to a different king.

And that we can partner with the people of this world only in so far as they are advancing the purposes and priorities of our Lord. This is something that's important for us to remember as we live as Christians.

It's Christ's priorities that must define our lives because Christ is our king and the gospel is our charter. The word of God is our constitution. Worship is our anthem.

[14 : 47] So Jesus is the Christ. He's the king that has come and he will come again to exert full authority and power over the earth. And in addition to being the Christ, Matthew tells us that Jesus is also God.

He is the incarnate God, the son of God who has taken on human flesh. This is hinted at in verses 18 and 20 where twice we are told that Jesus was conceived in Mary from the Holy Spirit.

I mean, imagine that. No wonder Joseph was hesitant to approach Mary and to have conjugal relations with her even after the wedding ceremony. Right? It said in verse 24 to 25, Joseph took his wife but knew her not until she had given birth to a son.

The word know is a biblical euphemism for sexual intimacy. For example, Genesis 4 once says, Now Adam knew Eve, his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain.

Joseph refused to know his wife even when it was appropriate for him to do so until she had given birth to Jesus. Matthew is making it extra clear that Jesus is not a child of Joseph and Mary's sexual union.

[15 : 57] It's not hard to understand why Joseph was apprehensive about approaching Mary in this way. This virgin is pregnant from the Holy Spirit. Something sacred has taken place inside her.

Something holy has happened to her. Something divine is in her womb. How can I, a mere man, Joseph the carpenter, approach her and have conjugal relations?

Some people will say that it is impossible for a man who is lawfully wedded to a wife to be sexually inactive for such an extended period of time, but Joseph's example teaches us that self-control is possible.

And notice how delicate and restrained Matthew is in his description of Mary's conception. Ancient Greco-Roman mythology is full of lurid tales of Greek and Roman gods impregnating human women, thereby producing demigods who are partly God and partly human, inferior deities.

But such myths have more in common with the disobedient angelic beings taking human wives for themselves and giving birth to the Nephilim in Genesis 6, and it's quite far removed from this account of Mary's conception.

[17 : 15] Matthew's unadorned account of Mary's conception is a stark contrast to these elaborate mythologies. Look at how he so carefully avoids any insinuation of sexual activity.

Rather, he says, the angel simply says, that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. I'll add that there's no mention here of the Catholic doctrine of immaculate conception, claiming that Mary was born without original sin and never sinned personally.

Mary was not sinless. Jesus is the only sinless human. In fact, to claim that Mary was sinless and that only a sinless woman could give birth to Jesus runs in the face of Jesus' genealogy, which we looked at last week, which showed that Jesus is descended from incestualists and murderers and adulterers and idolaters child sacrificers and prostitutes, among other things, to show that Jesus really did take on humanity with all its sinful history, its sordid history upon himself.

And that in his saving grace, that Jesus really did and really embraced sinners and saved them by dying on the cross for them. There's also no hint of the Catholic doctrine of Mary's perpetual virginity, the claim that Mary remained a virgin for the rest of her life.

Verse 25 does not say that Joseph never slept with Mary for the rest of her life. It says, Joseph knew Mary not until she had given birth to a son, which implies that after Mary gave birth to Jesus, Joseph and Mary assumed normal marital relations like any couple.

[19 : 04] people. That's why later in chapter 13, verse 55-56, Matthew notes that Jesus had brothers and sisters. But Jesus was set apart from all of them.

He was conceived like no other human being in history because even though he was truly man, a son of Mary, he wasn't merely a man, he was conceived from the Holy Spirit.

And the prophecy from Isaiah 7-14, which Matthew cites in verses 22-23 confirms this reality. Matthew is known for often citing Old Testament scriptures and then demonstrating how Jesus fulfilled it.

He does this over 10 times throughout his Gospels and five of them occur right here in the birth narrative. And so sometimes people call this the formula quotations. It's the fulfillment formula quotations.

So he'll show us, we'll see these throughout chapters one and two. But the one that he has in view here is Isaiah 7-14. Read verses 22-23 with me.

[20 : 11] All this took place to fulfill what the Lord has spoken by the prophet. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us.

The word translated virgin here refers in scripture to a young woman of marriageable age that is not married. So someone who has not known a man sexually.

For example, in Genesis 24-43, Abraham's servant who is searching for marriageable women for Abraham's son Isaac asks God specifically to reveal to him the virgin that he has prepared for Isaac.

I don't have the time to get into how this prophecy was fulfilled in the immediate context of Isaiah, but this prophecy finds its ultimate fulfillment in the coming of Jesus.

And it predicts the nature of Jesus' birth with remarkable specificity and precision. The virgin shall conceive and bear a son.

[21 : 16] And here's another name by which Jesus is known, Emmanuel, which means God with us. Because Jesus is the son of God himself, because Jesus is conceived from the Holy Spirit, when Jesus is born, God is with us.

Jesus is not only fully man, but he is fully God. He's the incarnate God, the God who has taken on human flesh. And this is why Jesus does not stop people from worshiping him throughout his lifetime on earth.

All pious people, all godly people, in case you didn't know this, if people start bowing down to you and worshiping you, you're supposed to stop them. Because you're not supposed to be worshiped.

Acts 10, 24 to 26, Cornelius falls at the feet of Peter, worships him, lifts him up, saying, Peter lifts him up, saying, stand up, I too am a man.

Don't worship a man. Even angels refuse to be worshiped. In Revelation 22, verses 8 to 9, when John falls and worships at the feet of an angel, he says to John, you must not do that.

