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Sermon Notes

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The Person and Purpose of Jesus Christ

Matthew 1:1-25

I. Asking the Right Questions at Christmas Time

Christmas confusion leads to the asking of many questions

A. Many busy bustling questions... miss the point

Will we have a white Christmas?

How will I pay off my credit card bill in January?

Will the toys I buy for my kids survive Christmas day?

What's for Christmas dinner?

B. Two central questions... the right questions to ask, from the Christmas hymn we just sang

What child is this who laid to rest upon Mary's lap is sleeping?

Why lies he in such mean estate where ox and lamb are feeding?

Or WHO IS JESUS? and WHY DID HE COME TO EARTH?

The identity and the purpose of Jesus Christ are the two central issues of Christmas... apart from these, Christmas has no significance at all... it is merely another holiday in a secular year

The Apostle Matthew wrote the first 25 verses of this gospel specifically to answer those questions... **WHO WAS JESUS? ... WHY DID HE COME?**

*uses genealogy

*uses narrative about Joseph and Mary

*uses message from angelic visitant

*specifically uses the names of this child to identify him

THIS BABY WAS GOD INCARNATE, and HE CAME TO SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS

II. The Kingly Ancestry of Jesus (vs. 1-17)

The New Testament begins with a genealogy! Actually the shortest genealogy in the Bible...

Matthew 1:1 A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham

But then follows a 42-name genealogy that traces the Kingly lineage of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world

NOTE: Don't skip the genealogy!

Most of us find genealogies boring... but that is an American perspective

People all over the world are fascinated by questions of descent... ancestors... some tribal religions even involve ancestor worship; European aristocracy was fascinated by lineage and family crests and the titles and honors given to ancestors; the Japanese are proud of the fact that their emperor can trace his lineage back to the year 660 through 125 successive generations... it is the longest continuous hereditary monarchy in the world

Americans are generally not so interested in genealogies and ancestors... perhaps that's the result of many of our ancestors losing their family names during the immigration process at Ellis Island; or others seeking to flee the old world past and make a new start for themselves here

A. Jewish interest

1. establish descent from Abraham... chosen people under the covenant

Romans 9:5 Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

- a. comprehensive genealogies kept

1 Chronicles 9:1 "All Israel was listed in the genealogies recorded in the book of the kings of Israel."

- b. practice dated back to creation... Genesis 5:1

Genesis 5:1 "This is the written account of Adam's line."

NOTE: this is how Jesus' genealogy in Luke 4 can be traced all the way back to Adam

- c. at time of Ezra, careful consideration of genealogies
- d. priests excluded... lost family records!!

2. Especially crucial for David's descendants

a. God's covenant with David

2 Samuel 7:11-13 "The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: when your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."

b. God maintained David's line even through some rough times

*sin [in the case of Jehoram]

2 Chronicles 21:7 "Nevertheless, because of the covenant the Lord had made with David, the Lord was not willing to destroy the house of David. He had promised to maintain a lamp for him and his descendants forever."

*danger [in the case of Joash]

Ahaziah was killed by Jehu; Athaliah, Ahaziah's mother, decided to kill the whole royal family... one woman took a little baby Joash and hid him in a bedroom with a nurse; that's how close the whole line of David came to being snuffed out

B. Key concern: the coming Messiah

vs. 1 "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."

1. Matthew writing for a Jewish audience, seeks to establish Jesus' right to be King of Israel
2. One of only three times he used full title "JESUS CHRIST"
3. From the very beginning, Matthew is proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of David
4. But he will go beyond this, for he was incarnate God as well

C. Key themes:

God's faithfulness, God's patience, God's grace

1. God's faithfulness

a. promise to Abraham

Genesis 12:1-3 The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. ² "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Galatians 3:8 *The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you."*

b. promise to David

Psalm 132:11-12 *The LORD swore an oath to David, a sure oath that he will not revoke: "One of your own descendants I will place on your throne-- ¹² if your sons keep my covenant and the statutes I teach them, then their sons will sit on your throne for ever and ever."*

NOTE: how the whole system had fallen into disrepair after the exile

Isaiah 3:6-7 *A man will seize one of his brothers at his father's home, and say, "You have a cloak, you be our leader; take charge of this heap of ruins!"*

⁷ *But in that day he will cry out, "I have no remedy. I have no food or clothing in my house; do not make me the leader of the people."*

c. Joseph was called "Son of David" (vs. 20)... BUT no great honor to most people... Joseph was a simple carpenter

d. YET God never forgot his promises to Abraham or to David

2. God's patience

vs. 17 *"Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ."*

a. Matthew purposefully omits certain names from OT genealogies

b. wants 2x7, 2x7, 2x7... number of perfect fulfillment

c. real issue is God's incredible patience

Forty-two generations listed here!! Archaeology places Abraham at c. 2000 B.C. God waited through all that history until the time was perfect

Galatians 4:4 *"When the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law..."*

Application: Never feel like God has abandoned you if He doesn't keep to your timetable!

