

“The Deity Of Jesus Christ”

Matthew 1:18

February 4, 2024

INTRO: What are *the most mind-blowing experiences in your life?*

- Think long & hard... thru your messes & miracles
- What has left you in either painful or joyous *AWE*
- Most say: big stuff... betrayals... & baby's birth(s)
- Me: miraculous grace & missional empowerment
- How about you? Who or what puts you in AWE?

T/S: *Today, my pastoral & missional goal is to introduce and/or affirm an AWE-inspiring & eternally-defining truth that exemplifies the core of Christian theology. Here lies the heart of Creator-Christ's truth in love!*

PRAYER

CONTEXT:

- We are studying the Gospel of Matthew: m M m
- We have spent 4 sermons on Christ's genealogy
- Today we shift to the coming of Creator Christ!

BIG IDEA: He IS The I AM!

PREVIEW:

1. Christ's **PERSON**
2. Christ's **PROCESS**
3. Christ's **POWER**

TEXT:

Matthew 1:18

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 by/from the Holy Spirit.

I. Christ's **PERSON**

- A. *Jesus* (His name means: "YAHWEH saves!")
- B. *Christ* (Matthew 1:1; Genesis 1:1; John 1:1)
- C. *Son of Mary* (The seed of Eve from Genesis 3:15!)
- D. *Son of David... Son of Abraham* (Matt. 1:1 & Heb. 1:1)
- E. *Son of GOD! If Jesus is not God, there is no Gospel!* ·JDP

VIDEO #1: *Is Jesus Divine?* (3:00)

The Person of God is proven by the process of God! - JDP

II. Christ's **PROCESS**

Matthew 1:18

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 by/from the Holy Spirit.

A. **NOT** natural

VIDEO #2: *MacArthur On Christ's Incarnation* (3:25)

B. **BUT** supernatural

VIDEO #3: *3-Min. Theology: What Is The Incarnation* (3:30)

Let's walk thru the con-text of the broader passage...

Matthew 1:18-25... DIVINITY DECLARED!

18Now 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**. 19And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. 20But 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**. 21She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for **he will save his people from their sins**." 22All 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). 24When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, 25but **knew her not** until she had given birth to a son. And he **called his name Jesus**.

*The Person of God is proven by the process of God! AND...
the process of God is proven by the Person of God.*

– JDP

VIDEO #4: *Is The Deity Of Christ Biblical?* (5:45)

III. Christ's **POWER**

Matthew 1:18

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way... by/from the Holy Spirit.

*The Person of God is proven by the process of God! AND...
the process of God is proven by the Person of God... AND
BOTH the Person & Process of God are proven
by the POWER of God!*

- JDP

Matthew 1:18

the birth... took place... by/from the Holy Spirit.

In the Old Testament, God revealed His name to Moses: "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you'" ([Exodus 3:14](#)). Thus, in Judaism, "[I AM](#)" is unquestionably understood as a name for God. Whenever Jesus made an "I am" statement in which He claimed attributes of deity, He was identifying Himself as God.

Here are the seven metaphorical "I am" statements found in John's gospel:

"I am the bread of life" ([John 6:35](#), [41](#), [48](#), [51](#)). In this chapter,

Jesus establishes a pattern that continues through John's gospel—Jesus makes a statement about who He is, and He backs it up with something He does. In this case, Jesus states that He is the bread of life just after He had fed the 5,000 in the wilderness.

At the same time, He contrasts what He can do with what Moses had done for their ancestors: "Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die" (vv. 49–50).

"I am the light of the world" ([John 8:12](#); [9:5](#)). This second of

Jesus' "I am" statements in John's gospel comes right before He heals a man born blind. Jesus not only says He is the light; He proves it. Jesus' words and actions echo [Genesis 1:3](#), "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."

"I am the door" ([John 10:7](#) and [9](#), ESV). This "I am" statement stresses that no one can enter the kingdom of heaven by any other means than Christ Himself. Jesus' words in this passage are couched in the imagery of a sheepfold. He is the one and only way to enter the fold. "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber" (verse 1, ESV).

"I am the good shepherd" ([John 10:11](#), [14](#)). With this "I am" statement, Jesus portrays His great love and care. He is the One who willingly protects His flock even to the point of death (verses 11 and 15). When Jesus called Himself the good shepherd, He unmistakably took for Himself one of God's titles in the Old Testament: "The Lord is my shepherd" ([Psalm 23:1](#)).

"I am the resurrection and the life" ([John 11:25](#)). Jesus made this "I am" statement immediately before raising Lazarus from the dead. Again, we see that Jesus' teaching was not just empty talk; when He made a claim, He substantiated it with action. He holds "the keys of death and the grave" ([Revelation 1:18](#), [NLT](#)). In raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus showed how He can fulfill Yahweh's promise to ancient Israel: "[God's] dead shall live; their bodies shall rise" ([Isaiah 26:19](#), [ESV](#)). Apart from Jesus, there is neither resurrection nor eternal life.

"I am the way and the truth and the life" ([John 14:6](#)). This powerful "I am" statement of Christ's is packed with meaning. Jesus is not merely one way among many ways to God; He is the only way. Scripture said that "The very essence of [God's] words is truth" ([Psalm 119:160](#), [NLT](#)), and here is Jesus proclaiming that He is the truth—confirming His identity as the Word of God (see [John 1:1](#), [14](#)). And Jesus alone is the source of life; He is the Creator and Sustainer of all life and the Giver of eternal life.

"I am the true vine" ([John 15:1, 5](#)). The final metaphorical "I am" statement in the Gospel of John emphasizes the sustaining power of Christ. We are the branches, and He is the vine. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit unless it is joined in vital union with the vine, only those who are joined to Christ and receive their power from Him produce fruit in the Christian life.

There are two more "[I am](#)" statements of Jesus in the Gospel of John. These are not metaphors; rather, they are declarations of God's name, as applied by Jesus to Himself. The first instance comes as Jesus responds to a complaint by the Pharisees. ***"I tell you the truth," Jesus says, "before Abraham was born, I am!"*** ([John 8:58](#)).

The verbs Jesus uses are in stark contrast with each other: Abraham was, but I am. There is no doubt that the Jews understood Jesus' claim to be the eternal God incarnate, because they took up stones to kill Him (verse 59).

The second instance of Jesus applying to Himself the name / AM comes in the Garden of Gethsemane. When the mob came to arrest Jesus, He asked them whom they sought. They said, "Jesus of Nazareth," and ***Jesus replied,***

"I am he" ([John 18:4-5](#)). Then something strange happened: ***"When Jesus said, 'I am he,' they drew back and fell to the ground"*** (verse 6).

Perhaps explaining the mob's reaction is the fact that the word *he* has been provided by our English translators. Jesus simply said, "I am." Applying God's covenant name to Himself, Jesus demonstrated His power over His foes and showed that His surrender to them was entirely voluntary (see [John 10:17–18; 19:11](#)).

– **GotQuestions.org**

REVIEW:

He IS The I AM!

Christ's **PERSON, PROCESS, POWER** are His **PROOF!**

CLOSE:

VIDEO #5: *Ludy's "He Is" – Names of God* (10:40)

PRAYER

WORSHIP: *This Is Our God & This Is Amazing Grace*

Jesus was not related to Joseph by blood, but in Luke, chapter 1, there is a genealogy of Mary, and Mary also came from David's line. Mary gave Jesus the royal blood, Joseph gave Him the royal right, because the royal right always came from the father. – John MacArthur

The Birth of Jesus Christ

18Now 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.

The Expositor's Commentary: D.A. Carson

The Birth of Jesus (1:18–25)

Two matters call for brief remarks: the historicity of the Virgin Birth (more properly, virginal conception), and the theological emphases surrounding this theme in Matthew 1–2 and its relation to the NT.

First, the historicity of the Virgin Birth is questioned for many reasons.

1. The accounts in Matthew and Luke are apparently independent and highly divergent. This argues for creative forces in the church making up all or parts of the stories in order to explain the person of Jesus. But the stories have long been shown to be compatible (Machen), even mutually complementary. Moreover literary independence of Matthew and Luke at this point does not demand the conclusion that the two evangelists were ignorant of the other's content. Yet if they were, their differences suggest to some the strength of mutual compatibility without

collusion. Matthew focuses largely on Joseph, Luke on Mary. R.E. Brown (*Birth of Messiah*, p. 35) does not accept this because he finds it inconceivable that Joseph could have told his story without mentioning the Annunciation or that Mary could have passed on her story without mentioning the flight to Egypt. True enough, though it does not follow that the evangelists were bound to include all they knew. It is hard to imagine how the Annunciation would have fit in very well with Matthew's themes. Moreover we have already observed that Matthew was prepared to omit things he knew in order to present his chosen themes coherently and concisely.

2. Some simply discount the supernatural. Goulder (p. 33) says Matthew made the stories up; Schweizer (*Matthew*) contrasts the ancient world in which virgin birth was (allegedly) an accepted notion with modern scientific limitations on what is possible. But the antithesis is greatly exaggerated: thoroughgoing rationalists were not uncommon in the first century (e.g., Lucretius); and millions of modern Christians, scientifically aware, find little difficulty in believing in the Virgin Birth or in a God who is capable of intervening miraculously in what is, after all, his own creation. More important, Matthew's point in these chapters is surely that the Virgin Birth and attendant circumstances were most extraordinary. **Only here does he mention Magi; and dreams and visions as a means of guidance are by no means common in the NT (though even here one wonders whether Western Christianity could learn something from Third-World Christianity).**

Certainly Matthew's account is infinitely more sober than the wildly speculative stories preserved in the apocryphal gospels (e.g., *Protevangelium of James* 12:3–20:4; cf. Hennecke, 1:381–85). R.E. Brown (*Birth of Messiah*) accepts the historicity of the Virgin Birth but discounts the historicity of the visit of the Magi and related events. But if he can swallow the Virgin Birth, it is difficult to see why he strains out the Magi. (See the useful book of Manuel Miguens, *The Virgin Birth: An Evaluation of Scriptural Evidence* [Westminster, Md.: Christian Classics, 1975].)

3. Many point to artificialities in the narrative: e.g., the structure of the genealogy or the delay in mentioning Bethlehem as the place of birth (Hill, *Matthew*). We have noted, however, that though Matthew's arrangement of the genealogy gives us more than a mere table of

names and dates, it does not tell us less. **More than any of the synoptists, Matthew delights in topical arrangements. But that does not make his accounts less than historical.** We are not shut up to the extreme choice historical chronicles or theological invention!

Matthew does not mention Bethlehem in 1:18–25 because it does not suit any of his themes.

In chapter 2, however, as Tatum has shown (W.B. Tatum, Jr., “The Matthean Infancy Narratives: Their Form, Structure, and Relation to the Theology of the First Evangelist” [Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1967]), one of the themes unifying Matthew’s narrative is Jesus’ “geographical origins”; and therefore Bethlehem is introduced.

4. It has become increasingly common to identify the literary genre in Matthew 1–2 as “midrash” or “midrashic haggadah” and to conclude that these stories are not intended to be taken literally (e.g., with widely differing perspectives, Gundry, *Matthew*; Goulder; Davies, *Setting*, pp. 66–67). There is nothing fundamentally objectionable in the suggestion that some stories in the Bible are not meant to be taken as fact; parables are such stories. The problem is the slipperiness of the categories (cf. Introduction: section 12. b; and cf. further on 2:16–18). If the genre has unambiguous formal characteristics, there should be little problem in recognizing them. But this is far from being so; the frequently cited parallels boast as many formal differences (compared with Matt 1–2) as similarities. To cite one obvious example: Jewish Midrashim (in the technical, fourth-century sense) present stories as illustrative material by way of comment on a running OT text. By contrast Matthew 1–2 offers no running OT text: the continuity of the text depends on the story-line; and the OT quotations, taken from a variety of OT books, could be removed without affecting that continuity (cf. esp. M.J. Down, “The Matthean Birth Narratives,” *ExpT* 90 [1978–79]: 51–52; and France, *Jesus*; see on 2:16–18).

R.E. Brown (*Birth of Messiah*, pp. 557–63) argues convincingly that Matthew 1–2 is not midrash. Yet he thinks the sort of person who could invent stories to explain OT texts (midrash) could also invent stories to explain Jesus. Matthew 1–2, though not itself midrash, is at least midrashic. That may be so. Unfortunately, not only does the statement fall short of proof, but the appeal to a known and recognizable literary genre is thus lost. So we have no objective basis for arguing that Matthew’s first readers would readily detect his midrashic methods. Of course, if “midrashic” means that Matthew intends to present a panorama of OT allusions and themes these chapters are certainly midrashic: in that sense the studies of Goulder, Gundry, Davies, and others have served us well, by warning us against a too-rigid pattern of linear thought. But used in this sense, it is not at all clear that “midrashic material” is necessarily unhistorical.

5. A related objection insists that these stories “are not primarily didactic” but “kerygmatic” (Davies, *Setting*, p. 67), that they are intended as proclamations about the truth of the person of Jesus but not as factual information. The rigid dichotomy between proclamation and teaching is not as defensible as when C.H. Dodd first proposed it (see on 3:1). More important, we may ask just what the proclamation intended to proclaim. If the stories express the appreciation of the first Christians for Jesus, precisely what did they appreciate? On the face of it, Matthew in chapters 1–2 is not saying something vague, such as, “Jesus was so

wonderful there must be a touch of the divine about him,” but rather, “Jesus is the promised Messiah of the line of David, and he is ‘Emmanuel,’ ‘God with us,’ because his birth was the result of God’s supernatural intervention, making Jesus God’s very Son; and his early months were stamped with strange occurrences which, in the light of subsequent events, weave a coherent pattern of theological truths and historical attestation to divine providence in the matter.”

6. Some argue that the (to us) artificial way these chapters cite the OT shows a small concern for historicity. The reverse argument is surely more impressive: **If the events of Matthew 1–2 do not relate easily to the OT texts, this attests their historical credibility; for no one in his right mind would invent “fulfillment” episodes problematic to the texts being fulfilled.** The fulfillment texts, though difficult, do fit into a coherent pattern (cf. Introduction section 11. b), and below on 1:22–23). More importantly, their presence shows that **Matthew sees Jesus as one who fulfills the OT.**

This not only sets the stage for some of Matthew’s most important themes; it also means that Matthew is working from a perspective on salvation history that depends on before and after, prophecy

and fulfillment, type and antitype, relative ignorance and progressive revelation.

This has an important bearing on our discussion of midrash, because whatever else Jewish midrash may be, it is not related to salvation history or fulfillment schemes. Add to the foregoing considerations the fact that, wherever in chapters 1–2 he can be tested against the known background of Herod the Great, Matthew proves reliable (some details below).

There is a good case for treating chapters 1–2 as both history and theology.

