

The birth of Jesus Christ

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[0:00] He doesn't make a big song and dance about it. There's no public divorcing. It was going to be done on the quiet. Because he didn't want to expose her to public disgrace.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. So we have a messenger from God with directions or plans for Joseph's life.

So Mary has already seen an angel. She is pregnant through the Holy Spirit. And now it's Joseph's turn to experience God's leading and direction.

And it's obviously God's perfect timing. Joseph is at the point now. Maybe he's already gone to the solicitor, as it were. Legal proceedings are about to start. And God says, no, you are to stick with her because she has not been unfaithful.

This is of me. This is of God. Now, put yourself in Joseph's shoes. I can imagine he wasn't too keen on this plan.

[1:11] There was going to be public disgrace here. Even though they were married, they should not have slept together. So Mary being pregnant either meant that she had been adulterous or that Mary and Joseph had been sleeping together.

So it probably wasn't to Joseph's liking, this plan, either. So the angel says, carrying on, and said, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

So the angel comes, God's messenger comes to say, no, no, no, this isn't adultery. This is God's plan. It's his power at work.

And actually, when we look back at this, we consider this is, you know, this is part of the greatest time in history where God himself, God the Son, has stepped down from heaven to become a baby. Actually, less than a baby. Conceived through pregnancy, to go through pregnancy and then to be born as a baby. God is arriving at this point or has arrived in Mary.

[2:38] She will give birth to a son. So carry on on the passage. And you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.

And all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet. The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us.

So, again, looking back, Matthew is addressing the Jewish readers. He just says, the prophet. Now, the Jewish readers would have known, and all of you obviously know, that it was Isaiah in chapter 7, verse 14, which Isaiah gave a prophetic word originally to King Ahaz, who was a king of Judah.

So this is long after David had died, but he's a descendant of King David. So King Ahaz, the people of Judah are facing enemies who have come to destroy the city of Jerusalem.

And the original prophetic word was that a young unmarried woman, so in the original it was saying just a normal birth, if you like, a young unmarried woman would have a child, and before that child was in the region of two or three years old, it gives a little bit more description in Isaiah, but actually roughly before they are two or three years old, all your enemies will be defeated.

[4:29] So this was Isaiah's prophetic word to King Ahaz and the people of Judah. And basically it was a promise, God will be with you.

God is with us. And using this whole thing of typology, Matthew takes this original prophetic word and addresses it to Jesus as something greater.

So Matthew actually uses, not the Hebrew word that Isaiah would have used, but the Greek translation, which actually was a virgin. So Matthew is saying, actually it will be a virgin who will give birth.

And the child that comes will be not just a sign of God with us, but will be Emmanuel, God with us.

So Jesus was to be God. He is God. But the declaration of Matthew here is that he is God actually with us, no longer seated on the throne, but actually come down to be with us, his presence as a man in the midst of us.

[5:42] So Matthew is arguing from the lesser prophecy to the greater here. So moving on then.

So when Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. As I mentioned earlier, this was the second part of the marriage.

Now, I don't know whether they had a big ceremony. Maybe it was a bit hush-hush because Mary was pregnant. You'd like to think and hope that there was some celebration in the midst of all that, but we don't know.

But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son and he gave him the name Jesus. So that's particular.

He gave him the name Jesus. Again, this would be something the Jewish people would understand. Jesus means God saves or the Lord is salvation.

[6:40] So the angel said, because he will save his people from their sins. So this is a declaration in the name Jesus. He is to save. He is to be your salvation.

And we declared that. We've been declaring it this morning. We've been singing the name Jesus. God saves. The Lord is salvation. salvation. Okay.

Let's move on then into the second chapter. After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem.

So we've gone through all of Luke's passages, if you like, the birth in the stable, the shepherds have come and we've actually gone on a period of time.

And now we've got these people called Magi. So what are Magi? Okay. What are they not, maybe, is the first thing to ask.

[7:47] They are not kings. Okay. And there almost certainly wasn't three of them. There's no, it doesn't say in the Bible how many there were.

We, the assumption of three becomes because there was just three gifts. But actually, there could have been a whole host of them. There could have been, you know, 10, 20. We just don't know.

And, but what were they?

They were court advisors, astronomers, and astrologers from the ancient empires of Persia and the Medians, the Medes.

And you might ask, well, why did they turn up? What? How would they know what was going on?

Well, if you go back into the Old Testament to Daniel, as in, he of, in the lion's den, he actually led these Magi for a time and would have shared the Jewish prophecies with them.