3. God's grace

NOTE: Roman Catholic dogma of Immaculate Conception of Mary concocted to protect purity of Christ... if Mary was conceived as a sinner, that would somehow taint Christ! NOT SO!!! God delights to do His perfect and pure work through sinners of the worst kind

a. to sinful Jews

David: adulterer and murderer

Solomon: idolater

Rehoboam: arrogant boaster

Manasseh: sacrificed his own son to an idol, practiced sorcery and killed so many innocent people that he filled Jerusalem from end to end

b. to sinful Gentiles

NOTE: I'll discuss this in a moment

c. to outcast women

1) **Tamar**: vs. 3... according to Genesis 38, after her husband died, she dressed up like a prostitute and had relations with her father in law, Judah... the "Lion of Judah", Jesus Christ, descended from that act of sexual sin!!

2) **Rahab**: vs. 5... Canaanite prostitute who was saved by believing in the God of Israel before the walls of Jericho fell... she entered the nation of Israel, married Salmon, and gave birth to Boaz

3) **Ruth**: vs. 5... godly woman who said to Naomi "Your God will be my God." However, she was a Moabitess, a whole race of people who came from the incestuous relationship of Lot and his daughters, in a cave after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The race was rejected by God:

Deuteronomy 23:3 "No Moabite may enter the assembly of the Lord even down to the tenth generation."

4) **"Uriah's wife" (Bathsheba)**: vs. 6... David's partner in adultery; after David murdered her husband, she became his wife and they had Solomon together

NOTE: three of these four women were Gentiles

d. to downtrodden nobodies

vs. 12... ***"After the exile to Babylon..."*** vs. 13-15 lists 10 straight men about whom we know absolutely nothing

Thus this genealogy shows three major things about God: **his faithfulness** to keep his promises, even after two thousand years of history... **his patience** in waiting for just the perfect moment to fulfill his promises... and **his grace** in using such sinful people to bring Christ into the world

D. Joseph's Contribution: His Kingly Name

1. Mary put her body to God's service, despite the scandal that would come
2. Joseph put his name to God's service, thus bringing himself under suspicion of having fathered the child himself

NOTE: crucial, so that Jesus would be born into the Kingly line of David

E. Two Genealogies, Only One Messiah

1. Luke's genealogy: Identical from Abraham to David
2. Luke's follows David's son Nathan... not the kingly line
3. Matthew's includes all the kings of Judah
4. BUT Jeconiah's curse:

Jeremiah 22:24, 30 "Even if you, Jehoiachim... were a signet ring on my right hand, I would still pull you off." This is what the Lord says: "Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David, or rule anymore in Judah."

5. HOW CAN GOD DO THIS?? No physical descendent of Jeconiah will ever sit on David's throne... yet God promised David a kingly line that would never fail!
6. VIRGIN BIRTH!! Physical decent from David through Mary; Kingly right to rule through Joseph

Fundamentally, these genealogies "trace the human ancestry" of Jesus Christ

They establish that he was truly human... so he could be our mediator

1 Timothy 2:5-6 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all men-- the testimony given in its proper time.

They establish that he was Jewish, a Son of Abraham, so that the promises to Abraham to bless all the nations on earth would be fulfilled

They establish that he was the Son of David, so that the promises to David to place one of his descendants on a throne that would last forever and ever would be fulfilled

GOD IS FATHFUL!!

The rest of the chapter uses a powerful narrative to teach us fully the answer to the questions:

"What child is this who laid to rest on Mary's lap is sleeping?"

“Why lies he in such mean estate where ox and lamb are feeding?”

III. The Birth of Jesus Christ from Joseph’s View: (vs. 18-25)

vs. 18: “This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.”