2nd, *the following theological considerations require mention.*

1. Often it is argued or even assumed (e.g., Dunn, *Christology*, pp. 49–50), that the concepts “virginal” conception and “preexistence” applied to the one person Jesus are mutually exclusive. Certainly it is difficult to see how a divine being could become genuinely human by means of an ordinary birth. Nevertheless **there is no logical or theological reason to think that virginal conception and preexistence preclude each other.**

2. Related to this is the theory of R.E. Brown (*Birth of Messiah*, pp. 140–41), who proposes a retrojected Christology. The early Christians, he argues, first focused attention on Jesus’ resurrection, which they perceived as the moment of his installation into his messianic role. Then with further reflection they pushed back the time of his installation to his baptism, then to his birth, and finally to a theory regarding his preexistence. There may be some truth to the scheme. Just as the first Christians did not come to an instant grasp of the relationship between law and gospel (as the Book of Acts amply demonstrates), so their understanding of Jesus doubtless matured and deepened with time and further revelation. But the theory often depends on a rigid and false reconstruction of early church history (cf. Introduction, section 2) and dates the documents, against other evidence, on the basis of this reconstruction. Worse, in the hands of some it transforms the understanding of the disciples into historical reality: that is, Jesus had no preexistence and was not virgin born, but these things were progressively predicated of him by his followers. Gospel evidence for Jesus’ self-perception as preexistent is then facetiously dismissed as late and inauthentic. The method is of doubtful worth.

Matthew, despite his strong insistence on Jesus’ virginal conception, includes several veiled allusions to Jesus’ preexistence; and there is no

reason to think he found the two concepts incompatible. Moreover R.H. Fuller ("The Conception/ Birth of Jesus as a Christological Moment," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 1 [1978]: 37–52) has shown that the virginal conception-birth motif in the NT is not infrequently connected with the "sending of the Son" motif, which (contra Fuller) in many places already presupposes the preexistence of the Son.

3. **We are dealing in these chapters with King Messiah who comes to his people in covenant relationship.** The point is well established, if occasionally exaggerated, by Nolan, who speaks of the "Royal Covenant Christology."

4. It is remarkable that the title "Son of God," important later in Matthew, is not found in Matthew 1–2. It may lurk behind 2:15. Still it would be false to argue that Matthew does not connect the Virgin Birth with the title "Son of God."

Matthew 1–2 serves as a finely wrought prologue for every major theme in the Gospel.

We must therefore understand Matthew to be telling us that if Jesus is physically Mary's son and legally Joseph's son, at an even more fundamental level he is God's Son; and in this Matthew agrees with Luke's statement (**Luke 1:35**).

The dual paternity, one legal and one divine, is unambiguous

(cf. Cyrus H. Gordon, "Paternity at Two Levels," JBL 96 [1977]: 101).

18 The word translated **"birth"** is, in the best MSS (cf. Notes), the word translated **"genealogy"** in **1:1**. Maier prefers "history" of Jesus Christ, taking

the phrase to refer to the rest of the Gospel. Yet it is best to take the word to mean “birth” or “origins” in the sense of the beginnings of Jesus Messiah. Even a well-developed christology would not want to read the man “Jesus” and his name back into a preexistent state (cf. on 1:1).

The pledge to be married was legally binding. Only a divorce writ could break it, and infidelity at that stage was considered adultery (cf. Deut 22:23–24; Moore, *Judaism*, 2:121–22).

The marriage itself took place when the groom (already called “husband,” Mt 1:19) ceremoniously took the bride home (see on 25:1–13). Mary is here introduced unobtrusively. Though comparing the Gospel accounts gives us a picture of her, she does not figure largely in Matthew.

“Before they came together” (*prin ē synelthein autous*) **occasionally refers in classical Greek to sexual intercourse** (LSJ, p. 1712); in the other thirty instances of *synerchomai* in the NT, there is, however, no sexual overtone. But here sexual union is included, occurring at the formal marriage when the “wife” moved in with her “husband.” Only then was sexual intercourse proper. **The phrase affirms that Mary’s pregnancy was discovered while she was still betrothed, and the context presupposes that both Mary and Joseph had been chaste** (cf. McHugh, pp. 157–63; and for the customs of the day, M *Kiddushin* [“Betrothals”] and M *Ketuboth* [“Marriage Deeds”]).

That Mary was “found” to be with child does not suggest a surreptitious attempt at concealment (“found out”) but only that her pregnancy became obvious. This pregnancy came about through the Holy Spirit (even more prominent in Luke’s birth narratives).

There is no hint of pagan deity-human coupling in crassly physical terms. Instead, the power of the Lord, manifest in the Holy Spirit who was expected to be active in the Messianic Age, miraculously brought about the conception.

The peculiar Greek expression in this verse allows several interpretations. There are **three important ones**.

1. Because Joseph, knowing about the virginal conception, was a just man and had no desire to bring the matter out in the open (i.e., to divulge this miraculous conception), he felt unworthy to continue his plans to marry one so highly favored and planned to withdraw (so Gundry, *Matthew*; McHugh, pp. 164–72; Schlatter). This assumes that Mary told Joseph about the conception. Nevertheless **the natural way to read vv. 18–19 is that Joseph learned of his betrothed’s condition when it became unmistakable, not when she told him**. Moreover the angel’s reason for Joseph to proceed with the marriage (v. 20) assumes (contra Zerwick, par. 477) that Joseph did not know about the virginal conception.

2. Because Joseph was a just man, and because he did not want to expose Mary to public disgrace, he proposed a quiet divorce. The problem with this is that “just” (NIV, “righteous”) is not defined according to OT law but is taken in the sense of merciful, not given to passionate vengeance, or even nice (cf. 1 Sam 24:17). But this is not its normal sense. Strictly speaking justice conceived in Mosaic prescriptions demanded some sort of action.

3. **Because he was a righteous man, Joseph therefore could not in conscience marry Mary who was now thought to be unfaithful. And because such a marriage would have been a tacit admission of his own guilt, and also because he was unwilling to expose her to the disgrace of public divorce, Joseph therefore chose a quieter way, permitted by the law itself. The full rigor of the law might have led to Mary’s stoning, though that was rarely carried out in the first century. Still, a public divorce was possible, though Joseph was apparently unwilling to expose Mary to such shame. The law also allowed for private divorce before two witnesses** (Num 5:11–31 interpreted as in M *Sotah* 1:1–5; cf. David Hill, “A Note on Matthew i. 19,” *ExpT* 76 [1964–65]: 133–34; rather similar, A. Tosato, “Joseph, Being a Just Man (Matt 1:19),” *CBQ* 41 [1979]: 547–51). That was what Joseph purposed. It would leave both his righteousness (his conformity to the law) and his compassion intact.

Joseph tried to solve his dilemma in what seemed to him the best way possible. Only then did God intervene with a dream.

Dreams as means of divine communication in the NT are concentrated in Matthew's prologue (1:20; 2:2, 13, 19, 22; elsewhere, possibly 27:19; Acts 2:17). An "angel of the Lord" (four times in the prologue: Mt 1:20, 24; 2:13, 19) calls to mind divine messengers in past ages (e.g., Gen 16:7–14; 22:11–18; Exod 3:2–4:16), in which it was not always clear whether the heavenly "messenger" (the meaning of angelos) was a manifestation of Yahweh. They most commonly appeared as men.

We must not read medieval paintings into the word "angel" or the stylized cherubim of Revelation 4:6–8. **The focus is on God's gracious intervention and the messenger's private communication, not on the details of angelology** and their panoramic sweeps of history common in Jewish apocalyptic literature (Bonnard).

The angel's opening words, "Joseph son of David," ties this pericope to the preceding genealogy, maintains interest in the theme of the Davidic Messiah, and, from Joseph's perspective, alerts him to the significance of the role he is to play.

The prohibition, **"Do not be afraid,"** confirms that Joseph had already decided on his course when God intervened. He was to **"take" Mary home** as his wife—an expression primarily reflecting marriage customs of the day but not excluding sexual

intercourse (cf. TDNT, 4:11–14, for other uses of the verb)— **because Mary’s pregnancy was the direct action of the Holy Spirit** (a reason that makes nonsense of the attempt by James Lagrand [“How Was the Virgin Mary ‘like a man’ ...? A Note on Mt i 18b and Related Syrian Christian Texts,” *NovTest* 22 (1980): 97–107] to make the reference to the Holy Spirit in 1:18, *ek pneumatos hagiou* [“through the Holy Spirit”], mean that Mary brought forth, “as a man, by will”).

21

It was no doubt divine grace that solicited Mary’s cooperation before the conception and Joseph’s cooperation only after it. Here Joseph is drawn into the mystery of the Incarnation. In patriarchal times either a mother (Gen 4:25) or a father (Gen 4:26; 5:3; cf. R.E. Brown, *Birth of Messiah*, p. 130) could name a child. **According to Luke 1:31, Mary was told Jesus’ name; but Joseph was told both name and reason for it.**

The Greek is literally “you will call his name Jesus,”

strange in both English and Greek. This is not only a Semitism (BDF, par. 157 [2]—the expression recurs in Mt 1:23, 25; Luke 1:13, 31) but also uses the future indicative (*kaleseis*, lit., “you will call”) with imperatival force—hence NIV, “You are to give him the name Jesus.” This construction is very rare in the NT, except where the LXX is being cited; the effect is to give the verse a strong OT nuance.

“Jesus” (*lēsous*) is the Greek form of “Joshua” (cf. Gr. of Acts 7:45; Heb 4:8), which, whether in the long form *yēhōšuaʿ* (“Yahweh is salvation,” Exod 24:13) or in one of the short forms, e.g., *yēšûaʿ* (“Yahweh saves,” Neh 7:7), identifies Mary’s Son as the one who brings Yahweh’s promised eschatological salvation.

There are several Joshuas in the OT, at least two of them not very significant (1 Sam 6:14; 2 Kings 23:8). Two others, however, are used in the NT as types of Christ: Joshua, successor to Moses and the one who led the people into the Promised Land (and a type of Christ in Hebrew chapters 3–4), and Joshua the high priest, contemporary of Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2; 3:2–9; Neh 7:7), “the Branch” who builds the temple of the Lord (Zech 6:11–13). But instead of referring to

either of these, the angel explains the significance of the name by referring to

Psalm 130:8: “He [Yahweh] himself will redeem Israel from all their sins” (cf. Gundry, *Use of OT*, pp. 127–28).

There was much Jewish expectation of a Messiah who would “redeem” Israel from Roman tyranny and even purify his people, whether by fiat or appeal to law (e.g., Ps Sol 17). But there was no expectation that the Davidic Messiah would give his own life as a ransom (20:28) to save his people from their sins.

The verb “save” can refer to deliverance from physical danger (8:25), disease (9:21–22), or even death (24:22); in the NT it commonly refers to the comprehensive salvation inaugurated by Jesus that will be consummated at his return.

Here it focuses on what is central, viz., salvation from sins; for in the biblical perspective sin is the basic (if not always the immediate) cause of all other calamities. This verse therefore orients the reader to the fundamental purpose of Jesus’ coming and the essential nature of the reign he inaugurates as King Messiah, heir of David’s throne (cf. Ridderbos, pp. 193ff.).

Though to Joseph “his people” would be the Jews, even Joseph would understand from the OT that some Jews fell under God’s judgment, while others became a godly remnant. In any event, it is not long before Matthew says that both John the Baptist (3:9) and Jesus (8:11) picture Gentiles joining with the godly remnant to become disciples of the Messiah and members of “his people” (see on 16:18; cf. Gen 49:10; Titus 2:13–14; Rev 14:4).

The words “his people” are therefore full of meaning that is progressively unpacked as the Gospel unfolds. They refer to “Messiah’s people.”

22

Although most EV conclude the angel’s remarks at the end of v. 21, there is good reason to think

that they continue to the end of **v. 23**, or at least to the end of the word “**Immanuel.**”

This particular fulfillment formula occurs only three times in Matthew: here; 21:4; 26:56. In the last it is natural to take it as part of Jesus’ reported speech (cf. 26:55); and this is possible, though less likely, in 21:4. **Matthew’s patterns are fairly consistent. So it is not unnatural to extend the quotation to the end of 1:23 as well.** (JB recognizes Matthew’s consistency by ending Jesus’ words in 26:55, making 26:56 Matthew’s remark!) This is more convincing when we recall that only these three fulfillment formulas use the perfect *gegonen* (NIV, “took place”) instead of the expected aorist. Some take the verb as an instance of a perfect standing for an aorist (so BDF, par. 343, but this is a disputed classification). Others think it means that the event “stands recorded” in the abiding Christian tradition (McNeile; Moule, *Idiom Book*, p. 15); still others take it as a stylistic indicator that Matthew himself introduced the fulfillment passage (Rothfuchs, pp. 33–36). But if we hold that Matthew presents the angel as saying the words, then the perfect may enjoy its normal force: “all this has taken place” (cf. esp. Fenton; cf. also Stendahl, Peake; B. Weiss, *Das Matthäus-Evangelium* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1898]; Zahn).

R.E. Brown (*Birth of Messiah*, p. 144, n. 31) objects that nowhere in Scripture does an angel cite Scripture in this fashion; but, equally, nowhere in Scripture is there a virgin birth in this fashion. Matthew knew that Satan can cite Scripture (4:6–7); he may not have thought it strange if an angel does. Broadus’s objection, that the angel would in that case be anticipating an event that has not yet occurred, and this is strange when cast in fulfillment language, lacks weight; for the conception has occurred, and the pregnancy has become well advanced, even if the birth has not yet taken place. **Joseph needs to know at this stage that “all this took place” to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet.** The weightiest argument is the perfect tense.

The last clause is phrased with exquisite care, literally, “the word spoken by [*hypo*] the Lord through [*dia*] the prophet.” The prepositions make a distinction between the mediate and the intermediate agent (RHG, p. 636), presupposing a view of Scripture like that in 2 Peter 1:21.

Matthew uses the verb “to fulfill” (*plēroō*) primarily in his own fulfillment formulas (Mt 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:56; 27:9; cf. 26:54) but also in a few other contexts (3:15; 5:17; 13:48; 23:32). (On Matthew’s understanding of fulfillment and on the origins of his fulfillment texts, cf. 5:17–20 and Introduction, section 11. b.)

[Here two observations are in order.](#)

- First, most of Matthew's OT quotations are easy enough to understand, but the difficult exceptions have sometimes tended to increase the difficulty of the easier ones. Hard cases make bad theology as well as bad law.
- Second, Matthew is not simply ripping texts out of OT contexts because he needs to find a prophecy in order to generate a fulfillment. Discernible principles govern his choices, the most important being that he finds in the OT not only isolated predictions regarding the Messiah but also OT history and people as paradigms that, to those with eyes to see, point forward to the Messiah (e.g., see on 2:15).

23

This verse, on which the literature is legion, is reasonably clear in its context here in Matthew.

Mary is the virgin; Jesus is her son,
Immanuel.

But because it is a quotation from Isaiah 7:14, complex issues are raised concerning Matthew's use of the OT.

The linguistic evidence is not as determinative as some think. The Hebrew word *ʿalmāh* is not precisely equivalent to the English word "virgin" (NIV), in which all the focus is on the lack of sexual experience; nor is it precisely equivalent to "young woman," in which the focus is on age without reference to sexual experience. Many prefer the translation "young woman of marriageable age." Yet most of the few OT occurrences refer to a young woman of marriageable age who is also a virgin. The most disputed passage is Proverbs 30:19: "The way of a man with a *maiden*." Here the focus of the word is certainly not on virginity. Some claim that here the maiden cannot possibly be a virgin; others (see esp. E.J. Young, *Studies in Isaiah* [London: Tyndale, 1954], pp. 143–98; Richard Niessen, "The Virginité of the עַלְמָה in Isaiah 7:14," BS 137 [1980]: 133–50) insist that Proverbs 30:19 refers to a young man wooing and winning a maiden still a virgin.

