



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Gospel of Matthew

“The King’s Supernatural Birth,” Matthew 1:18-25 – TRANSCRIPT

For the reading of the Scripture, we’re turning to the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew again and reading verses 18 through 25. Matthew chapter 1 verse 18 through verse 25:

“Now the birth of Jesus was in this way. When as his mother, Mary, was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph, her husband, being a just man and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privately. But while he thought on these things, behold, an 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 Spirit, and she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.’ Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet saying, Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which begin interpreted is ‘God with us.’” Then Joseph, being raised from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him,

and took unto him his wife, and knew her not til she had brought forth her firstborn son, and he called his name Jesus.”

To a world that was prepared politically, economically, morally and spiritually, Jesus came. There is a tide in the affairs of men, wrote Shakespeare, which taken at the flood leads on to fortune. The time of the coming of the Lord Jesus was God’s time. The Apostle Paul writes of this also, for he said, “When the fullness of time came, God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law.” And this passage we are going to look at, now, for a few moments this morning, is a passage in which the writer of the Gospel of Matthew gives us what came when the fullness of time did come.

We are studying in our series of studies on Sunday morning, the Gospel of the King, for the Matthew is the gospel of the king. And in these verses that we have just read for our Scripture reading this morning, we have the account of the supernatural origin of the king.

The accounts of the birth of the Lord Jesus that are given in the New Testament are accounts that are written from different standpoints, and yet they agree in the fact and manner of his birth. We have read twice here in these verses this morning that that which was conceived in Mary was of the Holy Spirit. We all know from the reading of these verses that the Gospel of Matthew sets forth for us our Lord’s birth as a birth of a virgin.

We’re also acquainted, if we have read much in the New Testament, of the fact that in Luke chapter 1, the author of that gospel also speaks of the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus. He writes, in the 35th verse of his gospel, “And the angel answered and said unto her, ‘The Holy Spirit 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.’” Matthew and Luke unite in clear affirmations of the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus.

It is sometimes not recognized, however, that the Gospels of Mark and John, while they do not express this explicitly, are just as clear in what they do say about the birth of the Lord Jesus. For example, it is a rather interesting thing that in the Gospel of Mark, while the Lord Jesus is called the Son of God, he is never called the Son of Joseph. Now that might not be so strange, except that in the Gospel of Mark, he is also called the Son of Mary.

Now one ordinarily, among the Hebrews, was never called by his mother. We might do that in our society, but they did not do that in their society. They always spoke of an individual as the son of his father, if his father were known. They only spoke of an individual as a son of a woman when they did not know the identity of the father. So we have expressed in the fact that the Lord Jesus is called the Son of Mary, and called the Son of God, but never called the Son of Joseph in Mark, agreement with the fact of the virgin birth though he does not expressly state that.

We are also acquainted with the fact that in the Gospel of John, we have some amazing statements made concerning the Lord Jesus. We read, for example, in the first chapter of his gospel, “And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten Father, full of grace and truth.” And then we read in the eighth chapter, in the 23rd verse, “He said unto them, ye are from beneath, I am from above. Ye are of this world; I am not of this world.” And again, while John does not explicitly state that the Lord Jesus was born of the virgin, what he does say perfectly agrees with that.

It’s rather surprising, then, to read on the part of many of our contemporary scholars that the virgin birth is hardly taught in the New Testament at all. Many of them, however, will grant that it is taught. They like to tell us, however, that it is not important. For example, I am reading a brief statement from one of the outstanding expositors in contemporary theology, and this is what he has to say concerning the virgin birth – and mind you, he comes from a church which has a very strong creedal affirmation; they have

accepted the Westminster Confession of Faith as their creed – and yet he is able to say and write, “This passage tells us how Jesus was born by the action of the Spirit. It tells us of what we call the virgin birth. The virgin birth is a doctrine which presents us with many difficulties, and it is a doctrine which our church does not compel us to accept in the literal and physical sense.”

It is a sad state to which the church comes when, in its credal statements there is affirmed the fact of the virgin birth of our Lord Jesus, his supernatural origin, and yet the ministers of that church may say that the church does not compel us to accept these things in a literal and physical sense. A few moments later, his real view concerning the virgin birth comes forth and he says, “There is much more in this chapter than the crude fact that Jesus was born of a virgin mother.” I certainly do not consider this to be a crude fact. As a matter of fact, it is anything but that.

