

THE GIFTS

Scripture Reading: Matthew 2:1-11

A familiar Christmas card scene shows three men in a stable kneeling before a manger in which a small baby is lying. They are the supposed three wise men who have come from the east to worship the new born king of Israel. They are presenting their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to the child.

These are well known facts: The number of wise men is not given, and they did not see a baby but a young child nearly two years old; and they saw Him in a house and not a stable. It is also a Biblical fact that they came to worship, so they must have believed that the baby had a supernatural origin. The gifts were part of their worship. These were not a child's gifts but were appropriate for worship.

Gold is the first metal mentioned in the Bible. It is symbolic of wealth, power and royalty (Psalm 21:3). Gold was used extensively in the tabernacle and the temple where God would dwell among His people. The New Jerusalem will be pure gold. Gold is symbolic of the royalty of Christ.

Frankincense is an aromatic gum that comes from tree resin from Arabia and the east coast of Africa. It was also used in the tabernacle and temple in the duties of worship. It was part of the incense that burned and filled the sanctuary with a sweet odor as smoke rose upwards. This represented the prayers of the saints rising up to God (Psalm 141:2). The only ones authorized to offer up incense were the priests, so it symbolized the priestly office of Christ.

Myrrh was also an aromatic gum from tree resin and was widely used in perfumes and medicines. A major use of myrrh was in anointing oil for prophets, priests and kings (Exodus 30:23-35). Christ is represented in the Old Testament as Prophet, Priest and King of Israel. The wise men must have known this, recognized the child as the fulfillment of these roles, and presented Him with the proper gifts.

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SAVIOR AND KING

Scripture Reading: Luke 1:26-33

The religions of the world are not especially favorable toward the doctrine of the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. They make up their own stories about how He was born and why. They also make up stories about Mary. Many Protestant church leaders say believing in the virgin birth isn't necessary for salvation. The problem is, the virgin birth undergirds the teachings about the deity of Christ.

What does the church, the Body of Christ, teach about Christ's birth?

1) His birth does not mark the beginning of His life. He is and has always been the eternal Son of God.

2) Christ is the God-man, God dwelling in a human body. He was not man deified. He was wholly God and wholly man in one personality.

3) He was born to be man's Savior from the wages of sin. He was born to be Israel's Savior King.

4) Since Christ was both God and man, we would expect His entrance into the world to be both unusual and miraculous.

5) Denial of the virgin birth means that the facts of Scripture have been obscured and altered. I John 4:2-3 says, "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is the spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come, and even now is already in the world." If these two verses make a statement, they say that to deny that Christ has come in the flesh is to stand with antichrist. Can it be more serious than that?

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Notes.

THE INCARNATION

Scripture Reading: Romans 8:3

The word "incarnation" is not found in the Bible. It is not even found in the index of Strong's Systematic Theology. Neither are other words, like trinity, rapture or missionary, in the Bible. These words are used for concepts found in the Bible; so even if the words are not in our English translations, the ideas are there.

The incarnation is a teaching that the person of the triune Godhead referred to as the Son entered the human race by being born as a human baby and growing to adulthood. He was wholly God and wholly man at the same time, but He had no sin nature.

Romans 8:3b says, "God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." Philippians 2:7-8 says, "But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

John 1:14 says, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." Romans 1:3 says, "Concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh."

The incarnation is the word that describes the entrance of the Lord into the human race by becoming a human being. Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, might not have mentioned the Virgin birth and its accompanying details; but he makes it abundantly clear that Christ was the sinless Son of God who paid the debt of the sin of all humanity. It is up to man to accept the gift of God's love, namely salvation, by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

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Notes:

THE INCARNATION

Scripture Reading: I Timothy 1:15

In our text verse, Paul gives us a reason for the incarnation; "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Not everyone believes this.

Some say the incarnation never happened because it is impossible. Others say it doesn't matter if it did or it didn't; nothing depends on it. In defense, the true believer in Christ says it matters altogether. The Bible gives at least three reasons why the Word became flesh.

1. Christ came into the world to reveal the Father (John 1:18). "No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." In John 14:7-9, Jesus said to know Him was to know the Father. In Colossians 1:15 we read that Christ is the image of the invisible God.
2. Christ came into the world to destroy the works of the devil. I John 3:8b says, "for this purpose the Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil." The devil was a betrayer, slanderer, liar and murderer, among other things.
3. Christ came to put away sin. I John 3:5 says, "And ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him is no sin."

Our sins are the sum total of all our transgressions, a random number no man can count. All our personal sins are in that number. Christ did not come to cover our sins, but to take them away, forever. To one and all alike, the sin problem has been solved. The Father sent the Son to die and pay the wages of sin for all mankind. Christ is our Savior; we have no other. If we acknowledge that Christ was born to die for us, then we will know the reason for the season; and Christmas will mean something special to us.

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THE GENEALOGIES

Scripture Reading: Matthew 1:1-16

In Titus 3:9 Paul says, “avoid foolish questions and genealogies.” Why is that? The Old Testament and the Gospels have lists of genealogies. These lists were necessary for Israel in order to determine the roles of the priests in Israel and also to keep a record of who had the right to reign over the nation of Israel as king. The church, the Body of Christ, does not have priests or kings; so genealogies are not needed.