Although it is fair to say that most OT occurrences presuppose that the *ʿalmāh* is a virgin, because of Proverbs 30:19, one cannot be certain the word necessarily means that. Linguistics has shown that the etymological arguments (reviewed by Niessen) have little force. Young argues that *ʿalmāh* is chosen by Isaiah because the most likely alternative (*bēṭûlāh*) can refer to

a married woman (Joel 1:8 is commonly cited; Young is supported by Gordon J. Wenham, “*Bethulah*, ‘A Girl of Marriageable Age,’ ” *VetTest* 22 [1972]: 326–29). Again, however, the linguistic argument is not as clear-cut as we might like. Tom Wadsworth (“Is There a Hebrew Word for Virgin? *Bethulah* in the Old Testament,” *Restoration Quarterly* 23 [1980]: 161–71) insists that every occurrence of *bēṭûlāh* in the OT does refer to a virgin: the woman in Joel 1:8, for instance, is betrothed. Again the evidence is a trifle ambiguous. In short there is a presumption in favor of rendering *‘almāh* by “young virgin” or the like in Isaiah 7:14. Nevertheless other evidence must be given a hearing.

The LXX renders the word by *parthenos* which almost always means “virgin.” Yet even with this word there are exceptions: Genesis 34:4 refers to Dinah as a *parthenos* even though the previous verse makes it clear she is no longer a virgin. This sort of datum prompts C.H. Dodd (“New Testament Translation Problems I,” *The Bible Translator* 27 [1976]: 301–5, published posthumously) to suggest that *parthenos* means “young woman” even in Matthew 1:23 and Luke 1:27. This will not do; the overwhelming majority of the occurrences of *parthenos* in both biblical and profane Greek require the rendering “virgin”; and the unambiguous context of Matthew 1 (cf. vv. 16, 18, 20, 25) puts Matthew’s intent beyond dispute, as Jean Carmignac (The Meaning of *parthenos* in Luke 1. 27: A reply to C.H. Dodd, *The Bible Translator* 28 [1977]: 327–30) was quick to point out. If, unlike the LXX, the later (second century A.D.) Greek renderings of the Hebrew text of Isaiah 7:14 prefer *neanis* (“young woman”) to *parthenos* (so Aq., Symm., Theod.), **we may legitimately suspect a conscious effort by the Jewish translators to avoid the Christian interpretation of Isaiah 7:14.**

The crucial question is how we are to understand Isaiah 7:14 in its relationship to Matthew 1:23. Of the many suggestions, five deserve mention.

1. Hill, J.B. Taylor (Douglas, *Bible Dictionary*, 3:1625), and others support W.C. van Unnik’s argument (“*Dominus Vobiscum*,” *New Testament Essays*, ed. A.J.B. Higgins [Manchester: University Press, 1959], pp. 270–305), who claimed Isaiah meant that a young woman named her child Immanuel as a tribute to God’s presence and deliverance and that the passage applies to Jesus because Immanuel fits his mission. This does not take the “sign” (Isa 7:11, 14) seriously; v. 11 expects something spectacular. Nor does it adequately consider the time lapse (vv. 15–17). Moreover, it assumes a very casual link between Isaiah and Matthew.

2. Many others take Isaiah as saying that a young woman—a virgin at the time of the prophecy (Broadus)—would bear a son and that before he reaches the age of discretion (perhaps less than two years from the time of the prophecy), Ahaz will be delivered from his enemies. Matthew, being an inspired writer, sees a later fulfillment in Jesus; and we must accept it on Matthew’s authority. W.S. LaSor thinks this provides canonical support for a *sensus plenior* (“fuller sense”) approach to Scripture (“*The Sensus Plenior and Biblical Interpretation*,” *Scripture, Tradition, and Interpretation*, edd. W. Ward Gasque and William S. LaSor [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978], pp. 271–72). In addition to several deficiencies in interpreting Isaiah 7:14–17 (e.g., the supernaturalness of the sign in 7:11 is not continued in 7:14), this position is intrinsically unstable, seeking either a deeper connection between Isaiah and Matthew or less reliance on Matthew’s authority. Hendriksen (p. 140) holds that the destruction of Pekah and Rezin was a clear sign that the line of the Messiah was being protected. But this is to postulate,

without textual warrant, two signs—the sign of the child and the sign of the deliverance—and it presupposes that Ahaz possessed remarkable theological acumen in recognizing the latter sign.

3. Many (esp. older) commentators (e.g., Alexander, Hengstenberg, Young) reject any notion of double fulfillment and say that Isaiah 7:14 refers exclusively to Jesus Christ. This does justice to the expectation of a miraculous sign, the significance of “Immanuel,” and the most likely meaning of *’almāh* and *parthenos*. But it puts more strain on the relation of a sign to Ahaz. It seems weak to say that before a period of time equivalent to the length of time between Jesus’ (Immanuel’s) conception and his reaching an age of discretion Ahaz’s enemies will be destroyed. Most commentators in this group insist on a miraculous element in “sign” (v. 11). But though Immanuel’s birth is miraculous, how is the “sign” given Ahaz miraculous?

4. A few have argued, most recently Gene Rice (“A Neglected Interpretation of the Immanuel Prophecy,” ZAW 90 [1978]: 220–27), that in Isaiah 7:14–17 Immanuel represents the righteous remnant—God is “with them”—and that the mother is Zion. This may be fairly applied to Jesus and Mary in Matthew 1:23, since Jesus’ personal history seems to recapitulate something of the Jews’ national history (cf. 2:15; 4:1–4). Yet this sounds contrived. Would Ahaz have understood the words so metaphorically? And though Jesus sometimes appears to recapitulate Israel, it is doubtful that NT writers ever thought Mary recapitulates Zion.

5. The most plausible view is that of J.A. Motyer (“Context and Content in the Interpretation of Isaiah 7:14,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 21 [1970]: 118–25). It is a modified form of the third interpretation and depends in part on recognizing a crucial feature in Isaiah. Signs in the OT may function as a present persuader (e.g., Exod 4:8–9) or as “future confirmation” (e.g., Exod 3:12). Isaiah 7:14 falls in the latter case because Immanuel’s birth comes too late to be a “present persuader.” The “sign” (v. 11) points primarily to threat and foreboding. Ahaz has rejected the Lord’s gracious offer (vv. 10–12), and Isaiah responds in wrath (v. 13). The “curds and honey” Immanuel will eat (v. 15) represent the only food left in the land on the day of wrath (vv. 18–22). Even the promise of Ephraim’s destruction (v. 8) must be understood to embrace a warning (v. 9b; Motyer, “Isaiah 7:14,” pp. 121–22). Isaiah sees a threat, not simply to Ahaz, but to the “house of David” (vv. 2, 13) caught up in faithlessness. To this faithless house Isaiah utters his prophecy. Therefore Immanuel’s birth follows the coming events (it is a “future confirmation”) and will take place when the Davidic dynasty has lost the throne.

Motyer shows the close parallels between the prophetic word to Judah (Isa 7:1–9:7) and the prophetic word to Ephraim (9:8–11:16). To both there come the moment of decision as the Lord’s word threatens wrath (7:1–17; 9:8–10:4), the time of judgment mediated by the Assyrian

invasion (7:18–8:8; 10:5–15), the destruction of God’s foes but the salvation of a remnant (8:9–22; 10:16–34), and the promise of a glorious hope as the Davidic monarch reigns and brings prosperity to his people (9:1–7; 11:1–16). The twofold structure argues for the cohesive unity between the prophecy of Judah and that to Ephraim. If this is correct, Isaiah 7:1–9:7 must be

read as a unit—i.e., 7:14 must not be treated in isolation. **The promised Immanuel (7:14) will possess the land (8:8), thwart all opponents (8:10), appear in Galilee of the Gentiles (9:1) as a great light to those in the land of the shadow of death (9:2). He is the Child and Son called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” in 9:6, whose government and peace will never end as he reigns on David’s throne forever (9:7).**

Much of Motyer’s work is confirmed by a recent article by Joseph Jensen (“The Age of Immanuel,” CBQ 41 [1979]: 220–39; he does not refer to Motyer), who extends the plausibility of this structure by showing that Isaiah 7:15 should be taken in a final sense; i.e., Immanuel will eat the bread of affliction in order to learn (unlike Ahaz!) the lesson of obedience. There is no reference to “age of discretion.” Further, Jensen believes that Isa 7:16–25 points to Immanuel’s coming only after the destruction of the land (6:9–13 suggests the destruction extends to Judah as well as to Israel); that Immanuel and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, Isaiah’s son (8:1), are not the same; and that only Isaiah’s son sets a time limit relevant to Ahaz.

The foregoing discussion was unavoidable. For if Motyer’s view fairly represents Isaiah’s thought, and if Matthew understood him in this way, then much light is shed on the first Gospel. **The Immanuel figure of Isaiah 7:14 is a messianic figure, a point Matthew has rightly grasped. Moreover this interpretation turns on an understanding of the place of the Exile in Isaiah chapters 6–12, and Matthew has divided up his genealogy (Mt 1:11–12, 17) precisely in order to draw attention to the Exile. In 2:17–18 the theme of the Exile returns.**

A little later, as Jesus begins his ministry (4:12–16), Matthew quotes Isaiah 9:1–2, which, if the interpretation

adopted here is correct, properly belongs to the Immanuel prophecies of Isaiah 7:14, 9:6.

Small wonder that after such comments by Matthew, Jesus' next words announced the kingdom (Mt 4:17; cf. Isa 9:7). Isaiah's reference to Immanuel's affliction for the sake of learning obedience (cf. on Isa 7:15 above) anticipates Jesus' humiliation, suffering, and obedient sonship, a recurring theme in this Gospel.

This interpretation also partially explains Matthew's interest in the Davidic lineage; and it strengthens a strong interpretation of "Immanuel." Most scholars (e.g., Bonnard) suppose that this name in Isaiah reflects a hope that God would make himself present with his people ("Immanuel" derives from *'immānû'ēl*, "God with us"); and they apply the name to Jesus in a similar way, to mean that God is with us, and for us, because of Jesus.

But if Immanuel in Isaiah is a messianic figure whose titles include "Mighty God," there is reason to think that "Immanuel" refers to Jesus himself, that he is "God with us." Matthew's use of the preposition "with" at the end of 1:23 favors this (cf. Fenton, "Matthew 1:20–23," p. 81). Though "Immanuel" is not a name in the sense that "Jesus" is Messiah's name (1:21), in the OT Solomon was named "Jedidiah" ("Beloved of Yahweh," 2 Sam 12:25), even though he apparently was not called that. Similarly...

Immanuel is a "name" in the sense of title or description.

***No greater blessing can be conceived than
for God to dwell with his people
(Isa 60:18–20; Ezek 48:35; Rev 21:23).***

Jesus is the one called “**God with us**”: the designation evokes John 1:14, 18. As if that were not enough, Jesus promises just before his ascension to be with us to the end of the age (28:20; cf. also 18:20), when he will return to share his messianic banquet with his people (25:10).

If “Immanuel” is rightly interpreted in this sense, then the question must be raised whether “Jesus” (1:21) should receive the same treatment. Does “Jesus” (“Yahweh saves”) mean Mary’s Son merely brings Yahweh’s salvation, or is he himself in some sense the Yahweh who saves? If “Immanuel” entails the higher christology, it is not implausible that Matthew sees the same in “Jesus.” The least we can say is that Matthew does not hesitate to apply OT passages descriptive of Yahweh directly to Jesus (cf. on 3:3).

Matthew’s quotation of Isaiah 7:14 is very close to the LXX; but he changes “you will call” to “they will call.” This may reflect a rendering of the original Hebrew, if 1QIsa^a is pointed appropriately (cf. Gundry, *Use of OT*, p. 90). But there is more here:

The people whose sins Jesus forgives
(1:21) are the ones who will gladly
call him “God with us”
(cf. Frankemolle, pp. 17–19).

24–25

When Joseph woke up (from his sleep, not his dream), he “took Mary home as his wife” (v. 24; same expression as in 1:20).

Throughout Matthew 1–2 the pattern of God’s sovereign intervention followed by Joseph’s or the Magi’s response is repeated. While the story is told simply, **Joseph’s obedience and submission under these circumstances is scarcely less remarkable than Mary’s (Luke 1:38).**

Matthew wants to make Jesus’ virginal conception quite unambiguous, for he adds that Joseph had no sexual union with Mary (lit., he did not “know” her, an OT euphemism) until she gave birth to Jesus (v. 25).

The “until” clause most naturally means that Mary and Joseph enjoyed normal conjugal relations after Jesus’ birth (cf. further on 12:46; 13:55). Contrary to McHugh (p. 204), the imperfect *eginōsken* (“did not know [her]”) **does not hint at continued celibacy after Jesus’ birth but stresses the faithfulness of the celibacy till Jesus’ birth.**

So the virgin-conceived Immanuel was born. And eight days later, when the time came for him to be circumcised (Luke 2:21), Joseph named him “Jesus.”

Notes

18 Some MSS have γέννησις (*gennēsis*, “birth”) instead of γένεσις (*genesis*, “birth,” “origin,” or “history”): the two words are easily confused both orthographically and, in early pronunciation

systems, phonetically. The former word is common in the Fathers to refer to the Nativity and is cognate with γεννάω (*gennaō*, “I beget”); so it is transcriptional less likely to be original.

The δέ (*de*, “but”) beginning the verse is doubtless a mild adversative. All the preceding generations have been listed, “but” the birth of Jesus comes into a class of its own.

Οὕτως (*houtōs*, “thus”) with the verb ἦν (*ēn*, “was”) is rare and is here equivalent to τοιαύτη (*toiautē*, in this way; cf. BDF, par. 434 [2]).

“Holy Spirit” is anarthrous, which is not uncommon in the Gospels; and in that case the word order is always πνεῦμα ἅγιον (*pneuma hagion*). When the article is used, there is an approximately even distribution between τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα (*to hagion pneuma*, “the Holy Spirit”) and τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον (*to pneuma to hagion*, “the Spirit the Holy”); cf. Moule, *Idiom Book*, p. 113.

- 19 In δίκαιος ὢν καὶ μὴ θέλων (*dikaios ōn kai mē thelōn*, lit., “being just and not willing” NIV, “a righteous man and did not want”), it does not seem possible to take the first participle concessively (i.e., “although a righteous man”) because of the *kai*; the two participles should be taken as coordinate.
- 20 Ἴδού (*idou*, “behold”) appears for the first of sixty-two times in Matthew. It often introduces surprising action (Schlatter), or serves to arouse interest (Hendriksen); but it is so common it seems sometimes to have no force at all (cf. Moulton, *Prolegomena*, p. 11; E.J. Pryke, “ΙΔΕ and ΙΔΟΥ,” NTS 14 [1968]: 418–24).
- 21 The noun ἁμαρτία (*hamartia*, sin) occurs at 3:6; 9:2, 5–6; 12:31; 26:38; ἁμαρτανῶ (*hamartōlos*, “I sin”) is found at 18:15, 21; 27:4; and ἁμαρτωλός (*hamartanō*, “sinner”) at 9:10–11, 13; 11:19; 26:45.
- 22 Contrary to Moule (*Idiom Book*, p. 142), the ἵνα (*hina*, “in order to” or “with the result that”) clause is not ecclastic (consecutive). Although in NT Greek *hina* is not always telic, yet the very idea of fulfillment presupposes an overarching plan; and if there be such a plan, it is difficult to imagine Matthew saying no more than that such and such took place with the result that the Scriptures were fulfilled, unless the Mind behind the plan has no power to effect it—which is clearly contrary to Matthew’s thought. See further on 5:17.¹

Exalting Jesus In Matthew Commentary: Platt

Our Mysterious And Majestic King

MATTHEW 1:18–25

¹ D. A. Carson, “[Matthew](#),” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 70–82.

