

**Series:** The King is Born

**Title:** What the Virgin Birth Teaches Us

**Text:** Matthew 1:22-25

**Date:** December 26, 2021

## **Verse 22**

After relaying the angel's announcement, Matthew provided his own commentary on the events. He said, "Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet" (Matthew 1:22). Highlighting the fulfillment of prophecy was of great interest to Matthew. On nine other occasions in his gospel, he shared what are often regarded as "fulfillment formulas" (Matthew 2:15, 17-18, 23; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:35; 21:4-5; 27:9-10).<sup>1</sup> Matthew made much of prophetic fulfillment because of his audience. He had interest in proving Jesus' Messianic nature to the Jews. Since most of his readers would have had high regard for the Law and the Prophets, and since most of them would have been astute in the Scriptures, he frequently utilized prophecy in order to demonstrate the way in which Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures. In effect, Matthew's writing was intended to echo Jesus' statement in John 5:39 – "You pore over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, and yet they testify about me."

For modern readers, there is a takeaway from Matthew's "fulfillment formulas." Jesus' fulfillment of prophecy stands as a witness to His otherworldly nature. One Bible teacher has pointed out seventy-one Messianic prophecies fulfilled by Christ.<sup>2</sup> No other religious leader or teacher can make a claim to such a feat! Fulfilled prophecy proves that both Christ and Christianity are distinct and superior when compared to other world religions and philosophies.

## **Verse 23**

Verse 23 contained the prophetic passage referenced in verse 22. Matthew quoted the prophet Isaiah, saying, "See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel" (Matthew 1:23). The prophetic quotation was drawn from the book of Isaiah. Approximately eight hundred years before the birth of Christ, the prophet said, "the Lord himself will give you a sign: See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14).<sup>3</sup> In quoting the passage, Matthew actually quoted the Septuagint's rendering of the verse, not the Hebrew Bible's rendering.<sup>4</sup>

There is a degree of controversy surrounding Matthew's reference to Isaiah 7:14. In part, such controversy is grounded in the fact that Isaiah's verse did not actually refer

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<sup>1</sup> Ross, 12.

<sup>2</sup> Turek, Frank and Norman L. Geisler. *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 340.

<sup>3</sup> Ross, 13.

<sup>4</sup> Glasscock, 46.

to a virgin conceiving and giving birth. In the Hebrew Bible, the prophet used a word that referred to a young woman. His terminology did not necessarily speak of a virgin, but Matthew's did.

Why was there an apparent difference between the intent of Isaiah's words and Matthew's words? Did Matthew misapply Scripture to support his perspective regarding Jesus? It is worth noting that the famous Greek version of the Old Testament that was used in the first century implemented the same word rendered "virgin" in Matthew 1:23 in its translation of Isaiah 7:14.<sup>5</sup> Though the Hebrew word did not directly imply a virgin, it seems Jews regarded the word for a virgin as being an appropriate translation.

Another controversy revolves around the historical context of Isaiah's writing. From reading the prophet, it is clear that his prophecy was applied to a child that was actually born in his day. Isaiah 8:3 and 8 seemed to indicate that one named "Maher-shalal-hash-baz" was the fulfillment of the Lord's announcement in Isaiah 7:14. How can Christians reconcile this reality with Matthew's announcement in Matthew 1:23?

It first helps to remember that many Old Testament prophecies are depicted as having both near and far fulfillments in Scripture. While the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 was partially fulfilled through the birth of Maher-shalal-hash-baz in Isaiah's day, it was ultimately fulfilled through the birth of Jesus in Matthew's day. Ultimately, the meaning of the prophecy was that the line of David would be preserved. Both Maher-shalal-hash-baz and Jesus' birth contributed to the fulfillment of that prophecy.<sup>6</sup>