Matthew chapter 1 opens with a genealogy. The genealogy is that of the royal family of Israel. Thus, verse 1 states that Jesus Christ was descended from King David, who was descended from Abraham. Abraham had a great-grandson named Judas (Judah). There were eleven other great-grandsons whose father was Jacob, and they are not named. Why is Judah named? It was predetermined that he would become the father of the royal family of Israel.

Verses 2-5 give a list of the family lineage before there were kings. Verses 6-11 give the lists of kings who ruled Judah, the southern kingdom. Then the kingdom era ended for Israel with the Babylonian captivity. They have never had a kingdom since. Verses 12 -16 give the list of men who would have been king if there had been a kingdom. Verse 16 gives the names of Jacob and Joseph the husband of Mary. Joseph the carpenter would have been king of Judah when Jesus was born, but the Jews had no kingdom. Verse 16 stops the genealogy with Jesus Christ. Why? Jesus had no sons to ascend the throne, and none will be needed. The Lord Jesus Christ will be the final and everlasting King of Israel.

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JOSEPH AND MARY

Scripture Reading: Matthew 1:18

What do we know about Joseph and Mary? Not much, but then the Gospel record is not about them but about the Lord Jesus Christ. We do not know how they met or what family arrangements were made for their betrothal. It is suggested by many scholars that Mary was a young woman, probably in her middle teens, when the betrothal was arranged and the marriage took place. This was the rule rather than the exception in Bible times. Matthew 1:18 says Mary was espoused to Joseph. This was equivalent to today's custom of engagement. The betrothal could last as long as a year and was as binding as marriage itself. A public ceremony announced the betrothal. A marriage feast made the marriage official.

A major issue of the betrothal was the dowry which was negotiated between the families of the prospective groom and bride. When all was agreed upon, the two were considered husband and wife but did not live together as such until the marriage feast.

It was during the betrothal that Mary's conception took place. When Mary told Joseph of her condition and that it was an act of the Holy Spirit, he did not believe her. Who would? His intent was to quietly “put her away,” which was considered a divorce. Only one thing kept Joseph from putting Mary away and that was God's intervention. He sent His angel Gabriel to tell Joseph in a dream that Mary's explanation was correct and that he was to marry her.

Three things may be safely assumed.

1) The betrothal period was nearly ended when Mary conceived. Matthew 1:19 says they were considered husband and wife, so that means all negotiations were completed.

2) Mary told Joseph of the conception as soon as she learned it.

3) No other man in all Israel could have served as the father of Jesus, for Joseph would have been the king of Israel had there been a kingdom. Not one other man in all Israel could have filled this role.

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THE VIRGIN BIRTH

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 7:14

Is it necessary and important to believe in the virgin birth of Christ? Any truth taught in the Bible is necessary to believe. Some deny it but not because the Bible does not teach it, for it does. They deny it because they believe the Scriptures are not factual.

Christ's birth was a natural birth, for He was born like all babies are born; but it was supernatural because Mary was a virgin, never having known any man. The virgin birth rests on the fact of a supernatural conception. With today's technology, perhaps a virgin birth is possible but not a conception without a human father somewhere in the picture. What is equally important with what happened, is why it happened. The conception and virgin birth are hardly mentioned in the Bible, but the reason for them is given much more space. One of the main reasons is its bearing on the deity of Christ.

Isaiah 7:14 prophesies that "a virgin shall conceive." The conception and virgin birth are inseparable in this verse. Those who think the Hebrew word for virgin means "young woman" without necessarily meaning a virgin should check Matthew 1:23 where Isaiah's prophecy is quoted, and the Greek word clearly means virgin. There is no mistake in the King James Bible's translation, nor was there a mistake in the angelic message to Joseph. God inspired Matthew to state the facts that the conception and virgin birth of Christ were subjects of prophecy and were fulfilled when Jesus was born.

If we can't believe the Biblical record on this matter concerning Christ, how can we believe anything else it says about Him? In fact, how can we believe anything at all in the Bible? The integrity of the Scriptures are at stake here. We believe the Lord Jesus Christ was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. We need not be surprised by His sinlessness when we know and believe these two facts.

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THE STAR

Scripture Reading: Matthew 2:7-10

The wise men saw the star and a message in its appearance. There are many questions about this mysterious star. Where was it when the wise men saw it? Was it really a star? Why did the people in Judea seem to be unaware of it? How could a star high up in the heavens pinpoint one particular house in a particular town? How did the wise men know the star meant a king in Israel had been born?

What the wise men saw was an "astera." This Greek word is almost always translated star; but "almost" implies there are exceptions, and a star might not always be a heavenly body. Numbers 24:17 says, "There shall come a star out of Jacob," and this cannot be a heavenly body. It is a reference to Christ. Revelation 1:16 and 20 calls angels stars. Jude 13 says evil teachers are wandering stars.

The wise men identify the light as exclusively "His star." An undogmatic suggestion says that the expression "we have seen His star in the east" means the light they saw was in the east where they lived, not over Judea. This would explain why the people in Judea knew nothing about it. A second suggestion is that the star was not a heavenly body at all but was the Shikinah glory of the Lord. Israel was very familiar with this light, even though it had long since disappeared from the Holy of Holies. The Jews living in Persia knew the royal family would come from Jacob and through the tribe of Judah. Since Daniel gives a time when the Messiah would appear, it is highly possible that the Jews living in Persia were watching for a sign of His appearance. When they saw the light, the Shikinah glory of the Lord, they knew Christ the King had been born.

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