So this would have been part of the Magi's history, these Jewish prophecies. And they would have been looking for signs. That's kind of what their job was, to look through the signs. It probably wasn't just exclusively Jewish prophecies.

[9:04] There'd have been all sorts of things. But they were looking for signs. Back to our passage. So, the Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, where is the one who has been born King of the Jews?

We saw his star. The star. There's no definition as to what this means. And we can only surmise, was it a natural star or a planet or a comet or maybe it was a supernatural light or even maybe an angel that was showing the way.

We don't specifically know. And God leads in mysterious ways. But if you're wondering about these Jewish prophecies, there was a prophecy from Numbers.

chapter 24 verse 17. So, this is again what the Jewish people would understand. It says, a star shall come out of Jacob, so that is Judah, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel.

So, the star was a symbol for a god and a king. So, the scepter was for a king. So, the Magi saw this star attributed it to the Jewish prophecy and said, a god is born, a king.

[10:41] Let's go and see him and worship. Okay, moving on. So, we saw his star when it arose and have come to worship him.

When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed at all Jerusalem with him. So, you might think, well, Herod's the king in the region.

Why is he so disturbed? Again, this is something we need to realize, that Herod was not actually Jewish. He was an idumen from Edom and a descendant of Esau who was the twin brother of Jacob who then gave birth to the 12 tribes, the father of Israel.

So, Herod wasn't actually Jewish. He had no right to the throne. But, instead, he had been instilled as the king in that area by Rome, who were the conquering nation over the people there.

So, there was huge hostility between the Jews and the Edomins, which was historical, going back all the way to Jacob and Esau, hundreds of years, and now they've got this notoriously brutal and paranoid tyrant as king over them.

[12 : 18] In fact, he was so brutal that he executed many of his own family to ensure that he stayed as king. And, as the Magi came and said, you know, where is this king of the Jews?

It triggered the ultimate panic because supposedly this king of the Jews had a legal right to become king, which Herod didn't have.

A legal claim on the throne. Plus, the king of the Jews meant the Messiah who would come to save Israel.

So, Herod was absolutely petrified of what was going on here. Okay, moving on. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born.

In Bethlehem in Judea, they replied, for this is what the prophet has written. But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah.

[13 : 27] For out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel. Okay, so, the prophet was Micah, chapter 5, verse 2, and he is talking about the birthplace of the Messiah being Bethlehem.

But he was actually also looking back at the birthplace of King David. And this is then Matthew bringing out this promise that the Messiah would come from the lineage of David and from the birthplace, the hometown, if you like, of David.

And again, the Jews should have known what this prophecy meant. So moving on then. Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, go and search carefully for the child. So a brief timeline then here.

It was less than two years since the star had appeared. So we're not talking about a baby. We're not talking about a manger. We're still in Bethlehem.

[14 : 44] So Mary and Joseph have stuck around. Maybe that's because of the census that they went there for originally. Or maybe they've chosen to stay there because it was their ancestral home.

But that is where they are. Moving on. As soon as you find him, report to me so that I too may go and worship him. After they heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them, until it stopped over the place where the child was.

When they saw the star, they were overjoyed, on coming to the house. So as I said, no longer a stable, but a house. And a miracle that a star stops over a house.

they saw the child with his mother Mary and they bowed down and worshipped him. So the Magi know Jesus as divine, as God, as king, as the Messiah from these ancient prophecies.

And they've come and they are bowing down. and this is a group who have come from a foreign land and yet realized that this is the Messiah, that they have come to worship.

[16 : 07] And then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. So there is again a symbolism here of the gifts.

many have heard this at Christmas time, but actually the gold was to symbolize royalty, that he was the king of kings.

Frankincense or incense if you like was often burnt to God in the temple but also was a sign of priesthood.

So there's two things going on here. Presentation of the incense was to say you are God but also you are a priest as well which is what Jesus was.

And then the myrrh was to do with embalming of bodies of death and sacrifice. So there was symbolism in these three gifts. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

[17 : 11] So again, God is leading these magi both with a star and then with a dream. And this is to protect Jesus, Mary and Joseph from Herod who wanted to kill him.

Okay. We move on. When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. So God again is directing Joseph and it would appear that that's how Joseph generally heard from God

in dreams.

And God speaks in different ways to each one of us. But this is how Joseph heard. Get up, he said, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt.

So Egypt wasn't very far away from where they were. It wasn't part of Herod's jurisdiction. It was a good route, would only take a few days to go to.

There would have been in the region a million Jews living in Egypt at the time, so they would have been able to blend in, but also would have had community as well. And as they went, they went with these three gifts of the Magi, which would have been able to support them for however long they were in Egypt.