Main Idea: Jesus Christ is fully God and fully human, and He has come to save His people from their sins.

I. How Jesus Came

- A. To a virgin mother
- B. To an adoptive father
- C. Amidst a fallen world

II. Who Jesus Is

- A. As the Son of man, Jesus is fully human.
- B. As the Son of God, Jesus is fully divine.
- C. The Incarnation is the most extraordinary miracle in the whole Bible.
- D. The Incarnation is the most profound mystery in the whole universe.

III. What Jesus Confirms

- A. God is the Creator and Re-Creator of all things.
- B. God is always faithful to His Word.
- C. God is transcendent over us, yet He is present with us.

In the latter half of Matthew 1 we encounter the most extraordinary miracle in the whole Bible, and the most remarkable mystery in the whole universe. This miraculous mystery is described in eight simple verses. Referring to this miracle, J. I. Packer said, “It is here, in the thing that happened at the first Christmas, that the profoundest and most unfathomable depths of the Christian revelation lie” (Packer, “For Your Sakes He Became Poor,” 69). Our souls ought to be captivated with fascinating glory in the midst of a familiar story.

Personally, this is a story that I have a new perspective on, because Matthew 1:18–25 is really a story of adoption. A short time ago, my wife and I returned from China with our new daughter. I am mesmerized by this little girl, and it’s such a fascinating dynamic. Biologically, it’s obvious that I’m not her father; yet, she is my daughter, and I love her and am smitten by her as a daddy. After spending a month in China filling out paperwork and writing her first name next to my last name, I’ve been reminded that this little girl is now fully a part of our family. As I consider Matthew’s account of Jesus’ birth, I’m struck in a fresh way that Joseph was in very similar shoes—Jesus was not his biological son.

How Jesus Came

MATTHEW 1:18–25

Several aspects of this passage call for some explanation. Matthew begins by talking about the “birth of Jesus *Christ*” (18; emphasis added). Remember that “Christ” is not Jesus’ last name; rather, it means “the Messiah,” the Anointed One. The word “engaged” in verse 18, which the

ESV translates as “betrothed,” is also important to consider, since an engagement was much more binding in the first century than it is in the twenty-first century. Once you were engaged, you were legally bound, so to call off an engagement would be equivalent to divorce. After the engagement, the only thing left to do was for the woman to go to the man’s home to physically consummate the marriage and for them to live together (Blomberg, *Matthew*, 57). This would happen approximately a year after the engagement began. So when Matthew says that she was pregnant “before they came together” (v. 18), he is saying that Mary was with child before she and Joseph consummated their marriage physically.

Also of note is the comment in verse 18 that Mary was pregnant “by the Holy Spirit.” Matthew is clueing us in to something supernatural that was going on, though Mary and Joseph would not find out this “by the Holy Spirit” part until a little later. Put yourself in this young couple’s shoes: Mary, having never had a physical relationship with a man, finds out that she’s pregnant. Imagine the thoughts and emotions, the confusion and the worry, that would be going through your mind. Or consider Joseph: as a husband, you’ve yet to bring your wife into your home to consummate the marriage, and you find out that she is pregnant! There is only one possible explanation in your mind—she has clearly been with another man.

What would you do if you discovered that the woman you love, the one you’ve chosen to marry, was pregnant right before you took her into your home? Verse 19 gives us a glimpse into Joseph’s thought here: “So her husband Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly.” Joseph had a couple of options at this point. He could either go public and shame Mary, or he could quietly divorce her. In righteous compassion, he resolved to do the latter.

Notice that Joseph is addressed by the angel as “son of David,” which reminds us that Joseph is in the line of King David. The angel gives Joseph the shocking news that “what has been conceived in her is by the Holy Spirit” (v. 20). The virgin birth may be familiar to us, but such a reality was absolutely unheard of for Joseph. Then the angel tells Joseph that Mary will “give birth to a son” (v. 21), a son whom Joseph had no part in bringing about, and that this son would be named “Jesus” because He would “save His people from their sins” (v. 21). So, Joseph was told to adopt this boy as his son, and the legal name by which He would be called—Jesus—means “Yahweh (the Lord) saves.” Now that’s an announcement! Matthew then says in verse 22,

Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

*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.”*

We don’t know exactly what Joseph felt at this point, but I imagine he was puzzled. Nevertheless, Matthew gives us a great picture of Joseph’s obedience in verses 24–25: “When Joseph got up from sleeping, he did as the Lord’s angel had commanded him. He married her but did not know her intimately until she gave birth to a son. And he named Him Jesus.” Joseph obeyed without questioning God or laying down conditions. He didn’t ask for another night’s sleep to see if anything changed; he simply obeyed. And when it says that he “did not know her intimately” in verse 25, Scripture is telling us that Joseph did not have physical relations with

Mary. Matthew ends the chapter by telling us that Joseph called the child “Jesus,” just as the angel had said. This is how the King of creation came into the world.

Based on what we’ve seen so far, we can say several things about how Jesus came. First, He was born **to a virgin mother**. This is an absolutely shocking pair of words—a “virgin mother” is naturally impossible, which points us to the supernatural aspect of Jesus’ birth. **Physically, Jesus is Mary’s son**, for even in the genealogy, where we read over and over that one individual fathered another, verse 16 identifies Joseph as Mary’s husband and Mary as the one “who gave birth to Jesus who is called the Messiah.” The text is careful not to call Joseph the father of Jesus. Instead, it points out that Jesus was biologically the son of Mary.

The fact that Matthew never explicitly refers to Joseph as Jesus’ father reminds us that Jesus was born **to an adoptive father**. After being named and taken into the family by Joseph, **legally, Jesus is Joseph’s son**. And being Joseph’s son means that this adoption ties Jesus to the line of David as a royal son. Finally, in terms of how Jesus came, Matthew tells us that all of these things happened **amidst a fallen world**. Jesus came to a world of sin in need of salvation, which is why it is crucial to see that **ultimately, Jesus is God’s Son**. The problem of sin needed a divine solution.

Part of the purpose of the virgin birth of Jesus is to show us that salvation does not come from man, but from God. Salvation is wholly the work of a supernatural God, not the work of natural man. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves from our sins, which is evident even in the way in which Jesus entered the world. This baby born in Bethlehem was and is the center of all history.

Who Jesus Is

The story of the virgin birth in Matthew 1 forms the foundation for everything we know about who Jesus is. This truth is foundational for why we worship Him, why we follow Him, and why we proclaim Him to the nations. With so much at stake in this one doctrine, we need to think carefully about how we understand this baby born in Bethlehem. The truth here is multifaceted.

As the Son of man, **Jesus is fully human**. He was born of a woman, so just like any other child, He came as a crying, cooing, bed-wetting baby boy. Don’t let yourself picture Jesus apart from His true humanity. It was a holy night, but it wasn’t silent. After all, whoever heard of a child coming out of the womb and staying quiet? After sleepless nights of putting my own children to sleep, I can only imagine trying to put a baby down when the cows keep mooing and the donkeys keep braying. Jesus wasn’t born with a glowing halo around His head and a smile on His face; He was born like us.

As one who is fully human, **Jesus possesses the full range of human characteristics**. He is like us **physically** in that He possesses a human body, and as Matthew will later show us, this body grew tired at points (8:24). That’s right, the Sovereign of the universe took on the human limitation of being dependent on sleep! Not only did Jesus grow weary, but He also became hungry (4:2). This was a baby that needed to be fed and nursed and nurtured. He had a body just like ours.

Jesus was also fully human **mentally**. He possessed a human mind that Luke says, “increased in wisdom” (2:52). He learned in the same way that other children do. Sometimes we get the idea that Jesus came out of the womb using words like “kingdom,” “righteousness,” “substitution,”

and “propitiation,” but that’s not the case. Jesus had to learn to say the first-century Jewish equivalent of “Ma-ma” and “Da-da.” He possessed a human mind.

Jesus was also like us **emotionally**. In Matthew’s Gospel we see the full range of human emotions: for example, Jesus’ soul was troubled and overwhelmed, such that He wept with loud cries and tears (26:36–39). It also seems reasonable to conclude from Scripture that Jesus laughed and smiled; He was not boring.

Finally, after seeing that Jesus was like us physically, mentally, and emotionally, Matthew also says that He was like us **outwardly**. Or, to put it another way, Jesus’ humanity was plain for all to see. For example, when Jesus taught in the synagogue in His own hometown, the people were amazed, saying,

How did this wisdom and these miracles come to Him? Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? Isn’t His mother called Mary, and His brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, aren’t they all with us? So where does He get all these things? (13:54–56)

The people who were closest to Jesus for much of His life—His own brothers and the people in His own hometown—recognized Him as merely a man, just like everyone else. He was fully human (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 534–35).

So why is this important? Why emphasize Jesus’ humanity? We must affirm Jesus’ full humanity, because it means that **Jesus is fully able to identify with us**. He is not *unlike* us, trying to do something for us. No, Jesus is truly representative of us. Follower of Christ, you have a Savior who is familiar with your struggles—physically, mentally, and emotionally. He is familiar with your sorrow. He is familiar with your suffering (Heb 2:18). This is why it’s comforting to affirm that Jesus was born of a woman, as the Son of Man.

As we affirm Jesus’ humanity, in the very same breath we must acknowledge that **as the Son of God, Jesus is fully divine**. Just as Jesus possesses the full range of human characteristics, so **Jesus possesses the full range of divine characteristics**. Consider all that Matthew shows us. First, Jesus has **power over disease**. He is able to cleanse lepers, give sight to the blind, and cause the lame to walk, all by simply speaking healing into reality. At strategic points, Matthew talks about how Jesus went about healing every disease and every affliction among the people (4:23–24; 9:35). He graciously exercises His power over the whole range of human infirmities.

Second, Jesus’ divinity is on display as He shows His **command over nature**. In Matthew 8 Jesus rebukes the storm and it immediately calms down, to which the disciples respond, “What kind of man is this?—even the winds and the sea obey Him!” (8:27). Only God possesses this kind of power over nature.

Third, Jesus has **authority over sin**. That is, He is able to forgive sins, something Matthew tells us explicitly in Jesus’ healing of the paralytic (9:1–6).

The fourth way in which Matthew points to Jesus’ deity is in His **control over death**. Jesus not only brings others to life (9:23–25), but He even raises Himself from the dead (John 10:17–18). These claims may sound extravagant, yet this is precisely the portrait Matthew gives us of Jesus. He is fully able to identify with us, and as God, **Jesus is fully able to identify with God**.

When you put these truths concerning Jesus’ nature together, you begin to realize that **the incarnation, the doctrine of Jesus’ full humanity and full deity, is the most extraordinary miracle in the whole Bible**. And if this miracle is true, then everything else in this Gospel account makes total sense. After all, is it strange to see Jesus walking on the water if He’s the God who

created the very water He's walking on? Is it strange to see Him feeding 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish if He's the One who created their stomachs? Furthermore, if what Scripture says is true, is it even strange to see Jesus rise from the dead? No, not if He's God. The strange thing, the real miracle, is that Jesus died in the first place. The doctrine of the incarnation and Christ's identity as fully human and fully divine is the fundamental point where Muslims, Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, and countless others disagree with Christianity. It is the ultimate stumbling block. Furthermore, if we're honest, this important doctrine contains some mystery even for those who hold firmly to the biblical witness. So how do we even begin to understand it?

There are some things we must keep in mind if we are to uphold the truth of the incarnation. **Clearly Jesus' human nature and divine nature are different**, that is, they are to be distinguished in certain ways. One of the heresies that had to be rejected in the early centuries of the church's life was the idea that the human nature of Christ was absorbed into His divine nature, with the result that a third nature was formed, a nature that was neither God nor man. Such a view undermines Jesus' role as our mediator (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 556). Consider how Scripture holds together the separate truths of Christ's human and divine natures:

- He was born a baby and He sustains the universe.
- He was 30 years old and He exists eternally.
- He was tired and omnipotent.
- He died and He conquered death.
- He has returned to heaven and He is present with us.

While we have to maintain a distinction between His natures, we must affirm that **Jesus' human nature and divine nature are unified**. He is one person, so we don't have to specify in every instance whether Jesus performed a certain action in His divine nature, or whether it was His human nature that did it. The Gospel writers don't say that Jesus was "born in His human nature" or that "in His human nature he died." No, He acts as a unified person, even if His two natures contributed in different ways. Scripture simply says, "*Jesus was born*" or "*Jesus died*." One theologian gives the following analogy to illustrate this point: If I were to write a letter, though my toes had nothing to do with the writing process, I would still say, "I wrote the letter," not "My fingers wrote the letter, but my toes had nothing to do with it." I simply say that I wrote the letter, and the meaning is understood (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 562). Similarly, everything that is done by Jesus is unified in such a way that we don't need to distinguish between His two natures when we speak of Him. It does not matter whether His divine or His human nature is specifically in view, because they are always working in perfect unity.

The Incarnation is the most profound mystery in the whole universe. This mystery is encapsulated in what Matthew writes about the virgin birth of Jesus. There are, after all, other ways Jesus could have come into the world. On the one hand, if He had come without any human parent, then it would have been hard for us to imagine or believe that He could really identify with us. On the other hand, if He had come through two human parents—a biological mother and a biological father—then it would be hard to imagine how He could be fully God since His origin would have been exactly the same as ours. But God, in His perfect wisdom and creative sovereignty, ordained a virgin birth to be the avenue through which Christ would come into the world (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 530).

What Jesus Confirms

In light of everything we've seen so far in Matthew 1, there are three clear takeaways. First, **God is the Creator and Re-Creator of all things**. Interestingly enough, the word Matthew uses for "birth" in verse 18 is transliterated "genesis," which means origin—the origin of Jesus Christ. The imagery, then, in the first book of the New Testament takes us all the way back to the first book of the Old Testament, for **in Genesis, the Spirit brings life to men**. Scripture opens with the Spirit giving life to all of creation: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, *and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters*" (Gen 1:1–2; emphasis added). Then the Lord breathes life into Adam, the first man (Gen 2:7). Now **in Matthew, the Spirit gives life to the Messiah**. There were pagan stories of mythological gods who physically procreated with mortal humans, but there is nothing of that kind in this text (Carson, *Matthew*, 74). This is a picture of the Spirit breathing life into the Messiah in Matthew 1, just as He did for man in Genesis.

You may recall that **in Genesis, God promises a seed from a woman**. Specifically, He promises to raise up a seed, a singular offspring, who would crush the head of Satan, the serpent (Gen 3:15). Now **in Matthew, God delivers that seed through a woman**. The parallels between Matthew and Genesis can be drawn out further: **in Genesis, a man is born who would succumb to sin**. The first man, Adam, initially lived in unhindered communion with his Creator before rebelling against God and falling into sin. Paul tells us in Romans 5 that from Adam's one sin condemnation came to all men (vv. 12–21). We have all inherited a sinful nature from Adam, and we have all succumbed to sin. But with Jesus the story is different.