Now I know there are objections to this supernatural birth of the Lord Jesus. There are many of them. For example, it has been objected that this is nothing more than a story similar to the pagan stories of the East, and we are not take this story in any other sense than those ancient stories in which the origin of some well-known person was dramatized.

But who would want to compare the birth of our Lord Jesus with the conception and birth of Caesar Augustus, for example? The myth of his origin is that his mother was visited in a temple of Apollo by a serpent, and the fruit of this union was Augustus. But who would want to compare a legend like that with this beautiful and holy narrative of the birth of our Lord Jesus?

Then there are some who have said, well, we are to regard these stories of the virgin birth as attempts by the early church to dramatize the origin of the Lord Jesus. They are inventions in which the church desired to do this in order to gain attention for the message that they were proclaiming. Well now, if it was the desire of the church to invent a spectacular origin for Jesus Christ, the virgin birth appears to be a fairly

inauspicious choice. It should be by those who have studied Greek mythology, and others, that Pallas Athena, for example, a goddess of the Greeks, jumped fully armed out of the head of the Greeks. Now that is a spectacular origin. [Laughter] In comparison with that kind of story, the comparison of a virgin mother in a stable surrounded by shepherds doesn’t seem very spectacular at all.

As a matter of fact, the gospel accounts of the Lord Jesus are only spectacular because we have come to believe that God is a God who does not perform the miraculous. Now the miracles that are performed in the New Testament are not the kind of miracles that the world would like for the Christian church to provide for them. As I was coming in this morning, I was listening to a program in which Dr. M. R. DeHawn was featured, and in the course of the program, reference was made to some miracles, and the doctor said God was able to do the impossible. Why, he is able to grow a crop of wheat on Fifth Avenue if he desires. But he has not done that up to this point, and he rather doubted if God was going to do that. We have difficulties with the miracles of the word of God because we do, naturally, have a little bit of difficulty with the omnipotence of our great God.

There are those who have objected to the virgin birth from the standpoint of biology. They have simply said, this is contrary to natural processes. That’s true. But then, Adam and Eve came into existence contrary to natural processes. And as a matter of fact, it is the recognition of the accounts of the New Testament that this is the belief of those who were involved in these events, that they were events that came to pass contrary to natural processes. And in fact, in the Lucan account of the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus, the specific statement is made by the angelic being who announced the virgin birth, “With God, nothing is impossible.” And so we are to regard the birth of our Lord Jesus as a miracle, and heaven recognizes that it is a miracle, and we too recognize that it is a miracle. We do not try to explain it by natural biological processes. There was such a

thing as parthenogenesis, but parthenogenesis does not explain the origin of the Lord Jesus.

Professor Alva McClain of Grace Seminary used to say – and I think with a great deal of force and accuracy – “A sinless man is a greater miracle in the moral order than a virgin birth in the biological.” And so if we are thinking about miracles, the miracles of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus is greater than the miracle of his origin. But Scripture, nevertheless, presents us with the fact of the virgin birth, and as we shall see later on, it is a very important doctrine.

There is also a Scriptural objection that has sometimes been raised through the virgin birth. It has been said that the Scriptures present him as the carpenter’s son. The Scripture uses such expressions as “his mother” in reference to Mary, and also “your father” in reference to Joseph. And incidentally, there is nothing wrong with affirming that Joseph is the father of our Lord Jesus. If you understand by that that he is the father in a legal sense, for that is precisely what he was. Mark, for example, could have said that Joseph was his father, and he would have been correct, because he was his father in the legal sense. We use the term father in a legal sense, too. And so, there is nothing wrong with these statements in which we have a carpenter’s son, his mother, your father, or any of the other things that suggest that he did have a mother or a father. He did have; he had a mother physically and a father legally. But he was conceived of the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary, and all of these accounts unite in the affirmation of the Apostle’s Creed to that effect.

Let’s look for a moment, now, at the account itself, and then I want to conclude with a few words concerning the importance of the King’s supernatural birth. Jacob and Heli had contracted a marriage for their children according to ancient custom. I’ve often wondered, would we be better off if our parents had contracted our marriages for us? Now I don’t think I would have been, but I think I know a great number of other people

who would have been better off. I’m sure that they are probably thinking the same thing of me.