NOTE: remarkable simplicity with which virgin conception of Jesus is stated... if this were a human account, we would have embellished it greatly; the Bible just states it simply

We zero in on the human servants, Mary and Joseph, that God used to bring Jesus into the world and to bring him up in the world

A. Mary and Joseph

1. Mary: godly, submissive, obedient, faith-filled... and a VIRGIN
2. Joseph: righteous man (obedient to the laws); manual laborer (sometimes carpenter, sometimes mason or other builder)... a man who is not even given a single SPOKEN LINE in the Bible, but whose quiet godliness and manly protection of his wife and her son stands as a timeless example of godly manhood
3. AGE: quite possible that they were in their early teens

B. Joseph’s problem

1. the betrothal & its laws
 - a. two stages... betrothal & wedding ceremony
 - b. betrothal arranged by families of bride & groom... involved payment of a dowry
 - c. contract legally binding; couple married legally [NOTE vs. 19 Joseph Mary’s husband]; BUT union not consummated until a year later; wedding ceremony
 - d. THUS any immorality during that year would be considered adultery
2. Mary’s news

“Before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.”

- a. clear that Joseph and Mary had never been sexually intimate
- b. Mary’s news she got from the angel

Luke 1:26-35 In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." ³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

c. Mary told Joseph; Joseph couldn't believe her... TOO MUCH FOR ANYONE TO BELIEVE... it had never happened before

d. total contradiction of Mary's character, but what else could Joseph think?

C. Joseph's solution

vs. 19 "Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly."

1. Joseph's character

- a. godly, law-abiding
- b. Mosaic covenant required death... but Israel lax about Law of Moses
- c. two options... public exposition, private separation
- d. righteous = kind hearted and merciful... **private separation**

2. Joseph's agony

- a. like Mary, a quiet thinker
- b. knew Mary's character, but it was too much to believe
- c. decision: a quiet divorce

D. God's message

vs. 20-21 "But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream 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. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.'"

1. God waits for just the right moment... Joseph had made up his mind

2. Angelic messenger... IN A DREAM???

In Matthew 1-2, angels communicate to people FIVE TIMES by means of dreams

In this first, most important dream, the angel tells Joseph the same thing that Gabriel had told Mary... the child within her had been CONCEIVED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

He goes beyond this to tell Joseph WHY this baby will be born... he will SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS

3. Message: FEAR NOT

a. Don't be afraid to take Mary home as your wife

why fear? 1) Human judgment and scorn

2) God's judgment and rejection

c. freedom from the second, not the first... that would be the price Joseph would have to bear... the most common interpretation after a hasty early wedding and with Joseph's silent acceptance of Mary was that JOSEPH was the father... they had sinned together by fornication... this Joseph would have to bear

E. Joseph's Obedience

vs. 24-25 *“When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until after she gave to birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.”*

1. Willing to pay the price... shame & secret whispering

2. Quiet godly submission... willing to forgo marital rights so that Mary would be a virgin when Jesus was born

NOTE: Catholic confusion... perpetual virginity of Mary; here text indicates they had a normal married life after Jesus was born... Jesus had other brothers and sisters... Catholic attitude that even marital relations are somehow sinful

3. Manly protection and care... this protection seen clearly in chapter 2

IV. The Virgin Birth and the Meaning of the Names

A. Is the Virgin Birth Essential?

Theological liberals attacked this doctrine wholesale... In the early part of the 20th century, Albert Schweitzer and Rudolph Bultmann began something called the “Quest for the historical Jesus”; they said Christianity was born steeped in mythology, and it was for the scientific minds of the

modern era to find the true historical Jesus, to “demythologize” the Jesus story... first and foremost, they attacked the doctrine of the Virgin Birth

In 1922, a liberal Protestant preacher named Harry Emerson Fosdick preached a sermon entitled, “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?” In that he said that Christians can hold differing views on the “mooted and vexing question” of the Virgin birth

On June 25, 2002, Bishop Joseph Sprague of the United Methodist Church gave an address at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado. Bishop Sprague claimed that the “myth” of the virgin birth “was not intended as historical fact, but was employed by Matthew and Luke in different ways to appoint poetically the truth about Jesus as experienced in the emerging church.” Sprague defined a theological myth as “not false presentation but a valid and quite persuasive literary device employed to point to ultimate truth that can only be insinuated symbolically and never depicted exhaustively.” According to Sprague, Jesus was born to human parents and did not possess “trans-human, supernatural powers.”

