

## Thoughts Concerning the Birth of Jesus

We pick up the narrative in Luke chapter 1, where Zacharias is informed by the angel Gabriel that his barren wife, Elisabeth, would conceive, even though she is far beyond child-bearing years. Gabriel gives many details concerning the son she would bear, including his name, which was to be John. We come to know him later as John the Baptist.

(18) "But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John... (24) And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months...

Gabriel also appears unto Mary, when Elisabeth is six months pregnant, and reveals to her the miraculous conception that would take place within her womb. Mary doesn't understand how this could be, since she had not known a man; she was a virgin. Mary and Joseph, to whom she was espoused, had not engaged in that intimate relationship intended only for a husband and wife.

(26-27) And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary... (30-31) And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS... (34-37) Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible."

The miracle of Elizabeth's conception was physical. The miracle of Mary's conception was both physical and spiritual. Every conception within the womb is a miracle; the miracle of the beginning of life. The conditions that must exist for one cell from the male (the sperm) to successfully penetrate one cell of the female (the egg) is nothing short of a miracle. When two newly joined cells begin to divide and multiply and eventually become billions of cells, all specializing in certain functions, grouping together to form organs and other members of the body, and coordinating in such a precise manner as to form one complex system (a human being), it is nothing short of a miracle. God is the Giver of life and the One who designed procreation in such a miraculous manner.

**Psalm 139:13-16**, "For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them."

**Psalm 127:3** tells us that children are an inheritance from God; they are blessings dispensed by the Lord. **Gen.30:1-2**: when Rachel was envious of Leah because she bore no children to their husband Jacob, she demanded of Jacob, and said "Give me children, or else I die". Jacob's reply was "Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?"

**Gen.33:5**: after many years of separation between Jacob and Esau, they met once again. When Esau saw Jacob's large family, he asked "Who are those with thee?" Jacob's reply was, "The children which God hath graciously given thy servant."

**Gen.48:8-9:** many years later, Jacob would ask Joseph the same thing concerning Ephraim and Manasseh. Joseph's reply was "They are my sons, whom God hath given me in this place."

God is the Giver of life. As believers, we should never compromise on this foundational truth; academically, socially, or politically. Life begins at conception.

Notice again, in verses 27 and 34, that Mary is a virgin; she knew not a man. The intimate relationship between a man and a woman that is commonly called 'making love' or 'having sex' or any number of other terms, is a relationship that God gave to and designed for a husband and his wife. The intended purpose of this intimate relationship is primarily procreation, and secondarily the mutual pleasure of both husband and wife. If that blessing is misused in any way outside the bonds of marriage between a man and a woman, it is fornication; it is sin. Herein is another foundational truth that should not be compromised. A relationship that involves fornication is not undefiled, is not honorable, and is not pleasing to God. A relationship that involves fornication is a relationship between two individuals who are committing an immoral act, regardless of their age or station of life. While God loves sinners, He hates sin, and He calls on us to repent and cease from that sin.

Paul severely admonished the church at Corinth because they were ignoring this sin among the members of that church. He taught them that the body, being a temple of the Holy Ghost, was not for fornication. He admonished them to flee fornication. He warned them that fornication was the reason thousands of Israelites died in one day. To the churches of Galatia, Paul described fornication as being a work of the flesh. He warned the church at Ephesus that fornication should not be named among them within the church. He taught them to mortify that deed of the flesh. And to the church at Thessalonica, Paul taught that it was the will of God and their sanctification that they should abstain from this sin.

In the midst of a crooked and perverse world, we as believers need to humbly yet boldly stand as a minority who publicly and privately teaches and celebrates virginity. We need to publicly and privately teach, promote, and celebrate marriage as the union between male and female only. As believers, we also need to lovingly, yet consistently, call on people to repent from lifestyles contrary to these moral principles. And where we have either individually or collectively been guilty of committing or condoning immorality of this nature, we need to repent, seek forgiveness, renew our commitment, and then show others a better way.

Luke 1:39-40; after Gabriel informs Mary about Elisabeth, Mary leaves Nazareth to visit her cousin.  
Luke 1:56; Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then returned home to Nazareth, being now about three months with child.

The narrative now shifts to the gospel according to Matthew, chapter 1.

(18) "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost."

Mary has been out of town for three months and returns to Nazareth pregnant. Joseph knows the child is not his. It is only natural for Joseph to assume that Mary has been unfaithful; that she has played the harlot. How would any young man feel in this situation? No doubt, Joseph is angry, heartbroken, confused; he feels betrayed. But according to verse 19, Joseph is a just man; an honorable young man. He had every right to go to the law and demand that Mary suffer the consequences. But Joseph didn't

do that. Whether out of love or compassion or mercy, Joseph decides to put Mary away privately. He did not want Mary to be made a public example.

(20), "But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost."

