

# Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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## The Birth of Jesus, King and Savior

by Dan Trygg

“Now the birth of Jesus Anointed-King was-being in-this-manner.”

Matthew 1:18a

It is interesting to compare Matthew's version of the birth of Jesus to that which is recorded by Luke (1:1-2:20). It quickly becomes evident that **Matthew recorded the story from the perspective of Joseph, while Luke recorded things passed along to him by Mary.** It is amazing to see how little the two accounts repeat material recorded by the other. You would think that something as important as the story of Jesus' birth would have been repeated in both accounts, especially if one of the authors had the other one's work to use as a reference. Matthew records from the Jewish perspective, especially as it relates to Jesus' being a rightful heir to the Davidic throne. In the earlier part of the chapter, his interest had been to follow Joseph's lineage from Abraham and David, to establish that Jesus could be the Anointed-King, or Christ (Matt. 1:1-17; cf. Lk. 23:2). We should not be surprised that he continues in this vein in the second part of the chapter. **His concern is to legitimize Jesus as the promised Anointed-King.**

Matthew describes the situation very briefly. **Joseph and Mary were betrothed**, i.e., they had been promised to each other. Betrothal was similar to engagement for couples in our culture, except that betrothal was considered a covenant that was as legally binding as a marriage. To end such a covenant required more than simply “breaking up” the relationship. The man would have to divorce his intended wife, requiring a legal certificate, to bring their covenant to an end. **Betrothal was a family affair**, in that usually marriages were arranged between families. **Family honor was a significant issue at stake.** The period of betrothal usually lasted a year, during which time the future husband would build a home for his bride and his future family. Relationships between men and women were much more carefully monitored than is true in our culture, and sexual relations between the couple were strictly forbidden. Certainly virginity before marriage was expected. If it was discovered that this was not the case, this in itself was grounds for termination of a betrothal or marriage. This could involve not only public humiliation, but also beating or stoning for the woman being judged as having been promiscuous before marriage (Deut. 22:13-21).

**Matthew tells us, “before they came together she was found to be with child”** (Matt. 1:18). **For Joseph, this would have been a nightmare.** From Luke's gospel, we discover that three months earlier Mary had been visited by the angel, announcing that she would become pregnant by the Holy Spirit. She had been instructed to leave Nazareth to visit her relative, Elizabeth, an old woman who also became pregnant as a sign of God's intervention and favor (Lk. 1:1-56). When Mary returned, being now visibly three months pregnant, Joseph could only fear the worst, namely that, away from his watchful care, somehow she had been seduced, or had been promiscuous. **He knew that he was not the father**, and it must have grieved him that someone else had picked the bloom which had been promised to him. Being a righteous man, it was unthinkable that he would marry her, ...but, at the same time, out of his love for her, he could not bring himself (lit., he was “not desiring”) to make a public display of her. Instead, **he purposed to divorce her privately and quietly.**

**“An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream”** (1:20). This is the first of four times where we are told that God communicated to Joseph in this way (cf. 2:13,19,22). It is ironic that this son of Judah should be named after the famous forefather of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph the son of Jacob, who was also one who received communication from God through dreams (Gen. 37:5-11). There are many times in the Bible where God communicated with people through dreams (e.g., Gen. 20:3; 28:10-12; 31:24; 37:5; 41:1-13; Judg. 7:13,14; I Kg. 3:5; Job 7:14; Dan. 2:1-13; Matt. 27:13,19). It was not uncommon for these dreams to include angels, as Joseph's did. It is important for us to understand this, because the Bible tells us that **we live at a time when God's people will see visions and dream revelatory dreams** (Acts 2:17,18). Apparently, Joseph had received messages from God in this manner before, because he never wavers in his reaction to any of these revelations. His response is instant and complete. He immediately does exactly as he had been instructed.

Here **he is told “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife”** (1:20). (Note that he is addressed as “Joseph, son of David”, emphasizing *again* the lineage from King David.) **Fear is the emotion which the angel addresses.** “Fear *not*”, ...Mary has *not* been unfaithful. “Fear *not*”, ...she is *not* unstable and untrustworthy. “Fear *not*”, ...the child does *not* even belong to some other man. “For the thing having been begotten in her is out from the Holy Spirit” (1:20). There is no record of any conversation between Mary and Joseph, where she may have tried to explain to him what had happened to her. Thus, we have no way of knowing if the angel's message is a confirmation of her words, or a fresh revelation to Joseph apart from anything which she may have said. What we do know is that **the angel told him that**

**the child was not the offspring of a man, but of the Holy Spirit. He also told Him that she would bear a Son, and that he was to name Him “Jesus” (meaning “Yahweh saves”).**