Some may see another issue with Matthew's words in verse 23. Why did the angel speak of Mary's child being named "Jesus" in Matthew 1:20 while Isaiah spoke of Him being called "Immanuel"? Well, in Jewish culture a name spoke more about what one did than what one was to be called.<sup>7</sup> Though Jesus may have been the formal moniker used to address the child, there were other names assigned to Him that revealed the important work He would accomplish. Jesus was what He was to be called; Immanuel was one of His roles as Savior.<sup>8</sup>

This line of thinking is supported by Matthew's explanation of the second name. At the end of verse 23, He provided his readers with a translation of the name "Immanuel." He said, "which is translated 'God is with us.'" The title Immanuel underscored the reality of an event called "the incarnation." Through the Virgin Birth, God adorned Himself in human flesh and lived among men. He did so in order to secure salvation from sin and death for His people. Paul upheld this doctrine in Philippians 2:5-8.

Interestingly, Matthew's gospel closed with a similar proclamation concerning God's nearness to His people. In issuing the Great Commission, Jesus said, "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). The nearness

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<sup>5</sup> France, 84.

<sup>6</sup> Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Ross, 13.

<sup>8</sup> France, 84.

of God to the souls of men and women was guaranteed through the coming of Christ to Earth. Throughout life, God's people can always have confidence that God is with them. They never have to fear being alone. None needs to feel powerless or helpless.

Because of the incarnation, all can sing with the Psalmist, "God is our refuge and strength, a helper who is always found in times of trouble" (Psalm 46:1). Many overlook this aspect of the Christmas message. As a result, they have a professed faith that is devoid of comfort and assurance. One has commented, "Too often those who have rightly contended for Jesus' full deity have created a God to whom they do not feel close."<sup>9</sup>

The Virgin Birth revealed that God desires to be near to mankind, but it also revealed the wonder-working power of God. It was a supernatural miracle that should invoke marvel from humanity. In Luke's gospel, Mary herself exclaimed, "How can this be, since I have not had sexual relations with a man?" (Luke 1:34).

Many doubt the Virgin Birth nowadays. It is worth noting that Jesus' first-century opponents were skeptical as well. In John 8:41, it seems they slandered Him on account of rumors concerning His birth origin, insinuating that He was the result of an immoral relationship. They refused to believe the reports that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Some today similarly dismiss this cardinal tenant of the faith. They regard Jesus as a good teacher, but they deny the supernatural. Things like gods being birthed by virgins appear to be outdated superstition of a bygone era. Rationalism and naturalism make many suspicious of anything that pays credence to otherworldly powers.

In a world that denies the plausibility of miracles, modern believers must remember that the power of God makes anything possible. The finely-tuned design of our world gives evidence of a creator. If the Lord really did make the heavens and the Earth, other feats within creation shouldn't be seen as outside the realm of possibility. Parting seas, resurrecting the dead, and conceiving a child within a virgin are rather simple acts for the one who spoke the sun into existence. One has rightly said, "A virgin birth is simply no problem for an omnipotent God."<sup>10</sup>

Despite the doubts many have concerning the Virgin Birth, it is a seminal doctrine in the Christian faith. It is for good reason that many creeds throughout church history have affirmed it. The Apostle's Creed said, "Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary."

The doctrine is important because it upholds the fact that Jesus was fully human. Our Lord had to be born of a woman in order to effectively live and die for sins. Jesus could not have atoned for humanity's sin if through just appearing as a theophany on Earth. He had to live in a real human body to provide a suitable, substitutionary sacrifice for real human people. Because He lived and died for us in a real, human body, we can have salvation.

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<sup>9</sup> Blomberg, 61.

<sup>10</sup> Ross, 11.

