

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD CHRISTMAS EVE

Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

by: Rev. Roberto Rojas



Matthew 1:18-25 ESV

Author and Date:

The Holy Spirit caused His Word to be written through St. Matthew Levi the apostle and evangelist around 50 AD. This is the historical account of the birth of Jesus fulfilling the direct messianic prophecy written by Isaiah the Prophet (734 BC).

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 from the Holy Spirit.

- Betrothal was a legally binding relationship, the first stage of marriage, lasting about a year. Joseph and Mary did not live together or have sexual relations, as is indicated by the phrase, “before they came together.”
- To marry Mary, Joseph would have had to receive permission from her father, publicly declare his intent to be Mary’s husband, demonstrate his ability to provide for her while living apart, and abstain from sexual intimacy. After the wedding, they would consummate the marriage and live together. All Christian parents should teach their children to keep the 6th Commandment and do the same.

¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

- Joseph was a just man because he had faith in God’s Word and wished to live according to His Law. Assuming that Mary had been unfaithful to him, Joseph sought to divorce her quietly because the Law called for a betrothed woman to be stoned if she was guilty of adultery (Deuteronomy 22:23-24). He feared and loved God and for this reason sought to not hurt her reputation, but defend her (8th Commandment).

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.”

- The angel of the Lord who announced the miracle of Mary’s pregnancy is the same one who warned Joseph in a dream to flee to Egypt (Matthew 2:13, 19).
- The angel affirms Joseph’s lineage and the accuracy of Matthew’s genealogy (Matthew 1).

²¹ “She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

- The angel predicts not only the sex of the child (son), but also what that son will do.
- “He Himself” (Greek: *autos*)—the use of *autos* is emphatic (see Matthew 3:11; 8:24; 16:20) and reads, “He *Himself* will save his people from their sins.” God does not simply send a savior: He is the Savior. Neither is Jesus just another deliverer or earthly ruler; His name indicates what He alone would do: save His people from their sins.
- Jesus saving us from our sin not only points to His first Advent in humiliation, but also His second Advent in glory. He will not only forgive and remove the guilt of sin from His people now, but He will eternally remove sin from His people in the Resurrection to eternal life (Matthew 13:40-43; Revelation 21:4, 27).
- “[Matthew] darkly signified the Gentiles too. For ‘His people’ are not the Jews only, but also all that draw nigh and receive the knowledge that is from Him” (John Chrysostom, NPNF1 10:26).

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- “[Matthew] darkly signified the Gentiles too. For ‘His people’ are not the Jews only, but also all that draw nigh and receive the knowledge that is from Him” (John Chrysostom, NPNF1 10:26).

- This text shows that there is a difference between a person and his sin, between original sin and the creature himself. Lutherans have always confessed this teaching of Scripture: “Original sin does not come from God. God is not sin’s creator or author. Nor is original sin God’s creature or work, but it is the devil’s work. . . . [I]t is God’s work that a person can think, speak, do, and work anything. . . . But human nature is corrupt. Its thoughts, words, and works are wicked. This is originally satan’s work, who has corrupted God’s work in Adam through sin. From Adam, sin is passed down to us by inheritance [Romans 5:12]. . . . [I]n the article of Sanctification Scripture testifies that God cleanses, washes, and sanctifies mankind from sin [1 Corinthians 6:11; 1 John 1:7] and that Christ saves His people from their sins [Matthew 1:21]. Sin, therefore, cannot be a person himself. For God receives a person into grace for Christ’s sake. But God remains hostile to sin eternally. . . .” (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration: Article I. Original Sin, 41-45).

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

- This is the first of ten times where Matthew introduces a fulfillment of the Old Testament with these words. Matthew 3:3 states that John the Baptist is “spoken of by the prophet Isaiah,” but Scripture does not say he “fulfilled” (Greek: *pleróo*) the Scripture: This word is used only when Jesus fulfills prophecies (see Matthew 1:23; 2:6, 15, 18, 23).

²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).

- God spoke this prophecy to Ahaz, the evil king of Judah (see 2 Kings 16:1-4). Israel and Syria threatened Judah because King Ahaz refused to join forces with them against Assyria. Instead, Ahaz asked the king of Assyria for help (1 Kings 16:5-9). Rather than trust in God, he took refuge in a pagan man. God commanded Ahaz to ask Him for a sign, but Ahaz refused because he would have to give up his plan and idolatry (Isaiah 7:10-12). Nevertheless, God gave a sign to the House of David. Even though Ahaz refused to believe that God could deliver Judah from her enemies, God responded by giving Judah the sign of deliverance from all enemies: A virgin will conceive and bear a son. This is the direct Messianic prophecy that God promised to save them from their sin! God gave Judah a preview of His faithfulness by destroying their enemies

(Isaiah 7:16), thus foreshadowing how God would destroy the enemies of sin, death, and the devil (Romans 6:14; Romans 16:20; 1 Corinthians 15:55; Revelation 20:1-3).

- “He is called ‘Immanuel’ (Isaiah 7:14), which means, if you interpret it, ‘God with us,’ *primarily* with regard to the person, because in the unity of His person He is God and man, ‘God revealed in the flesh’ (1 Timothy 3:16); who became flesh and ‘dwelt among us’ (John 1:14), for which reason God is said to have been ‘with Him’ (Acts 10:38). . . . [I]f Immanuel were not God and man, He would not be able to be ‘Jesus.’ . . . [T]he Messiah is our Immanuel . . . He is called God and man—both from the Spirit and from His mother—and this is what all Christians believe and call Him, because He shares two natures, divine and human. *Secondarily*, with regard to His *office* He is called ‘Immanuel,’ because He is with us through His intercession before the heavenly Father, through His defense against all foes, and through His support and comfort in all adversities.” (Johann Gerhard, Theological Commonplaces: Exegesis IV. 26)

²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife,

- King Ahaz doubted God’s Word through Isaiah, but Joseph believed both the Word of God from the angel and the Old Testament. Joseph repented of his thoughts, trusted in the Word, and did as God commanded him.

²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

- “He knew her not” (Greek: *eginosken*)—this is a Hebrew expression that means to have sexual intercourse. The Greek word is written in the imperfect indicative which is better translated, “He *continued* not knowing her.” This shows that Joseph plays no active role in the birth of Jesus. Jesus’ birth is completely from God and not from man, although His nature is fully human and fully God.



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