Furthermore, if vss. 22,23 are a continuation of the angel’s message, he went on to explain to Joseph how **this very event had been prophesied in the OT.** (The quotation is directly from the Greek Septuagint [LXX] translation of Isaiah 7:14. Since Joseph was from Galilee, an area where the Jews typically talked and did business in *Koinē* Greek, the LXX may have been more familiar to him than the Hebrew. Certainly, it would have been more familiar to the Greek-speaking Jews scattered throughout the Empire, who would later read this account.) **Note that all the necessary ingredients are there in this prophecy to explain to Joseph what was happening, and to put him at ease.** “Behold, the virgin shall be with child (she is *still* a virgin), and she shall bear a Son (as the angel is declaring to him will take place with Mary’s child), and they will call His name ‘Immanuel’, which translated means, ‘God with us’” (which would *literally* be true if He were the offspring of the Holy Spirit, or metaphorically understood, since God is sending this Child to save them from their sins). **Note that the revelation conveyed in the dream was confirmed in the Scriptures. This provided a sound foundation for Joseph’s faith.**

The angel’s visitation in Joseph’s dream had its intended effect. Joseph arose from his sleep, and *immediately* did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took her as his wife. This is a wonderful quality to emulate in the man whom God chose to be a role model for His Son. **Once Joseph clearly knew what God desired of him, he went into action. He did not delay to do the Lord’s will.** He was on it instantly. In a relationship, when one party *immediately responds* to the needs and desires of the other person, *what does that communicate?* It expresses the relative importance of that person to his friend or partner. When we *delay*, ...when we say, “I’ll get to that”..., we certainly are *not* communicating that same level of commitment and dedication, are we? **Instant obedience demonstrates that God’s will is of first importance.**

**It is important to understand another aspect of this obedience, which may not be so apparent on the surface reading. To everyone who knew them, when Joseph went to take the obviously pregnant Mary to be his wife, this would have looked like an admission of impropriety on their part,** an admission that *he* was the father of Mary’s Child. For two people who had striven their entire lives to be holy, who had purposed to live in a way that was dedicated to God, this would have been a very difficult thing to deal with. *Any self-righteousness was dashed to the ground.* They had to *look like sinners* in order to do as God asked. Only the two of them would really know what had transpired. **Sometimes God may lead us in ways that are misunderstood by others. What is important is that we maintain our own integrity and obedience to God. God will never ask us to sin, or to violate what is clearly His revealed will.** One of the important tests we must utilize to evaluate thoughts and suggestions, either within our own head, or by other people, is to carefully examine whether the proposed actions are in agreement with what the Bible teaches, or not. If it is contrary to what God says in the Scriptures, then we can know that it is not the Spirit of God that is behind the suggestion.

The next phrase, “and kept her a virgin until she gave birth” indicates that **Joseph had no sexual relations with Mary until after the Child was born. The implication is that once the Baby came, they had a normal marriage relationship, including sexual intimacy.** In spite of the beliefs of some, who want to preserve Mary as a “perpetual virgin”, that did not seem to be God’s interest, nor certainly Joseph’s. The Scripture records that Jesus had other siblings. He had four brothers: James, Joseph, Simon and Judas (Matt. 13:55; cf. Jn. 7:3-5,10; Acts 1:14; Gal. 1:19), and He also had “sisters”, though we are never told how many (13:56). There is no attempt by Matthew to explain this in any other terms than that they were natural half-siblings, children of Joseph and Mary. Since Matthew is writing to new converts, or seekers, if the perpetual virginity of Mary were an important teaching of the early church, then we would expect some clarification, but there is none. Nor is there any mention of such an idea in any other NT book.

**“and he called His name Jesus” (1:25)** The chapter ends with Joseph’s *further* obedience to the angelic vision. Note that Jesus’ birth is simply alluded to in passing. The details of the trip to Bethlehem, of the birth in the stable, or of the baby lying in a feeding trough are left to Luke’s account. The appearance of the angels to the shepherds, or their search for the Child, and the wonderment of all who heard of their story, do not even receive the slightest mention by Matthew. Both accounts, however, record that the angel told them to name the Child “Jesus”, “Yahweh-saves”. Matthew’s version offers the further explanation, **“for it is He who will save His people from their sins” (1:21). What is it about “sin” that we need to be “rescued” from? Matthew makes no attempt to explain this. It is as if we all should know.** On the most simple level, however, “sin” is an error, a mistake. The word means to “miss the mark”. It is like we are doing the best we can in life to accomplish what we think is right for us, but we miss the target, and unfortunately we also lose the prize or benefit that we had thought we would get. We mess up, because we don’t really see the big picture. The prophet Isaiah wrote, “Your sins have made a separation between you and your God” (59:2). Sin originally also brought toil, pain and sorrow (Gen. 3:16,17). It also brings death and judgment (Rom. 2:5,6; 6:23). **If Jesus could rescue you from your mistakes, would you be interested?**