But Jesus also needed to be Divine in order to provide a suitable, sinless sacrifice; consequently, He was born of a virgin who conceived by the agency of the Holy Spirit. Had He been merely a man, or even a spiritually-supercharged and enlightened man, He would have never been able to live a sinless life. The effects of Adam and Eve's sin has been transmitted to the entire human race. A perfectly righteous man could never have been produced via Adam's seed. In Romans, we read, "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all people, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12). By being born of the Holy Spirit, Jesus was completely separate from the rest of the Adamic race.<sup>11</sup>

The Virgin Birth teaches us that Jesus was fully God and fully man. Theologians refer to this reality as "the hypostatic union." Through use of such a term, they seek to affirm both the unity and duality of Jesus nature. At the end of the day, the ins and outs of the way in which Jesus was 100% God and 100% man at the same time is an unfathomable mystery the human mind can never understand.<sup>12</sup> Discerning believers accept the incomprehensible Bible doctrine by faith, knowing that Jesus' dual nature was critical to His redemptive work.

Charles Spurgeon commented on the importance of these truths, saying, "Had he been of a sinful father, how should he have possessed a sinless nature? He is born of a woman, that he might be human; but not by man, that he might not be sinful."<sup>13</sup> Another has said, "The miraculous conception of Jesus underscores the true humanity of Christ, in that He was indeed truly born of a woman and is indeed human; He is 'of her substance.' And it also underscores the true divinity of Christ, in that His conception was 'by the power of the Holy Ghost.'"<sup>14</sup>

Christ's birth via a virgin also reveals a lot about His eternal nature. Being conceived by the Holy Spirit, Jesus was and is the Eternal God who has always existed. He is the Word who was with God in the beginning (John 1:1), a part of the Triune God who said, "Let us make man in *our* image, according to *our* likeness" (Genesis 1:26). The Virgin Birth upholds the truth of an early Christian hymn we find in Scripture:

He is the image of the invisible God,  
the firstborn over all creation.  
For everything was created by him,  
in heaven and on earth,  
the visible and the invisible,  
whether thrones or dominions  
or rulers or authorities—

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<sup>11</sup> Glasscock, 48.

<sup>12</sup> McKim, Donald K. *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 135.

<sup>13</sup> Spurgeon, 5.

<sup>14</sup> Gardner, Kevin, D. "The Virgin Mother Kind." *Tabletalk: Volume 45, No. 12*, 2021, 10.

all things have been created through him and for him.  
He is before all things,  
and by him all things hold together (Colossians 1:15-17).

It is for good reason that Jesus called Himself “the Alpha and the Omega...the one who is, who was, and who is to come” (Revelation 1:8). Jesus is eternal. He has always existed, and He always will exist. Forever and ever He has dwelt as one with the Heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit. The Virgin Birth reminds us of these realities.

#### **Verse 24**

After providing a commentary on the angelic visitation, Matthew returned to his story. He said, “When Joseph woke up, he did as the Lord’s angel had commanded him. He married her” (Matthew 1:24). Matthew’s words in verse 24 indicated that Joseph dutifully followed the angel’s orders from verse 20. Take note of Joseph’s example. After hearing the Word of God, the man sprung to action. He exhibited faithful obedience to the will of God. Though Jesus is the main point of the story before us, Joseph stands as a memorial to the importance of faithful obedience in the Christian life. All should labor to be like him, to be both hearers and doers of what God says (James 1:22).

#### **Verse 25**

Matthew concluded his account of Jesus’ birth by saying Joseph and Mary “... did not have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son” (Matthew 1:25). The phrase “not have sexual relations” employed a Hebrew idiom that used the common word for “know” to speak of physical intimacy between a man and a woman.<sup>15</sup>

By not knowing his wife in an intimate way until after Jesus’ birth, Joseph preserved his wife’s virginity.<sup>16</sup> As a result, Jesus was indeed born of a virgin. However, the language of verse 25 by no means indicated that Mary remained a virgin for the rest of her life. The preposition rendered “until” in the original language conveyed the idea that Joseph and Mary had normal marital relations after the birth of Jesus. We know from other gospel accounts that Mary had other children, presumably by Joseph (Mark 3:21, 31). The Roman Catholic doctrine of the “perpetual virginity” of Mary does not align with the plain Scriptural account.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 2.

<sup>17</sup> France, 85.