In the virgin birth, Jesus did not inherit a sinful nature, nor did He inherit the guilt that all other humans inherit from Adam. However, we shouldn't conclude from this that Mary was perfectly sinless, as the Roman Catholic Church has historically taught. Scripture nowhere teaches this; instead, Jesus' birth was a partial interruption in the line that came from Adam. A new Adam has come on the scene, a man who would not succumb to sin. In contrast to the first Adam, **in Matthew, a man is born who would save from sin**. The God who creates in Genesis 1 is re-creating and redeeming in Matthew 1. He is making a way, through the virgin birth of Christ, for humanity to be rescued from sin and reconciled to God. Just consider how glorious it is that God is the Creator and Re-Creator of all things:

- He takes the hurts in our lives, and He turns them into joy.
- He takes the suffering in our lives, and He turns them into satisfaction.
- He takes the rebellion in our lives, and He clothes us in His righteousness.
- He takes the sin in our lives, and He brings salvation.

In addition to being the Creator and Re-Creator of all things, Matthew 1:22 tells us that **God is always faithful to His Word**. What has been promised will be fulfilled. As Matthew quotes Isaiah 7:14 and the prophecy of the virgin birth, he says, "Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet." This is the first of ten times that Matthew uses this kind of phrase to speak of Jesus' fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and expectations (1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 27:9). Matthew makes clear throughout this book that when God makes a promise in His Word, He fulfills it in the world.

We can be certain that God is faithful to His Word, but **what we don't know** for sure is how to understand the fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14. **Is Isaiah 7:14 a prophecy with a single or double fulfillment?** The prophet says, "Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel." This prophecy was given at a significant point in Israel's history, approximately seven hundred years before Jesus' birth in Matthew 1. King Ahaz, who was mentioned earlier in the genealogy (Matt 1:9), was a wicked king facing threats from foreign nations, and instead of seeking the Lord for help, he sought the help of the Assyrian king. Isaiah brought news to Ahaz that God would deliver His people, but Ahaz refused to listen. This is the context of Isaiah's promise; despite the people's rebellion, God would give a sign as a guarantee that the people of God and the line of David would be preserved, not destroyed.

The question is whether or not that sign—the virgin giving birth—was in any way fulfilled around the time of Isaiah's prophecy. Some scholars believe that this sign was partially fulfilled by a virgin who got married, had relations, got pregnant, and gave birth in the seventh century BC, but then the sign was ultimately fulfilled in the birth of Christ hundreds of years later. Other scholars believe this sign was only fulfilled in the birth of Christ. In the end, it's difficult to determine whether this prophecy has a single or a double fulfillment; nevertheless, there are some things we *do* know.

What we do know is that **Isaiah 7:14 is a prophecy with certain fulfillment in Christ**. The God we worship made a promise through the prophet Isaiah that was fulfilled seven hundred years later in the virgin birth of Christ, and based on that picture, we can be sure that this same God will also prove Himself faithful to us today. So when God says, "I will never leave you or forsake you" (Heb 13:5; Josh 1:5), that is a guarantee. When He says that He is your "refuge and strength, a helper who is always found in times of trouble" (Ps 46:1), you can bank on it. And when He says that "not even death or life, angels or rulers, things present or things to come, hostile powers, height or depth, or any other created thing will have the power to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38–39), you can be confident in His sustaining power. And when God says that there is coming a day when "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will no longer exist; grief, crying, and pain will exist no longer, because the previous things have passed away" (Rev 21:4), that too is a guarantee. God is always faithful to His Word.

Finally, Matthew 1:18–25 teaches that although **God is transcendent over us, He is present with us**. That is, in His glory, God is far above us, but in His grace, He is near to us. He is "Immanuel," which means "God is with us" (v. 23). Stop and consider who this is who promises to be with you: this is the God who spoke the world into being, the God who rules over all creation—every star in the sky, every mountain peak, every grain of sand, the sun and the moon, all the oceans and all the deserts of the earth—the God whom myriads of angels continually worship and sing praise to, the God whose glory is beyond our imagination and whose holiness is beyond our comprehension. *This* God is with you.

I once had an opportunity to bear witness to the incarnation while sitting across the table from a group of Muslim men in the Middle East during Ramadan, the Muslim holy month. We were finishing a meal late one night (they had just broken their fast), and they asked me to share with them what I believe about God. Knowing that Muslims believe Jesus was a good man, but certainly not God in the flesh (such a claim is blasphemous in Islam), I began to share about who Jesus is. I told them that when I decided to ask my wife to marry me, I did not send someone else

to do it for me; I went myself. Why? Because in matters of love, One must go Himself. That's a picture of the incarnation.

This astounding truth of Christianity—the reality that God became flesh (John 1:14)—may be incomprehensible to many, but to those who believe it is irresistible. There is an infinitely great God, mighty in power, who out of His love for us has not simply sent a messenger to tell us about His love. Even better, He has come Himself. And what He came to do is the greatest news in the whole world:

- He came to heal the sick (Matt 4:23–25; 8:14–17).
- He came to feed the hungry (14:13–21 and 15:32–39).
- He came to bless the poor (specifically the poor in spirit; 5:1–12).
- He came to bind the brokenhearted (6:25–34 and 11:28–30).
- He came to deliver the demon-possessed (8:28–34).

As we reflect on these and other blessings of Christ's ministry, we must remember that **ultimately, He came to rescue the lost** (1:21). Jesus came to a sin-stained world to endure the penalty of sin and to stand in the place of sinners. He came to die on a cross, to give His body, to shed His blood—all so that you and I could be rescued from our sin and reconciled to God. That's the good news of the incarnation. That's why Jesus came.

Reflect and Discuss

1. How does a denial of Jesus' virgin birth affect the gospel message?
2. What details of Jesus' earthly ministry demonstrate His full humanity?
3. List several characteristics of Jesus' ministry that display His divinity.
4. Explain how Jesus' divine and human natures are different, yet unified.
5. Why is it insufficient to say that Jesus was only a great moral example for us?
6. How did Jesus' birth fulfill the promise of Genesis 3:15?
7. How is Jesus contrasted with Adam?
8. How did Jesus fulfill Isaiah 7:14?
9. How would you explain to an unbeliever that Jesus is both God and man?
10. How should Matthew 1:21 shape the way you read the rest of this Gospel?²

St. Andrews Commentary: R.C. Sproul

THE BIRTH OF JESUS

² David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2013), 17–28.

Matthew 1:18–25

When we celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas time, our attention is most often given to Luke's account, because it gives us so much information. It tells us of the annunciation of the angel Gabriel to the peasant girl Mary. It includes the story of the shepherds as well as the infancy hymns that are sung by Zacharias and by others during that time.

Matthew's version is much briefer.

We notice at the outset that Matthew gives his account from the viewpoint of Joseph, whereas Luke tells his account from the viewpoint of Mary. Luke assures us that what he wrote in his Gospel was well researched from eyewitnesses, and tradition affirms that Luke got much of his information from Mary herself. Of course, when Matthew wrote his Gospel he had no opportunity to interview Joseph.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows (v. 18).

This opening assertion is rich in content, as brief as it is.

The word used here for the birth of Jesus is
***gennēsis*.**

Our word *genesis* comes from the Greek *ginomai*, which means "to be, to become, or happen." Matthew is asserting that this is how Jesus came to be, which, as we noted in the last chapter, places the birth

of Jesus within the framework of history rather than mythology.

The Betrothal of Mary and Joseph

After his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit (v. 18).

This takes place after betrothal and prior to marriage.

In our society, a betrothal is considered to be an engagement between two people who intend to become married at a certain time, yet there are countless occasions in which engagements are broken and the marriage never comes to pass. **Among the Jews in Jesus' day, however, a betrothal was far more serious. It was an unbreakable pledge customarily undertaken one year before the wedding, and it carried almost the weight of marriage itself;**

it was so close that it required virtually a writ of divorce to end it.

Following betrothal the bride remained under the roof of her parents. She would not move into the home of her husband until after the actual marriage. Therefore, **it was serious when a betrothed woman was discovered to be with child; the implications of such a pregnancy were enormous in Jewish society and could, indeed, result in execution of the woman who violated her betrothal by becoming pregnant.**

Yet we are told here in Matthew that before Mary came together with Joseph, ***“she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.”***

The father of this child in Mary's womb was not some illicit lover, nor was it Joseph; the paternity was accomplished through the supernatural activity of the Holy Spirit.

In the Apostles' Creed we recite, "Jesus Christ ... was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary ..." Those two miraculous aspects—His conception and His birth—were integral to the faith of the Christian church of the early centuries.

Jesus' conception was extraordinary, not natural but supernatural, accomplished by the divine work of the Spirit, and as a result a baby born to a virgin.

Perhaps no assertion of biblical Christianity fell under greater attack by nineteenth-century liberalism than the account of the virgin birth.

For some reason more attention was given to that than to the resurrection.

Because the story is so blatantly supernatural, it became a stumbling block to those who tried to reduce the essence of the Christian faith to all that can be accomplished through natural humanity.

When Mary's pregnancy was discovered, Joseph, being a just man—one who was also kind and gave detailed attention to the observance of the law of God, ***not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly (v. 19).*** He was not willing to call down the wrath of the courts upon his betrothed, and he decided to deal with it from a spirit of compassion. After he thought it over deeply and carefully, he decided to divorce her or put her away in a private manner, so as to save his betrothed from total public humiliation.

While he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David" (v. 20).

The New Testament makes so much out of the fact that Jesus is the Son of David that it's almost amazing to find Joseph being given that same title, but this is also important for the lineage of Jesus.

For Jesus to be a Son of David in Jewish categories, legally His father also had to be a son of David. That is why the angel gives this honorific title to Joseph when he addresses him, saying, ***Do not be afraid to take to you Mary your***

wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit (v. 20).

This is the second time in this brief narrative that the conception of Christ in the womb of Mary is attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit.

In Luke's version, when the angel Gabriel told Mary that she had conceived the child and would bring forth a baby, she was stunned and said, "How can this be since I know not a man?" (Luke 1:34). The angel replied, **"With God nothing will be impossible"** (Luke 1:37).

Then Gabriel explained to Mary how the birth would take place. The Holy Spirit would overshadow her so that the child would be born as a result of this supernatural work. Luke uses the same language that is used at the dawn of creation: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep" (Gen. 1:1–2), and then we are told that the Holy Spirit came and hovered over the waters, and God said, "Let there be light" (v. 3). In the act of

creation, the Spirit is moving on the face of the deep, and out of the nothingness of that darkness God, through the power of His Spirit, brings forth the whole of creation.

From the biblical perspective, the genesis of life in the first place was through the power of the Spirit of life, of the Spirit of God. Gabriel was declaring to Mary that same power by which the universe was made; that same power that brought life out of the darkness originally is the power that will overshadow her womb and produce a son.

God doesn't need a human father
to bring this to pass.

The Authority to Name

She will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins (v. 21).

It was the privilege of Jewish parents to name their children. The very first enterprise given to humanity in the garden was the scientific task of taxonomy, that is, the task of naming the animals, and in that task of naming, the superior names the subordinate.

God gave to Adam and Eve the responsibility and authority to name everything in the animal kingdom. Yet throughout the Old Testament, when a child was born into specific historical and redemptive purposes, God took away the privilege from the parent and named the child himself, indicating that the child belonged to Him.

That is what happened with Zacharias in the birth of John the Baptist. God told Zacharias what to name his son (Luke 1:13). The same thing happens here in Matthew. The Lord is saying to Joseph, “You are not going to choose a name for this boy. You will name Him what I tell you to name Him, because ultimately He is my Son, and you shall call his name Jesus.”

The etymology behind the name Jesus is “Jehovah saves.”
Name Him Jesus “for He will save His people from their sins.”

The idea of salvation in the Bible in general means some kind of rescue from a threat of destruction or calamity, and the highest, ultimate sense of salvation is rescue from the worst of all possible calamities. The worst calamity that could ever befall human beings is to fall under the judgment of God for their sin. That is the calamity that awaits every person who does not rush to Christ for salvation.

However, the baby is called “Jesus” because He is a savior, and He will save His people from the consequences of their sins.

The Virgin Birth

So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet saying, “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us” (vv. 22–23).

This verse, in which **Matthew is quoting Isaiah**, was sharply attacked by the critics of the nineteenth century. In the Jewish language there are two words that can be used to describe a virgin. The most precise and technical word is not the one that Isaiah chose. Rather, Isaiah chose the other word, which can be translated “young woman” or, more appropriately, “maiden,” which presumes virginity but doesn’t necessitate it.

The critics point to that and say that Isaiah wasn’t speaking of a virgin but saying only that a young woman, a maiden, would conceive.

Therefore, the critics say, the Bible does not teach a virgin birth.

That’s what we call the exegesis
of despair

...because if you just give a cursory look at the context of this text, there is no doubt that Matthew is teaching that Jesus was born from the womb of a woman who had never been with a man—a virgin.

Isaiah said, *“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel”* (Isa. 7:14), but here in Matthew the angel says they will call His name *“Jesus.”*

Those names are not the same, and they do not mean the same thing. Isaiah does not tell us why they will call Him “Immanuel.”

The term *Immanuel* describes what Christ does. It describes the event of incarnation. He will be called Immanuel because He will be the incarnate presence of God with us, but His proper Jewish name will be Jesus, because *“He will save his people from their sins.”*

Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS (vv. 24–25).

This reflects not only the obedience and submission of Joseph to what the angel had directed him to do but also that Joseph fully embraces Jesus as his son and fulfills the legal requirements of the genealogy that we examined in the last chapter.

Joseph did this even though the child's name was not selected by him but by the angel. **In the ultimate sense, Jesus was named by God, who is His ultimate Father.** In the proximate sense, Jesus was named by Joseph, who was given the unspeakable privilege of being the Lord Jesus Christ's earthly father.³

Matthew Commentary: A. Barnes

18. *Now the birth of Jesus Christ.* The circumstances attending his birth.

Was on this wise. In this manner.

Espoused. Betrothed, or engaged to be married. There was commonly an interval of ten or twelve months, among the Jews, between the contract of marriage and the celebration of the nuptials (see Ge. 24:55; Ju. 14:8; De. 20:7), yet such was the nature of this engagement, that unfaithfulness to each other was deemed adultery. See De. 22:25, 28.

With child by the Holy Ghost. See Note, Lu. 1:35.

19. *Her husband.* The word in the original does not imply that they were married. It means here the man to whom she was espoused.

A just man. *Justice* consists in rendering to every man his own. Yet this is evidently not the character intended to be given here of Joseph. **The meaning is that he was kind, tender, merciful; that he was so attached to Mary that he was not willing that she should be exposed to public shame. He sought, therefore, secretly to dissolve the connection, and to restore her to her friends without the punishment commonly**

³ Robert Charles Sproul, [Matthew](#), St. Andrew's Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 21–25.

inflicted on adultery. The word *just* has not unfrequently this meaning of mildness, or mercy. See 1 Jn. 1:9.; comp. Cicero, *De Fin.* 5, 23.