[18:33] Stay there, back on the screen, stay there until I tell you for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him. So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt where he stayed until the death of Herod.

And so was fulfilled what the prophet had said through the prophet, out of Egypt I called my son.

There's another prophet. This one's Hosea, chapter 11, verse 1.

This starts to tie into the whole thing of the Israelite nation when they were in slavery in Egypt and how God brought them out of Egypt.

Moses led them out, but you can read about it, you know, all about the plagues and how the Egyptian army was then drowned in the Red Sea.

But as the Israelite nation had come out, they were supposed to go into the promised land and be God's people. But they'd only done part of that and basically they had failed.

[19:40] They had turned to other gods and they had then been exiled. Matthew is saying here, again in this typology, Jesus was to be the ultimate Israel, to be victorious in conquering the promised land.

And also that he was to be greater than Moses. Moses led a nation, a people out of slavery, but Jesus was to lead all mankind out of spiritual sin and death and slavery to them.

Okay. You still with me? I hope. Just, yes. Okay, moving on. When Herod realised that he'd been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious and he gave his orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.

So, as I said, this puts Jesus at under two years old, but probably a toddler by this time. Then, what was said through the prophet Jeremiah, Matthew does tell you which prophet it is this time, through the prophet Jeremiah was filled, a voice is heard in Ramah weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted because they are no more.

So, Rachel was the mother of Israel, of the twelve sons, so married to Jacob. And, previously, in Jeremiah 31, 15, he was again talking about Jewish mothers weeping when Judah was taken into captivity in Babylon.

[21:30] Again, Matthew uses this typology to talk about the literal mothers in Bethlehem at this time weeping because their sons had been put to death.

Okay, we move on then to the final bit. after Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt.

It's another dream. I can imagine Joseph isn't getting much sleep these days. But it's God's direction again to Joseph and said get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel for those who are trying to take the child's life are dead.

So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in the place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go.

So this is the son of Herod who has now died and apparently he was even more brutal than his father. So much so that the people's sent a delegation to the emperor in Rome pleading that he would be taken from reigning in this area.

[22:59] And he was. The emperor deposed him after five or six years. Okay, moving on. Having been warned in a dream, yes, more lost sleep, he withdrew to the district of Galilee and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth.

So Galilee was north of Judea where Jerusalem and the temple and Bethlehem was. It was beyond Samaria which didn't have the Jews living there.

But Galilee did have, the Jews did live there. But the Galileans were viewed by the southern Judeans, so those who lived in Judea, as uncultured peasants.

Okay, last bit. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets that he would be called a Nazarene. So basically there's two things here.

I'm just going to touch on one of them because we're running out of time. But Nazareth was, or a Nazarene was a term of social derision. So there was many prophecies that the Messiah would be despised, lowly, and rejected.

[24 : 20] So I'm going to do five quick key takeaways. I'd like the band to come up, please. Firstly, God keeps his promises, but not always as we expect.

they would come and conquer the Romans. But actually he came and conquered sin and death and the devil.

Not an earthly kingdom, but a spiritual kingdom. It wasn't what they expected. And I would say, do we have promises that maybe God has made to us? He will keep them, but not always as we expect.

Maybe you need to revisit them, things that may be forgotten that he said. He communicates now, Joseph and the Magi were hearing from God, but actually he continues to speak to each one of us. But are we listening for him? Has he spoken and maybe you haven't responded? Again, do you need to seek him over that?

[25 : 39] God's plans for our lives can be hard. They certainly were for Joseph and Mary. They aren't always what we'd like.

work. But to be all in for God can result in difficult times. Maybe you need just God's renewal of faith at this time because you're going through difficult times for provision and help.

He provides for our needs. He provided gold, frankincense, and myrrh for Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. But actually he provides all our needs. Let's seek him and trust him. And finally, he guides our steps to keep us safe.

Are we trusting him for ourselves and for our loved ones? Maybe you just want to seek him for reassurance.

[26 : 47] God's love. We have run on in time. I'm just going to pray and then we're going to spend a bit more time worshipping. Lord, I just thank you that you know each of us personally.

You know the struggles. You know the good things that we're going through, the hard things. Lord, I thank you that you have good plans and purposes for our lives.

I pray that we would be able to press into you, to trust you, even when the times get tough, and know your provision, know your leading, know your presence with us.

Holy Spirit, would you just come and bless each one of us as we press into you in worship and speak into our hearts if there are those things that maybe we need to revisit promises that you've given us in the past that we've forgotten or laid aside.

Help us, Lord, to trust you.