However, the belief in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ is essential to our Christian faith:

John Piper gave us four reasons why it is vital:

- First, it highlights the supernatural essence of Jesus’ person and mission. On one end of Jesus’ life lies his supernatural conception and birth; on the other, his supernatural resurrection and his ascension to God’s right hand. Jesus’ authenticity was attested to by the supernatural working of his Father.
- Secondly, the virgin birth shows that humanity needs redeeming that it can’t bring about for itself. The fact that the human race couldn’t produce its own redeemer implies that its sin and guilt are profound and that its savior must come from outside.
- Thirdly, in the virgin birth, God’s initiative is on display. The angel didn’t ask Mary about her willingness. He announced, “Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus” (Luke 1:31). God didn’t ask Mary for permission. He acted – gently but decisively – to save his people from their sins.
- Finally, this virgin birth hints at the fully human and fully divine natures united in Jesus’ one person.

Wayne Grudem: “God, in his wisdom, ordained a combination of human and divine influence in the birth of Christ, so that his full humanity would be evident to us from the fact of his ordinary human birth from a human mother, and his full deity would be evident from the fact of his conception in Mary’s womb by the powerful work of the Holy Spirit.”

However, none of this reasoning would matter if the virgin birth were not clearly taught in scripture!

1. the virgin birth predicted

Isaiah 7:14 “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son...”

2. the virgin birth fulfilled

vs. 18 “Before they came together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.”

3. the virgin birth explained

Luke 1:34-35 “How will this be, since I have never been intimate with any man?” The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the most high will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.”

4. the virgin birth required

Luke 1:35 “So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.”

1 Timothy 2:5 “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

B. What Mean These Names?

Christ is the name of PROPHECY

Jesus is the name of PURPOSE

Emmanuel the name of PERSONAL IDENTITY

1. Christ, the name of PROPHECY... anointed one; Hebrew messiah
 - a. connected clearly with God’s promises in the Old Testament... beginning with the promise in the Garden of Eden that the “seed of woman” would crush the serpent’s head
 - b. Jesus of Nazareth was born as the fulfillment of prophecies hundreds of years old
 - c. He was the Son of Abraham, fulfilling a two-thousand year old promise that through Abraham all peoples on earth would be blessed
 - d. He was the Son of David who would rule over all the world; King of kings and Lord of lords
2. Jesus... the name of PURPOSE Salvation is from Yahweh, the God of Israel
 - a. the name Jesus points to his purpose... SALVATION
 - b. BUT it was not to be the military salvation Israel wanted

vs. 21 “You are to give him the name Jesus BECAUSE he will save his people from their sins.”

The word BECAUSE only makes sense if we understand the meaning of the Jewish name by which we know Jesus... it is JOSHUA, or YEHOSHUA... literally “Yahweh saves” or as John 2:9 puts it,

“Salvation is from the Lord”

The angel made it clear that Jesus came to SAVE people... the word SAVE implies a very great danger, a great THREAT

Most Jews in that age would have thought a Messiah, a Savior would be military and political in nature

- c. the true oppressors of Israel and of the world were not military conquerors like Rome... IT WAS SIN... and it is sin that oppresses us today

It is sin that destroys families through adultery, alcoholism, pornography, abuse

It is sin that ruins friendships through arguments and prideful quarrels

It is sin that oppresses our thoughts and hinders everything we do

It is sin that causes people to be selfish when there are needs all around us

and it is sin that God will judge on judgment day...

only Jesus can save us from our sins

3. Emmanuel, the name of PERSONAL IDENTITY

vs. 23 “They will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us.”

- a. God in the flesh, with a human body

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

- b. True God truly with us

“With us...” means by our side, experiencing what we experience... grief, suffering, pain

“With us...” means on our side, fighting our battle against sin and judgment

“Instead of us...” is the ultimate act of union with us... Jesus TOOK OUR PLACE

Galatians 3:13 “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’”

Applications:

The true understanding of Christmas comes in asking the right questions...

“What child is this who laid to rest on Mary’s lap is sleeping?”... this amazing chapter of scripture answers that: “This, this is Christ the Lord...” the God of the universe, come to enter human history in the form of a baby

“Why lies he in such mean estate where ox and lamb are feeding?”

Why would the Son of God come down to earth in such a lowly state? It is because in his humiliation we find salvation...

Philippians 2:6-8 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!

As we celebrate the Christmas season, let us bow down in awe at the feet of this exalted being... this Christ, who lowered himself infinitely, even to the point of dying in our place

“You will give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins!”

Emmanuel: God with us... that means you are never alone as you face all the trials of your life!