A public example. To expose her to public shame or infamy. Adultery has always been considered a crime of a very heinous nature. In Egypt it was punished by cutting off the nose of the adulteress; in Persia the nose and ears were cut off; in Judea the punishment was death by stoning, Le. 20:10; Eze. 16:38, 40; Jn. 8:5. This punishment was also inflicted where the person was not married, but betrothed, De. 21:23, 24.

In this case, therefore, the regular punishment would have been death in this painful and ignominious manner. Yet Joseph was a religious man—mild and tender; and he was not willing to *complain* of her to the magistrate, and expose her to death, but sought to avoid the shame, and to put her away privately.

Put her away privily. The law of Moses gave the husband the power of divorce, De. 24:1. It was customary in a bill of divorce to specify the causes for which the divorce was made, and witnesses were also present to testify to the divorce. But in this case, it seems, Joseph resolved to put her away *without specifying the cause*; for he was not willing to make her a public example. This is the meaning here of *privily*. Both to Joseph and Mary this must have been a great trial. Joseph was ardently attached to her, but her character was likely to be ruined, and he deemed it proper to separate her from him. Mary was innocent, but Joseph was not yet satisfied of her innocence. We may learn from this to put our trust in God. He will defend the innocent. Mary was in danger of being exposed to shame. Had she been connected with a cruel, passionate, and violent man, she would have died in disgrace. But God had so ordered it that she was betrothed to a man mild, amiable, and tender; and in due time Joseph was apprised of the truth in the case, and took his faithful and beloved wife to his bosom. Thus our only aim should be to preserve a conscience void of offence, and God will guard our reputation. We may be assailed by slander; circumstances may be against us; but in due

time God will take care to vindicate our character and save us from ruin. See Ps. 37:5, 6.

20. *He thought on these things.* He did not act hastily. He did not take the course which the law would have *permitted* him to do, if he had been hasty, violent, or unjust.

It was a case deeply affecting his happiness, his character, and the reputation and character of his chosen companion. God will guide the thoughtful and the anxious. And **when we have looked patiently at a perplexed subject, and know not what to do, then God, as in the case of Joseph, will interpose to lead us and direct our way.** Ps. 25:9.

The angel of the Lord.

The word ***angel* literally means a messenger.**

It is applied chiefly in the Scriptures to those invisible holy beings who have not fallen into sin; who live in heaven (1 Ti. 5:21; compare Jude 6); and who are sent forth to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation. See Notes on He. 1:13, 14, and on Da. 9:21. The word is sometimes applied to *men*, as messengers (Lu. 7:24; 9:52; Ja. 2:25); to the winds (Ps. 104:4); to the pestilence (Ps. 78:49); or **to whatever is appointed to *make known* or to *execute* the will of God.** It is commonly applied, however, to the unfallen, happy spirits that are in heaven, whose dignity and pleasure it is to do the will of God. **Various ways were employed by them in making known the will of God, by dreams, visions, assuming a human appearance, etc.**

In a dream.

This was a common way of making known the will of God to the ancient prophets and people of God,

Ge. 20:3; 30:1, 11, 24; 37:5; 41:1; 1 Ki. 3:5; Dan. 7:1; Job 4:13–15; compare my Notes on Isaiah, vol. i. p. xi, xii, xiii.

In what way it was ascertained that these dreams were from God cannot now be ascertained. It is sufficient for us to know that in this way many of the prophecies were communicated, and to remark that there is no evidence that we are to put reliance on *our* dreams.

Son of David. Descendant of David. See ver. 1. The angel put him in mind of his relation to *David* perhaps to prepare him for the intelligence that Mary was to be the mother of the Messiah—the promised heir of David.

Fear not. Do not hesitate, or have any apprehensions about her virtue and purity. Do not fear that she will be unworthy of you, or will disgrace you.

To take unto thee Mary thy wife. To take her *as* thy wife; to recognize her as such, and to treat her as such.

For that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

Is the direct creation of divine power. A body was thus prepared pure and holy, and free from the corruption of sin, in order that he might be qualified for his great work—the offering of a pure sacrifice to God.

As this was necessary in order to the great work which he came to perform, Joseph is directed by an angel to receive her as pure and virtuous, and as every way worthy of his love. Comp. Notes on He. 10:5.

21. *His name JESUS.*

The name *Jesus* is the same as *Saviour*.

It is derived from the verb signifying *to save*. In Hebrew it is the same as *Joshua*. In two places in the New Testament it is used where it means Joshua, the leader of the Jews into Canaan, and in our translation the name *Joshua* should have been retained, Ac. 7:45; He. 4:8.

It was a very common name among the Jews.

He shall save. This expresses the same as the name, and on this account the name was given to him.

He saves men by dying to redeem them; by giving the Holy Spirit to renew them (Jn. 16:7, 8); by his power in enabling them to overcome their spiritual enemies, in defending them from danger, in guiding them in the path of duty, in sustaining them in trials and in death; and he will raise them up at the last day, and exalt them to a world of purity and love.

His people.

Those whom the Father has given to him.

The Jews were called the people of God because he had chosen them to himself, and regarded them as his peculiar and beloved people, separate from all the nations of the earth. Christians are called the people of Christ because it was the purpose of the Father to give them to him (Is. 53:11; Jn. 6:37); and because in due time he came to redeem them to himself, Tit. 2:14; 1 Pe. 1:2.

From their sins. This was the great business of Jesus in coming and dying.

It was not to save men *IN* their sins, but *FROM* their sins.

Sinners could not be happy in heaven.

It would be a place of wretchedness to the guilty. The design of Jesus was, therefore, to save them *from* sin; and from this we may learn, 1st, That **Jesus had a *design* in coming into the world. He came to save *his people*; and that design will surely be accomplished.** It is impossible that in any part of it he should fail. 2d.

We have no evidence that we are his people unless we are saved from the power and dominion of sin.

A mere profession, of being his people will not answer. Unless we give up our sins; unless we renounce the pride, pomp, and pleasure of the world, we have no evidence that we are the children of God.

It is impossible that we should be Christians if we indulge in sin and live in the practice of any known iniquity. See 1 Jn. 3:7, 8.

3d. That all professing Christians should feel that there is no salvation unless it is *from sin*, and that they can never be admitted to a holy heaven hereafter unless they are made pure, by the blood of Jesus, here.

22. Now all this was done. **The prophecy here quoted is recorded in Is. 7:14.** See Notes on that passage. The prophecy was delivered about 740 years before Christ, in the reign of Ahaz, king of Judah. The land of Judea was threatened with an invasion by the united armies of Syria and Israel, under the command of Rezin and Pekah. Ahaz was alarmed, and seems to have contemplated calling in aid from Assyria to defend him. Isaiah was directed, in his consternation, to go to Ahaz, and tell him to ask a sign from God (Is. 7:10, 11); that is, to

look to *God* rather than to Assyria for aid. This he refused to do. He had not confidence in God, but feared that the land would be overrun by the armies of Syria (ver. 12), and relied only on the aid which he hoped to receive from Assyria. Isaiah answered that, in these circumstances, the Lord would himself give a sign, or a pledge, that the land should be delivered. The sign was, that a virgin should have a son, and that before that son would arrive to years of discretion, the land would be forsaken by these hostile Kings. The prophecy was therefore designed *originally* to signify to Ahaz that the land would *certainly* be delivered from its calamities and dangers, and that the deliverance would not be long delayed. The land of *Syria* and *Israel*, *united* now in confederation, would be deprived of both their kings, and thus the land of Judah would be freed from the threatening danger. This appears to be the *literal* fulfilment of the passage in Isaiah.

Might be fulfilled. It is more difficult to know in what sense this could be said to be *fulfilled* in the birth of Christ. To understand this, it may be remarked that the word *fulfilled* is used in the Scriptures and in other writings in many senses, of which the following are some: 1st. When a thing is *clearly predicted*, and comes to pass, as the destruction of Babylon, foretold in Is. 13:19–22; and of Jerusalem, in Mat. 24. 2d. When one thing is *typified* or shadowed forth by another, and when the event occurs, the type is said to be fulfilled. This was the case in regard to the types and sacrifices in the Old Testament, which were *fulfilled* by the coming of Christ. See He. 9. 3d. When prophecies of future events are expressed in language more elevated and full than the particular thing, at first denoted, demands. Or, in other words, when the language, though it may express one event, is also so full and rich as *appropriately* to express other events *in similar circumstances* and of similar import, they may be said to be *fulfilled*. Thus, *e.g.*, the last chapters of Isaiah, from the fortieth chapter, foretell the return of the Jews into Babylon, and every circumstance mentioned occurred in their return. But the language is more expanded and sublime than was necessary to express their return. It will also *express appropriately* a much more important and magnificent deliverance—that of the redeemed under the Messiah; and the return of the people of God to him, and the universal spread of the gospel; and therefore it may be said *to be fulfilled* in the coming of Jesus and the spread of the gospel. So, if there were any other magnificent and glorious events, still, *in similar circumstances*, and of like character, it might be said also that these prophecies were fulfilled in all of them. The language is so full and rich, and the promises are so grand, that they may appropriately express *all* these deliverances. This may be the sense in which the prophecy now under consideration may be said to have been fulfilled. 4th. Language is said to be fulfilled when, though it was used to express one event, it may be used also to express another. Thus a *fable* may be said to be fulfilled when an event occurs similar to the one concerning which it was first spoken. A parable has its fulfilment in all the cases to which it is applicable; and the same remark applies to a proverb, or to a declaration respecting human nature. The statement that “there is none that doeth good” (Ps. 14:3) was at first spoken of a particular race of wicked men. Yet it is applicable to others, and in this sense may be said to have been fulfilled. See Ro. 3:10. In this use of the word *fulfilled*, it means, not that the passage was at first *intended* to apply *to this particular thing*, but that the words aptly or appropriately express the thing spoken of, and *may* be applied to it. We may say the same of this which was said of another thing, and thus the words

express *both, or are fulfilled*. The writers of the New Testament seem occasionally to have used the word in this sense.

23. *Behold, a virgin shall be with child.*

Matthew clearly understands this as applying literally *to a virgin*. Compare Lu. 1:34. It thus implies that the conception of Christ was miraculous, or that the body of the Messiah was created directly by the power of God, agreeably to the declaration in He. 10:5: “Wherefore, when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, *but a body hast thou prepared me.*”

And they shall call his name Emmanuel. That is, his name shall be so called. See Notes on Is. 7:14. The word *Immanuel* is a Hebrew word, and means literally *God with us*.

Matthew doubtless understands it as denoting that the Messiah was really “God with us,” or that the divine nature was united with the human.

He does not affirm that this was its meaning when used in reference to the child to whom it was first applied, but this is its signification as applicable to the Messiah. *It was fitly expressive of his character;* and in this sense it was fulfilled. When *first* used by Isaiah, it denoted simply that the birth of the child was a sign that God was with the Jews to deliver them. The Hebrews often incorporated the name of Jehovah, or God, into their proper names. Thus, Isaiah means “the salvation of Jehovah;” Eleazer, “help of God;” Eli, “my God,” &c. But **Matthew evidently intends more than was denoted by the simple use of such names. He had just given an account of the miraculous conception of Jesus; of his being begotten by the Holy Ghost. God was therefore his Father.**

He was divine as well as human.

His appropriate name, therefore, was
“God with us.”

And though the mere use of such a name would not prove that he had a divine nature, yet as *Matthew uses it*, and meant evidently to apply it, it *does* prove that Jesus was more than a man; that he was God as well as man. And **it is this which gives glory to the plan of redemption.** It is this which is the wonder of angels. It is this which makes the plan so vast & grand, so full of instruction & comfort to Christians. **See Phi. 2:6–8.**

It is this which sheds such peace and joy into the sinner’s heart; which gives him such security of salvation, and which renders the condescension of God in the work of redemption so great and his character so lovely.

**“Till God in human flesh I see,
My thoughts no comfort find,
The holy, just, and sacred Three
Are terror to my mind.**

**“But if IMMANUEL’s face appears,
My hope, my joy, begins.
His grace removes my slavish fears,
His blood removes my sins.’**

For a full examination of the passage, see my Notes on Is. 7:14.

24. *Being raised from sleep.* Having fully awoke.

Did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him. That is, he took Mary to wife. Probably this was done immediately, as he was now convinced of her innocence, and he would not by delay leave any ground of suspicion that he had not confidence in her.

25. *Knew her not.* The doctrine of the virginity of Mary *before the birth of Jesus is a doctrine of the Scriptures, and is very important to be believed. But the Bible does not affirm that she had no children afterward.* Indeed, all the accounts in the New Testament lead us to suppose that she had. See Notes on Mat. 13:55, 56. The language here evidently implies that she lived as the wife of Joseph after the birth of Jesus.

Her first-born son. Her eldest son, or he that by the law had the privilege of birthright. This does not *of necessity* imply that she had other children, though it seems probable. It was the name given to the son which was first born, whether there were others or not.

His name JESUS. This was given by divine appointment, ver. 21. It was conferred on him on the eighth day, at the time of his circumcision, Lu. 2:21.

Matthew Henry's Commentary:

Verses 18–25

The mystery of Christ's incarnation is
to be adored, not pried into.

If we *know not the way of the Spirit* in the formation of common persons, nor *how the bones are formed in the womb of any one that is with child* (Eccles. 11:5), much less do we know how the blessed Jesus was formed in the womb of the blessed virgin.

When David admires how he himself was *made in secret*, and *curiously wrought* (Ps. 139:13–16), perhaps he speaks in the spirit of Christ's incarnation. Some circumstances attending the birth of Christ we find here which are not in Luke, though it is more largely recorded here. Here we have,

I. Mary's espousal to Joseph. Mary, the mother of our Lord, *was espoused to Joseph*, not completely married, but contracted; a purpose of marriage solemnly declared in words *de futuro*—*that regarding the future*, and a promise of it made if God permit. We read of a man who *has betrothed a wife and has not taken her*, Deu. 20:7. Christ was born of a virgin, but a betrothed virgin,

1. To put respect upon the marriage state, and to recommend it *as honourable among all*, against that doctrine of devils which *forbids to marry*, and places perfection in the single state. Who more highly favoured than Mary was in her espousals?
2. To save the credit of the blessed virgin, which otherwise would have been exposed. It was fit that her conception should be protected by a marriage, and so justified in the eye of the world. One of the ancients says, It was better it should be asked, Is not this the *son of a carpenter*? than, Is not this the *son of a harlot*?
3. That the blessed virgin might have one to be the guide of her youth, the companion of her solitude and travels, a partner in her cares, and a help meet for her. Some think that Joseph was now a widower, and that those who are called the *brethren of Christ* (ch. 13:55), were Joseph's children by a former wife. This is the conjecture of many of the ancients. Joseph was a *just man*, she a *virtuous woman*. Those who are *believers* should not be *unequally yoked with unbelievers*: but let those who are religious choose to marry with those who are so, as they expect the comfort of the relation, and God's blessing upon them in it. We may also learn, from this example, that it is good to enter into the married state with deliberation, and not hastily—to preface the nuptials with a contract. **It is better to *take time to consider* before than to *find time to repent* after.**

II. Her pregnancy of the promised seed; *before they came together*, she *was found with child*, which really was *of the Holy Ghost*. The marriage was deferred so long after the contract that she appeared to be *with child* before the time came for the solemnizing of the marriage, though she was contracted before she conceived. Probably, it was after her return from her cousin Elizabeth, with whom she continued *three months* (Lu. 1:56), that she was perceived by Joseph to be with child, and did not herself deny it. **Note, Those in whom Christ is formed will show it: it will be *found to be* a work of God which he will own.** Now we may well imagine, what a perplexity this might justly occasion to the blessed virgin. She herself knew the divine original of this conception; but how could she prove it? She would be *dealt with as a harlot*. Note, After great and high advancements, lest we should

be puffed up with them, we must expect something or other to humble us, some reproach, *as a thorn in the flesh*, nay, *as a sword in the bones*. **Never was any daughter of Eve so dignified as the Virgin Mary was, and yet in danger of falling under the imputation of one of the worse crimes; yet we do not find that she tormented herself about it; but, being conscious of her own innocence, she kept her mind calm and easy, and committed her cause to *him that judgeth righteously*.** **Note, those who take care to keep a good conscience may cheerfully trust God with the keeping of their good names, and have reason to hope that he will clear up, not only their integrity, but their honour, as the sun at noon day.**

III. **Joseph's perplexity, and his care what to do in this case.** We may well imagine what a great trouble and disappointment it was to him to find one he had such an opinion of, and value for, come under the suspicion of such a heinous crime. *Is this Mary?* He began to think, "How may we be deceived in those we think best of! How may we be disappointed in what we expect most from!" He is loth to believe so ill a thing of one whom he believed to be so good a woman; and yet the matter, as it is too bad to be excused, is also too plain to be denied. What a struggle does this occasion in his breast between that jealousy which is the rage of man, and is cruel as the grave, on the one hand, and that affection which he has for Mary on the other!