Gabriel appears unto Joseph, just like he had unto Mary and unto Zacharias, except this time in a dream, and he gives Joseph an unbelievable explanation. She has conceived of the Holy Ghost? How could Joseph believe such an explanation? How could he proceed to take Mary to be his wife? Even if Joseph believed the angel, there was no way their families were going to believe it. Those in the community would think the whole thing was foolish. Joseph and Mary and their families would be made a mockery and would be outcasts. Everyone around them would look upon them in shame, especially with them trying to cover up the sin with such an outlandish lie.

A young couple becoming pregnant out of wedlock... how would the culture respond today? We are all sinners, right? But the confession that we are sinners is also the profession that something called sin exists; that is, the violation of a standard; in other words, the violation of God's moral law. The fact that a particular sin becomes more common doesn't change the fact that it is still sin. We shouldn't allow the increasing occurrence of sin to make light of God's declaration and determination of sin. In today's society, a young lady becoming pregnant out of wedlock is hardly a shock. In some circles, there is much celebration over the pregnancy, and the question of being married or who fathered the child is not even part of the conversation. We need to address the sin that led to that out-of-wedlock pregnancy before we begin to celebrate the pregnancy. At the same time, that sin shouldn't keep us from helping and supporting the mother in her time of need. There is a baby on the way now, and that child needs to be cared for and loved. The sin that led to the pregnancy should be just as seriously addressed with the father, including the responsibilities he now has. He obviously was not living up to the role of spiritual leader while committing that sin. He should be held accountable, and an effort to instruct him in the ways of righteousness and responsibility should be made. What a difference we might could make in the lives of individuals and on the cycle that is perpetuated from generation to generation if we would approach pregnancy out of wedlock with a balanced biblical view.

Sadly, if the pregnancy isn't being celebrated and the baby isn't wanted, or if it is simply not a convenient time in the mother's life to have a child, the most common option is abortion. Someone has asked, what if Mary had decided to get an abortion. Well, if that had been a practical option, there would have been plenty of people promoting it, no doubt. But honestly, God would not have allowed it to happen. It seems likely that God would not have chosen a young virgin who would even consider that to be an option in the first place. Mary was just such a young lady as that. But how deeply distraught we ought to be that abortion is the popular go-to option in our society. Just as there is no question that fornication is sin, so there is no question that abortion is a sin as well. Between 600,000 and 900,000 abortions were performed last year. Since 1970, there have been approximately 50 million abortions performed in the United States. Sadly staggering and disturbing indeed... Life begins at conception. That child has a right to live. Taking the life of that child is murder. Abortion is a sin. There is a better way. And just as it is with any other sin, there is forgiveness to be found when it is sought after. Whether it is the sin of fornication or abortion, let us pray fervently that God would grant to us repentance individually and as a nation.

As the narrative continues through the end of Matthew chapter 1, here are a few observations:

In the face of unbelievable circumstances, when the events of life appear to make no sense, our only option is to focus on God's will and God's word. A commitment to both is an absolute must. The angel's appearance to Joseph in that dream was so vivid and so overpowering that the probable reaction by everyone around him simply didn't matter. Joseph humbled himself, he trusted God, he honored Mary, and he respected what happened to her through the Holy Ghost. What great faith Joseph manifested! On an even larger scale, there was no greater message to ever be proclaimed than what Gabriel said to Joseph. Mary was going to bring forth a son. Her son was going to be named Jesus. Her son, Jesus, was the Son of God. His Son was going to save His people from their sins. Everything the angel proclaimed that night came to pass.

This familiar narrative of the birth of Jesus continues in Luke chapter 2.

Joseph and Mary, now with child, travel about 90 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem because a decree was issued for a census to be taken for the purpose of taxing the people. Bethlehem was called the city of David, and Joseph was of that lineage, so he and Mary had to go to his home town. While in Bethlehem, the child was delivered and laid in a manger, because there was no room in the inn. The Son of God becoming a man was the greatest display of humility the world could ever know: the Creator becoming a creature! The one who created man became a man to suffer at the hands of men to save them from their sins! The King of kings and Lord of lords not only became a man, but he was born to the poorest of the poor. Rather than being born into royalty or riches, the only place found for him to lay his head was a feeding trough.

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

An angel appeared unto some shepherds who were watching their flocks by night and announced the birth of the Savior, the Christ. As they stood in fear, a heavenly host appeared with the angel and praise rang out with these beautifully comforting words.

Peace and good will: the delightful satisfaction of a need through kindness and compassion. Jesus was the embodiment of peace on the earth. He was prophesied to be the Prince of Peace: the only One who had the authority to dispense peace, the only One with the ability to make peace, and One who delivered the only message that proclaims peace. He was the greatest example of compassion the world has ever seen. He had compassion on the hungry, the weary, the scattered, the sick, those in sorrow, those who had been beaten down, and those who returned to him in repentance.

Christ hasn't changed. He is still the Savior. His appearing still brings peace. His compassions never fail. Glory to God, Christ was born! Yet, He was born to die. He accomplished the Father's will. He now lives and is seated at the right hand of God making intercession for us; for you; for me.

Hallelujah what a Savior!

Matt Jordan, pastor