[22 : 42] I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers, the prophets, and with those who keep the word of this book. Worship God. The great apostle Peter refuses to be worshiped.

Even the angels refuse to be worshiped. And here is Jesus throughout his life. People bow down to him and worship him and he receives it.

Matthew 2, verse 11, the wise men come. They fall down and worship him. Matthew 14, 32, after Jesus walks on the water and calms the wind, he says that his disciples worshipped him, saying, truly, you are the son of God.

Jesus does not correct them. In Matthew 28, verse 9, when Mary Magdalene and the other Mary that's with her visiting Jesus' empty tomb encounter Jesus, the resurrected Jesus, he says that they came up and took hold of his feet and worshipped him.

In Matthew 28, verse 17, it says that Jesus' eleven disciples, when they saw the resurrected Jesus, they worshipped him. And that is right. Because Jesus is God.

[24 : 07] If he were not God, that would be idolatrous. It would be the height of human pride and presumption to receive worship. But Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us.

That's why it's not only appropriate, but necessary. It is incumbent upon us to worship him. So Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, and not just a human one.

He is the divine Messiah. And that brings us to my third point that Matthew tells about Jesus, that he is Savior. The angel who appears to Joseph says in verse 21, Mary will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus.

For he will save his people from their sins. The name Jesus means the Lord saves. And since Jesus is Lord, Emmanuel, God with us, it is Jesus himself who will save his people from their sins.

This is wonderful. It's wonderful that he's named Jesus, isn't it? Jesus could have been named a lot of other things.

[25 : 32] He could have been named Neziah, the one who conquers. He could have been named Daniel, the God who judges.

He could have been named a lot of other things. But his name is Jesus. the one who saves.

One who will save his people from their sins. The Jewish people were familiar with political subjugation and military conquest.

I mentioned that they were conquered and oppressed by many foreign nations, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans at the time of Jesus. But what caused their subjection and their oppression was their own sin and idolatry.

Because they were unfaithful to God. Because they were an adulterous people. Because they were disloyal and treasonous toward God, their king. They experienced the curse of the covenant.

- [26 : 46] And so the obstacle that God's people faced was far bigger than the Roman Empire. They needed nothing less than to be saved from their sins.

In our day too, we have our own share of suffering and oppression. We want to be saved from a housing crisis, from a climate catastrophe, from a global pandemic, from economic depression, from social injustices, from world hunger, from a mental illness epidemic.

There's a lot of things we want to be saved from. But there is one thing that is more urgent and more pressing and consequential than any of those things. And that is that we must be saved from our sins.

Because sin is the cause, the root of our alienation from God. Sin is the reason for people's eternal damnation. Sin is the root of all the diseases and disasters and deaths that have entered our world.

sin is the reason for the hostility and hatred between peoples. Do you give appropriate attention to dealing with the sins in your own life?

- [28 : 07] Or are you more preoccupied with your suffering, with your external circumstances? sickness and sufferings do not separate people from God.

But sin does. And sin is not something we can never, sin is not something we can ever contain by quarantining.

Sin hides. Sin lurks within us. Sin spreads. Sin infects. Sin kills. Not only physically, but even more gravely, spiritually.

In his book of the mortification of sin, 17th century English theologian John Owen says this, Do you mortify sin? Do you kill sin? Do you make it your daily work?

Be always at it whilst you live. Seize not a day from this work. Be killing sin, or it will be killing you. For those of you who are not yet followers of Jesus, what is your solution for sin?

- [29 : 23] Do you have a way making atonement for sin? Do you have a way of earning forgiveness from God, of being reconciled to Him?

Romans 6, 23 tells us that the wages of sin is death. Hebrews 9, 22 tells us that without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.

The inescapable punishment for sin is death. And the holy wrath of God cannot be appeased without the shedding of blood. But the good news for all of us is that because God so loved us, He sent His son, only son, His only son named Jesus to save His people from their sins.

Jesus does this by shedding not our blood, but His own blood on the cross. Jesus dies in our place as the substitutionary sacrifice is by His death that He takes, makes atonement for sin, and He is raised from the dead to show us one sin for all that He has defeated sin.

that all who trust in Him can be guaranteed resurrection, eternal life, be united with Jesus through faith.

- [30 : 47] That was Jesus' mission on earth. Jesus did many good works during His time on earth. He healed the sick, He even raised the dead, but Jesus' central mission was not any of those things.

It was to give His life as a ransom for many, as Matthew 20, 28 says. It was to save His people from their sins, Matthew 1, 21.

Likewise, then, we as Christians should love our neighbors and do many good works wherever we are, in the classrooms, in the libraries, in the labs, in the courts, in the banks, in the offices, in the studios, in the homes, in the marketplaces.

We should abound in good works, do many of these good works, but the central mission of the church is to proclaim the name of Jesus, is to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

So let's not lose sight of that mission that the Lord Jesus has given us. Let's not forget the good news that Jesus is the divine Messiah who saves people from their sins and declare that news to all nations to the end of the earth.

[32 : 03] Let's pray. God, we thank you for giving your son the name Jesus.

it's a name we could say to ourselves over and over again.

We could sing the praises of that name. That name can be on our lips all day long, every day.

Amen. Amen. And it would not lose its sweetness. Because you have saved us through Jesus from our sins.

Lord, we praise you. Help us to remember that. To live in light of that.

[33 : 15] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.