Observe,

1. The extremity which he studied to avoid. He was *not willing to make her a public example*. He might have done so; for, by the law, a *betrothed virgin*, if she played the harlot, was to be stoned to death, Deu. 22:23, 24. But he was *not willing* to take the advantage of the law against her; if she be guilty, yet it is not known, nor shall it be known from him. **How different was the spirit which Joseph displayed from that of Judah, who in a similar case hastily passed that severe sentence, *Bring her forth and let her be burnt!* Gen. 38:24.** How good it is to *think on things*, as Joseph did here! **Were there more of deliberation in our censures and judgments, there would be more of mercy and moderation in them.** Bringing her to punishment is here called *making her a public example*; which shows what is the end to be aimed at in punishment—the giving of warning to others: it is *in terrorem*—*that all about may hear and fear*. *Smite the scorner*, and the simple will beware.

Some persons of a rigorous temper would blame Joseph for his clemency: but it is here spoken of to his praise; because *he was a just man*, therefore he was not willing to expose her.

He was a *religious, good man*; and therefore inclined to be merciful as God is, and to *forgive* as one that was *forgiven*. In the case of the betrothed damsel, if she were defiled in the field, the law charitably supposed that she *cried out* (Deu. 22:26), and she was not to be punished. Some charitable construction or other Joseph will put upon this matter; and herein he is a *just man*, tender of the good name of one who never before had done anything to blemish it. Note, It becomes us, in many cases, to be gentle towards those that come under suspicion of having offended, to hope the best concerning them, and make the best of that which at first appears bad, in hopes that it may prove better. *Summum just summa injuria—The rigour of the law is (sometimes) the height of injustice*. That court of conscience which moderates the rigour of the law we call a *court of equity*. Those who are found faulty were perhaps *overtaken in the fault*, and are therefore to be *restored with the spirit of meekness*; and threatening, even when just, must be moderated.

2. The expedient he found out for avoiding this extremity. He was *minded to put her away privily*, that is, to give a bill of divorce into her hand before two witnesses, and so to hush up the matter among themselves. Being a *just man*, that is, a strict observer of the law, he would not proceed to marry her, but resolved to *put her away*; and yet, in tenderness for her, determined to do it as privately as possible. Note, **The necessary censures of those who have offended ought to be managed without noise.**

The words of the wise are heard in quiet.

Christ himself *shall not strive nor cry*. Christian love and Christian prudence will *hide a multitude of sins*, and great ones, as far as may be done without having fellowship with them.

IV. Joseph's discharge from this perplexity by an express sent from heaven, v. 20, 21. *While he thought on these things* and knew not what to determine, God graciously directed him what to do, and made him easy. Note, Those

who would have direction from God must *think on things* themselves, and consult with themselves.

It is the thoughtful, not the unthinking,
whom God will guide.

When he was at a loss, and had carried the matter as far as he could in his own thoughts, then God came in with advice. Note, God's time to come in with instruction to his people is when they are *nonplussed* and at a stand.

God's comforts most delight the soul
in the multitude of its perplexed
thoughts.

The message was sent to Joseph by an *angel of the Lord*, probably the same angel that brought Mary the tidings of the conception—the angel Gabriel. Now the intercourse with heaven, by angels, with which the patriarchs had been dignified, but which had been long disused, begins to be revived; for, when the *First-begotten* is to be *brought into the world*, the angels are ordered to attend his motions. **How far God may now, in an invisible way, make use of the ministration of angels, for extricating his people out of their straits, we cannot say; but this we are sure of, they are all ministering spirits for their good.**

This angel appeared to Joseph *in a dream* when he was asleep, as God sometimes spoke unto the fathers. When we are most quiet and composed we are in the best frame to receive the notices of the divine will. **The Spirit moves on the calm waters.** This dream, no doubt, carried its own evidence along with it that it was of God, and not the production of a vain fancy. Now,

1. Joseph is here *directed* to proceed in his intended marriage. **The angel calls him, *Joseph, thou son of David*; he puts him in mind of his relation to David**, that he might be prepared to receive this surprising intelligence of his relation to the Messiah, who, every one knew, was to be a descendant from David. Sometimes, when great honours devolve upon those who have small estates, they care not for accepting them, but are willing to drop them; it was therefore requisite to put this poor carpenter in mind

of his high birth: "Value thyself. Joseph, thou art that *son of David* through whom the line of the Messiah is to be drawn." We may thus say to every true believer, "Fear not, thou son of Abraham, thou child of God; forget not the dignity of thy birth, thy new birth."

Fear not to take Mary for thy wife; so it may be read. Joseph, suspecting she was with child by whoredom, was afraid of *taking her*, lest he should bring upon himself either guilt or reproach. No, saith God, *Fear not*; the matter is not so. Perhaps Mary had told him that she was with child by the Holy Ghost, and he might have heard what

Elizabeth said to her (Lu. 1:43), when she called her the *mother of her Lord*;

and, if so, he was afraid of presumption in marrying one so much above him. But, from whatever cause his fears arose, they were all silenced with this word, *Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife*. Note, It is a great mercy to be delivered from our fears, and to have our doubts resolved, so as to proceed in our affairs with satisfaction.

2. He is here *informed* concerning that *holy thing* with which his espoused wife was now pregnant. That which is conceived in her is of a divine original. He is so far from being in danger of sharing in an impurity by marrying her, that he will thereby share in the highest dignity he is capable of. Two things he is told,

(1.) **That she had conceived *by the power of the Holy Ghost*; not by the power of nature. The Holy Spirit, who produced the world, now produced the Saviour of the world, and prepared him a body, as was promised him, when he said, *Lo, I come*, Heb. 10:5. Hence he is said to be *made of a woman* (Gal. 4:4), and yet to be that second *Adam* that is the *Lord from heaven*, 1 Co. 15:47. He is the *Son of God*, and yet so far partakes of the substance of his mother as to be called the *fruit of her womb*, Lu. 1:42.** It was requisite that his conception should be otherwise than by ordinary *generation*, that so, though he partook of the human nature, yet he might escape the corruption and pollution of it, and not be *conceived* and *shapen* in

iniquity. Histories tell us of some who vainly pretended to have conceived by a divine power, as the mother of Alexander; but none ever really did so, except the mother of our Lord. His name in this, as in other things, is *Wonderful*. We do not read that the virgin Mary did herself proclaim the honour done to her; but she hid it in her heart, and therefore God sent an angel to attest it. Those who seek not their own glory shall have the honour that comes from God; it is reserved for the humble.

(2.) That she should bring forth *the Saviour of the world* (v. 21). *She shall bring forth a Son*; what he shall be is intimated,

[1.] In the name that should be given to her Son: *Thou shalt call his name Jesus, a Saviour*. Jesus is the same name with Joshua, the termination only being changed, for the sake of conforming it to the Greek. Joshua is called *Jesus* (Acts 7:45; Heb. 4:8), from the Seventy. There were two of that name under the Old Testament, who were both illustrious types of Christ, Joshua who was Israel's captain at their first settlement in Canaan, and Joshua who was their high priest at their second settlement after the captivity, Zec. 6:11, 12. Christ is our Joshua; both the *Captain of our salvation*, and the *High Priest of our profession*, and, in both, our Saviour—a Joshua who comes in the stead of Moses, and does that for us which the *law could not do, in that it was weak*. Joshua had been called *Hosea*, but Moses prefixed the first syllable of the name *Jehovah*, and so made it *Jehoshua* (Num. 13:16), to intimate that the Messiah, who was to bear that name, should be *Jehovah*; he is therefore *able to save to the uttermost*, neither is there *salvation in any other*.

[2.] In the reason of that name: *For he shall save his people from their sins; not the nation of the Jews only (he came to his own, and they received him not), but all who were given him by the Father's choice, and all who had given themselves to him by their own*. He is a king who *protects* his subjects, and, as the judges of Israel of old, *works salvation* for them.

Note, *those whom Christ saves he saves from their sins; from the guilt of sin by the merit of his death, from the dominion of sin by the Spirit of his grace*. In saving them from sin, he saves them from wrath and the curse, and all misery here and hereafter.

Christ came to save his people, not in
their sins, but from their sins; to
purchase for them, not a liberty to sin,
but a liberty from sins,

to redeem them from all iniquity (Tit. 2:14); and so **to redeem them from among men (Rev. 14:4) to himself, who is separate from sinners.**

So that those who leave their sins, and give up themselves to Christ as *his people*, are interested in the Saviour, and the great salvation which he has wrought out, Rom. 11:26.

v. **The fulfilling of the scripture in all this.** This evangelist, writing among the Jews, more frequently observes this than any other of the evangelists. Here **the Old Testament prophecies had their accomplishment in our Lord Jesus**, by which it appears that this was he that should come, and we are to look for no other; for this was he *to whom all the prophets bore witness*. Now the scripture that was fulfilled in the birth of Christ was that promise of a sign which God gave to king Ahaz (Isa. 7:14), *Behold a virgin shall conceive*; where the prophet, encouraging the people of God to hope for the promised deliverance from Sennacherib's invasion, directs them to look forward to the Messiah, who was to come of the people of the Jews, and the house of David; whence it was easy to infer, that though that people and that house were afflicted, yet neither the one nor the other could be abandoned to ruin, so long as God had such an honour, such a blessing, in reserve for them.

The deliverances which God wrought for the Old-Testament church were types and figures of the great salvation by Christ; and, if God will do the greater, he will not fail to do the less.

The prophecy here quoted is justly ushered in with a Behold, which commands both attention and admiration; for we have here the mystery of godliness, which is, without controversy, great, that God was manifested in the flesh.

1. The sign given is that the Messiah shall be *born of a virgin*.

A *virgin* shall conceive, and, by her, he shall be manifested *in the flesh*. The word *Almah* signifies a *virgin* in the strictest sense, such as Mary professes herself to be (Lu. 1:34), *I know not a man*; nor had it been any such wonderful sign as it was intended for, if it had been otherwise.

It was intimated from the beginning that the Messiah should be born of a virgin, when it was said that he should be the seed of the woman; so the seed of the woman as not to be the seed of any man.

Christ was born of a virgin not only because his birth was to be *supernatural*, and altogether extraordinary, but because it was to be *spotless*, and pure, and without any stain of sin. Christ would be born, not of an *empress* or *queen*, for he appeared not in outward pomp or splendour, but of a virgin, to teach us spiritual purity, to die to all the delights of sense, and so to *keep ourselves unspotted* from the world and the flesh that we may be presented *chaste virgins to Christ*.

2. The truth proved by this sign is, that he is the Son of God, and the Mediator between God and man:

for *they shall call his name Immanuel*; that is, he shall be *Immanuel*; and when it is said, *He shall be called*, it is meant, he shall *be*, the Lord our righteousness.

Immanuel signifies *God with us*; a mysterious name, but very precious; God *incarnate* among us, and so God *reconcilable* to us, at peace with us, and taking us into covenant and communion with himself.

The people of the Jews had God with them, in types and shadows, dwelling between the cherubim; but never so as when the Word was made flesh—that was the blessed *Shechinah*. What a happy

step is hereby taken toward the settling of a peace and correspondence between God and man, that the two natures are thus brought together in the person of the Mediator! by this he became an unexceptionable referee, a days-man, fit to *lay his hand upon them both*, since he partakes of the nature of both.

Behold, in this, the deepest mystery,
and the richest mercy, that ever was.

By the light of nature, we see God as a God above us; by the light of the law, we see him as a God against us; but by the light of the gospel, we see him as Immanuel, God with us, in our own nature, and (which is more) in our interest. Herein the Redeemer *commended his love*.

With Christ's name, Immanuel, we may compare the name given to the gospel church (Eze. 48:35). Jehovah Shammah—The Lord is there; the Lord of hosts is with us.

Nor is it improper to say that the prophecy which foretold that he should be called Immanuel was fulfilled, in the design and intention of it, when he was called Jesus; for if he had not been Immanuel—God with us, he could not have been Jesus—a Saviour; and herein consists the salvation he wrought out, in the bringing of God and man together; this was what he designed, to bring God to be with us, which is our great happiness, and to bring us to be with God, which is our great duty.

VI. Joseph's obedience to the divine precept (v. 24). *Being raised from sleep by the impression which the dream made upon him, **he did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him**, though it was contrary to his former sentiments and intentions; **he took unto him his wife**; he did it speedily, without delay, and cheerfully, without dispute; he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.*

Extraordinary direction like this we are not now to expect; but God has still ways of making known his mind in doubtful cases, by hints of providence, debates of conscience, and advice of faithful friends; by each of these, applying the general rules of the written word, we should, therefore, in all the steps of our life, particularly the great turns of it, such as this of Joseph's, take direction from God, and we shall find it safe and comfortable to do as he bids us.

VII. The accomplishment of the divine promise (v. 25).

She brought forth her first-born son.

The circumstances of it are more largely related, Lu. 2:1, etc. Note, That which is *conceived of the Holy Ghost* never proves *abortive*, but will certainly be *brought forth* in its season. What is *of the will of the flesh*, and *of the will of man*, often miscarries; but, if Christ be *formed* in the soul, God himself has begun the good work which he will perform;

what is conceived in grace will no doubt be brought forth in glory.

It is here further observed,

1. That Joseph, though he solemnized the marriage with Mary, his espoused wife, kept at a distance from her while she was with child of this Holy thing; he *knew her not till she had brought him forth*. Much has been said concerning the perpetual virginity of Mary: Jerome was very angry with Helvidius for denying it. It is certain that it cannot be proved from scripture. Dr. *Whitby* inclines to think that when it is said, *Joseph knew her not till she had brought forth her first-born*, it is intimated that, afterwards, the reason ceasing, he lived with her, according to the law, Ex. 21:10.

2. That Christ was the *first-born*; and so he might be called though his mother had not any other children after him, according to the language of scripture. Nor is it without a mystery that Christ is called her *first-born*, for he is the *first-born of every creature*, that is, the Heir of all things; and he is the *first-born among many brethren*, that in all things he may have the pre-eminence.

3. That *Joseph called his name Jesus*, according to the direction given him. God having *appointed* him to be the Saviour, which was intimated in his giving him the name *Jesus*, we must *accept* of him to be our Saviour, and, in concurrence with that appointment, we must call him *Jesus, our Saviour*.⁴

⁴ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 1612–1614.

◀ 1510. eimi ▶

Strong's Concordance

eimi: I exist, I am

Original Word: εἰμί

Part of Speech: Verb

Transliteration: eimi

Phonetic Spelling: (i-mee')

Definition: I exist, I am

Usage: I am, exist.

HELPS Word-studies

1510 *eimí* (the basic Greek verb which expresses *being*, i.e. "to be") – *am*, *is*. **1510** (*eimí*), and its counterparts, (properly) convey "straight-forward" *being* (*existence*, i.e. without explicit limits).

1510 /*eimí* ("is, am") – in the *present* tense, indicative mood – can be time-inclusive ("omnitemporal," like the Hebrew imperfect tense). Only the *context* indicates whether

the *present* tense also has "timeless" implications. **For example, **1510** (*eimí*) is aptly used in Christ's great "I am" (*ego eimi* . . .) that also include His *eternality* (*self-existent life*) as our life, bread, light," etc. See Jn 7:34, 8:58, etc.**

Example: Jn 14:6: "I am (**1510** /*eimí*) the way, the truth and the life." Here **1510** (*eimí*) naturally accords with the fact Christ is *eternal* – meaning "I am (*was, will be*)." The "I am formula (Gk *ego eimi*)" harks back to *God's only name*, "Yahweh" (OT/3068, "the lord") – meaning "He who always was, is, and will be." Compare Jn 8:58 with Ex 3:14. See also Rev 4:8 and **2962** /*kýrios* ("Lord").

NAS Exhaustive Concordance

Word Origin

a prol. form of a prim. and defective verb

Definition

I exist, I am

NASB Translation

accompanied* (1), accompany* (2), am (138), amount (1), amounts (1), appear* (1), asserted* (1), become* (5), been (45), been* (1), being (26), belong (3), belonged* (1), belonging (1), belonging* (1), belongs (4), bring* (1), came (1), come (5), consist (1), crave* (1), depends* (1), do (1), done* (1), exist (3), existed (4), existed* (1), falls (1), found (1), had (8), happen (4), have (2), have come (1), lived (1), mean (1), mean* (2), means (7), meant (2), originate (1), owns (1), remain (3), remained (1), rest (1), sided (1), stayed (2), themselves (1), there (6), turn (1).

ANSWERS IN GENESIS:

God, the Holy Spirit

by [Dr. Mark Bird](#)

Featured in [Answers in Depth](#)

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Abstract

The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force. The Bible teaches that He is active in our lives, a distinct person, and fully God.

Today is May the 4th, a day on which many people greet each other by saying “May the fourth be with you” as a clever play on words to the popular movie quote, “May the force be with you,” from Disney’s *Star Wars* movies. But unlike the impersonal force represented in *Star Wars*, the Holy Spirit is [God](#) Himself, who lives inside of and educates, strengthens, enlightens, and encourages Christians.

My brother Dave was the area supervisor of several gas stations. Every day he visited each of his stores. One morning he left early and started for the farthest store on his route. Dave was feeling depressed, and with no one in the car with him, he had few distractions from his feelings. The emptiness of his life troubled him. The road trip was getting miserable... Then suddenly, Dave said he heard a voice, an audible voice! Someone in that car said, “Jesus loves you!” In shock, my brother

turned to his right. He saw no one. *Who was that? Was it God?* “Forgive me!” Dave cried out. Then something happened in his heart. God gave him the assurance right then that he was a new creature in Christ.

Discovering that he no longer wanted the cigarettes in his front pocket, Dave threw them onto the car floor to be thrown away when he reached his destination. When he got home that night, he poured out the alcohol from the bar in his basement. He gathered his family around the dining room table and told them that things would be different in their home. And they were. That was over twenty years ago, and my brother is still a strong [Christian](#).

Now my question is: who spoke to my brother going down the highway? Was it an angel? Was it [Jesus](#)? Was it Dave’s imagination? I believe the voice Dave heard that morning was the voice of the Holy Spirit. Why does He speak? He speaks (though usually not audibly) because He is a Person, because He is God, and because His work is to bring each of us into a delightful, personal relationship with Jesus.

The Holy Spirit Is a Person

The Holy Spirit can speak ([Acts 8:29](#), [11:12](#), [13:2](#))—though some people don’t think the Holy Spirit can speak because they think of the Holy Spirit as an impersonal force, or simply a presence. For instance, a Jehovah’s Witness might say something like this:

“The holy spirit is not a person and it is not a part of a Trinity. The holy spirit is God’s active force that he uses to accomplish his will. . . . To a certain extent, it can be likened to electricity.”^{[1](#)}

The Jehovah’s Witness sees the Holy Spirit as an impersonal force. Maybe you, too, have trouble thinking of the Holy Spirit as a real person. After all, He doesn’t have a physical body like Jesus does. But He is a person who has eternally lived in an intimate relationship with God the

Father and God the Son. And now He invites each of us to participate in that dynamic relationship of love.

Biblical Proof That the Holy Spirit Is a Person

A real person has the attributes of personality, which include mind, will, and emotions. Does the Holy Spirit have a will? He distributes spiritual gifts to Christians “as He wills.”² Does the Holy Spirit have a mind? He “searches . . . the deep things of God” and knows them.³ Does the Holy Spirit have emotions? We are told to “grieve not the Holy Spirit.”⁴ If the Holy Spirit can be grieved, then He has emotions. Because the Holy Spirit has a mind, a will, and emotions, we know that He is a Person.⁵

A real person also has the capacity to have relationships with others. That’s the primary reason we have mind, will, and emotions. According to [Philippians 2:1](#), the Spirit is able to have fellowship with us.⁶ According to [2 Corinthians 13:14](#), the Holy Spirit can have communion with us.⁷ One who is able to commune and to have fellowship is capable of personal relationships. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is a person.

What This Means for You

The Holy Spirit is a real Person, not just a force or a presence or a power.

Understand that the Holy Spirit is a real Person, not just a force or a presence or a power. You must recognize Him as a Person. He can speak.⁸ He is praying for you, just as Christ is praying for you.⁹ He will teach you what you need to know. He will guide you in your decisions. He tells you that you are a child of God.¹⁰ He will personally clean up the “rooms” of your innermost being when you let Him. You can submit to His voice or reject His voice. If you disobey His voice, He will be grieved. Respecting the Holy Spirit as a person is necessary for your relationship with Him.

Listening to the Spirit

Take time to listen for the Spirit. Don't wait for an audible voice, but listen as He speaks through the Word. Learn to understand what many call "the prompts" and "the checks" of the Spirit. You can experience these because the Spirit, as a divine Person, has taken a personal interest in you. Have you ever thanked Him for that?

The Holy Spirit Is God

The Holy Spirit is the all-knowing, all-seeing, everywhere-present God. [Acts 5:3–4](#) teaches us that the Holy Spirit is God. Remember the story of Ananias and Sapphira? Before Ananias was struck dead, Peter told him, "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit? . . . You have not lied to men; but to God." From this event we can see that lying to the Holy Spirit is the same as lying to God; therefore, the Holy Spirit is God.

There is more Scriptural evidence that the Holy Spirit is God. We see from the [Bible](#) that:

- The words of God are the words the Holy Spirit inspired.[11](#)
- We are the temple of God because the Spirit indwells us.[12](#)
- The one born of the Spirit is said to be born of God.[13](#)

The Holy Spirit is God Himself, the third Person of the divine Trinity. Why is it so important to believe in the deity and personhood of the Holy Spirit? It is crucial because you cannot give Him the honor and respect that He deserves if you don't consider Him a divine Person. In fact, I find it doubtful that someone can be saved while he denies the personhood and deity of the One who tries to draw him to salvation.[14](#)

The Holy Spirit Is Distinct from the Father and the Son

One person I talked to declared, “The Holy Spirit is Jesus.” Some people think that the Holy Spirit is actually the same Person as the Father and the Son. But the Scriptures clearly teach a distinction between the Persons of the Trinity. For example, again and again in *John 14–16*, Jesus referred to a Helper (“Comforter” in the KJV) that He would send when He went back to the Father.¹⁵ This Helper would guide the disciples and teach them.¹⁶ If Jesus and the Holy Spirit were one and the same Person, Jesus’s reference to the Holy Spirit as *another* Helper would not make sense. Jesus must have been referring to *another* Person distinct from Himself.

The Holy Spirit has lived in a loving relationship with the Father and Son from all eternity.

Look at the account of Jesus’s baptism.¹⁷ Here the Son is baptized; a voice from Heaven says, “This is my beloved Son”; and the Holy Spirit, like a dove, rests upon Jesus. All of this occurs simultaneously. All three of the members of the Trinity are seen here at the same time, obviously distinct from one another.

As a distinct person, the Holy Spirit has lived in a loving relationship with the Father and Son from all eternity. God created us to participate in that love relationship. God wants us to enjoy fellowship with Him,¹⁸ as each member of the Trinity has enjoyed fellowship with each other from before the beginning of time.¹⁹

The Spirit Is at Work in the World and in Your Heart Today

The Holy Spirit speaks to us because He is the third Person of the Trinity, sent by the Father and the Son to work in our hearts.²⁰ The Holy Spirit was active in creation.²¹ He inspired the Holy Scriptures.²² So, what does He do today? He convicts the world of sin.²³ He regenerates the repentant believer²⁴ and gives assurance to those of us who are saved.²⁵ He sanctifies us.²⁶ He fills us with His presence.²⁷ He gives us power to live holy lives²⁸ and to be witnesses for God.²⁹ He helps us understand the Bible.³⁰ He enables us to exhibit the “fruit of the Spirit.”³¹ He gives gifts to

each member of the church so that each of us in the “body” can contribute as the Spirit desires.^{[32](#)} He “seals” us for the day of redemption, guaranteeing our inheritance in heaven.^{[33](#)}

Personal Application

Are you allowing God the Holy Spirit to work in your life? Are you letting Him sanctify you? Has He given you power to be an effective witness? Are you manifesting the “fruit of the Spirit?” Have you discovered the spiritual gifts that the Spirit has given you? Are you letting Him use you in the body of Christ?

The Holy Spirit wants to take up personal residence inside us. We can have a joyful life filled with the presence of the Spirit. We should listen carefully for the Spirit, for He loves to encourage and empower those who are willing to obey His voice as they study Scripture.

What are the seven I AM statements in the Gospel of John?

In the Gospel of John, Jesus makes seven statements beginning with the words *I am*. Each of these “I am” proclamations furthers our understanding of Jesus’ ministry in the world. They also link Jesus to the Old Testament revelation of God.

In the Old Testament, God revealed His name to Moses: “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you’” ([Exodus 3:14](#)). Thus, in Judaism, “I AM” is unquestionably understood

as a name for God. Whenever Jesus made an “I am” statement in which He claimed attributes of deity, He was identifying Himself as God.

Here are the seven metaphorical “I am” statements found in John’s gospel:

“I am the [bread of life](#)” ([John 6:35](#), [41](#), [48](#), [51](#)). In this chapter, Jesus establishes a pattern that continues through John’s gospel—Jesus makes a statement about who He is, and He backs it up with something He does. In this case, Jesus states that He is the bread of life just after He had fed the 5,000 in the wilderness. At the same time, He contrasts what He can do with what Moses had done for their ancestors: “Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die” (verses 49–50).

“I am the [light of the world](#)” ([John 8:12](#); [9:5](#)). This second of Jesus’ “I am” statements in John’s gospel comes right before He heals a man born blind. Jesus not only says He is the light; He proves it. Jesus’ words and actions echo [Genesis 1:3](#), “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.”

“[I am the door](#)” ([John 10:7](#) and [9](#), ESV). This “I am” statement stresses that no one can enter the kingdom of heaven by any other means than Christ Himself. Jesus’ words in this passage are couched in the imagery of a sheepfold. He is the one and only way to enter the fold. “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber” (verse 1, ESV).

“I am the [good shepherd](#)” ([John 10:11](#), [14](#)). With this “I am” statement, Jesus portrays His great love and care. He is the One who willingly protects His flock even to the point of death (verses 11 and 15). When Jesus called Himself the good shepherd, He unmistakably took for Himself one of God’s titles in the Old Testament: “The Lord is my shepherd” ([Psalm 23:1](#)).

“I am [the resurrection and the life](#)” ([John 11:25](#)). Jesus made this “I am” statement immediately before raising Lazarus from the dead. Again, we see that Jesus’ teaching was not just empty talk; when He made a claim, He substantiated it with action. He holds “the keys of death and the grave” ([Revelation 1:18](#), NLT). In raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus showed how He can fulfill Yahweh’s promise to ancient Israel: “[God’s] dead shall live; their bodies shall rise” ([Isaiah 26:19](#), ESV). Apart from Jesus, there is neither resurrection nor eternal life.

"I am [the way and the truth and the life](#)" ([John 14:6](#)). This powerful "I am" statement of Christ's is packed with meaning. Jesus is not merely one way among many ways to God; He is the only way. Scripture said that "The very essence of [God's] words is truth" ([Psalm 119:160, NLT](#)), and here is Jesus proclaiming that He is the truth—confirming His identity as the Word of God (see [John 1:1, 14](#)). And Jesus alone is the source of life; He is the Creator and Sustainer of all life and the Giver of eternal life.

"I am the [true vine](#)" ([John 15:1, 5](#)). The final metaphorical "I am" statement in the Gospel of John emphasizes the sustaining power of Christ. We are the branches, and He is the vine. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit unless it is joined in vital union with the vine, only those who are joined to Christ and receive their power from Him produce fruit in the Christian life.

There are two more "[I am](#)" statements of Jesus in the Gospel of John. These are not metaphors; rather, they are declarations of God's name, as applied by Jesus to Himself. The first instance comes as Jesus responds to a complaint by the Pharisees. "I tell you the truth," Jesus says, "before Abraham was born, I am!" ([John 8:58](#)). The verbs Jesus uses are in stark contrast with each other: Abraham *was*, but I *am*. There is no doubt that the Jews understood Jesus' claim to be the eternal God incarnate, because they took up stones to kill Him (verse 59).

The second instance of Jesus applying to Himself the name *I AM* comes in the Garden of Gethsemane. When the mob came to arrest Jesus, He asked them whom they sought.

They said, "Jesus of Nazareth," and Jesus replied, "I am he" ([John 18:4–5](#)). Then something strange happened: "When Jesus said, 'I am he,' they drew back and fell to the ground" (verse 6). Perhaps explaining the mob's reaction is the fact that the word *he* has been provided by our English translators. Jesus simply said, "I am." Applying God's covenant name to Himself, Jesus demonstrated His power over His foes and showed that His surrender to them was entirely voluntary (see [John 10:17–18; 19:11](#)).