Now it was the custom in those days, and when Jacob and Heli contracted the marriage for their children, Joseph and Mary, this betrothal was legally a time of marriage. But ordinarily, after a period of time, the two came together by virtue of a banquet and other arrangements, and they began their married life in the same home. But they were regarded as married from the time of their betrothal. Our text states that when his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. That expressed the origin of our Lord Jesus Christ. Campbell Morgan has said, “It is the holy mystery, the touch of God upon the simple life that made it forever sublime. The virgin birth, or the birth of our Lord Jesus is something that we can never really fathom. It is something we can only adore.”

Now this posed quite a problem for Joseph. Not understanding all that was involved, and knowing the statutes of the Scriptures to which he had yielded himself, he realized he was faced with a decision. And the decision was, shall I put away Mary publicly, as the Scriptures seem to teach that I should do? Or shall I, because of my love for her – and evidently it was love for her – put her away privately? And I would imagine from the disposition of this account, that Joseph spent many a sleepless night. He had many a night of weary sleep. He probably had many a night of dreams.

And finally, in the midst of his difficulties, he came to a conclusion. The tenses of the verbs here suggest that just as he had finally reached the decision as a just man— incidentally, the term “just” has reference to Joseph’s relationship to the law, primarily— but as a just man he had come to the conviction, I must obey Scripture, I must put her away, but nevertheless because of my love for her, I want to do it before two or three witnesses privately.

It is at this point that the angel comes to Joseph and tells him, “Joseph, thou son of David”—incidentally, notice there rests a great deal of stress upon the expression, “son of

David”—“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.” Now this is an important statement, and the evidence of it is that it is repeated twice. In the 18th verse, we read, “She was found with child of the Holy Spirit.” In the 20th verse, we read, “That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.”

We shall have no theological problem with the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus if we just remember two or three things. First of all, he had no human parentage such as you and I have. And therefore, we affirm the true and full deity of the Lord Jesus. He did not have a human father. That which was conceived in the Virgin Mary was of the Holy Spirit. In other words, there is an aspect to the person of our Lord Jesus, that is not human. It is divine. Now that is the first thing that we must have in mind if we are to have no theological problems with person of our Lord.

The second thing which we must bear in mind is that the Lord Jesus is not a new creation, as if he were some kind of demi-god or hetero-human. He is a true human being, and he possess the human nature that you and I possess, apart from sin. His nature that he derived from the Virgin Mary is a human nature. O the amazing condescension of the God-head in uniting itself to human nature in a marriage that is an eternal marriage. It is an amazing thing—I’ve never cease to marvel at the fact that the second person of the Trinity, who existed from all eternity—we cannot even think of it. It blows our mind to think of eternity. He existed from all eternity, but there came a point in time in which he took to himself an additional nature, a second nature, a human nature.

And mind you, this was not simply for a temporary period. It was not for the time from the manger – or from the pregnancy to be more exact – to the time of the completion of his redemptive program in which he turns over things to the Father. But so far as we can tell from the teaching of Scripture, throughout all eternity, the second person of the Trinity shall be the God-man, an amazing fact. Amazing, when you think of it, that this marriage

between the Lord Jesus and human nature is just as our marriages should be: permanent.

I never cease to marvel at that.

Now, then, the second thing that we need to remember is that there is no new creation.

That is, he is a true man apart from sin. The third thing that we must remember is that the divine element cannot receive pollution. And since the divine element cannot receive pollution, our Lord Jesus is a God-man, but he does not possess human sin. He is actually a divine person who possesses the human nature. Not a human person, who was raised to the power of deity, but a divine person, who possesses two natures: one person, two natures. A divine person, and because a divine person, he could not sin.

Now being a divine person – and that is evident, because he existed before he was born – he possesses all of the powers of the deity itself, for himself. The Apostle Paul writes, in Romans chapter 8 and the third verse, a very important doctrinal statement which bears upon what we have been saying here. He states in Romans chapter 8 and verse 3, “For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin condemned sin in the flesh.” The Lord Jesus came in the likeness of sinful flesh.

Now that statement is a very precise doctrinal statement. He came in the likeness of sinful flesh. He came in flesh, because he was true man, but it was only in the likeness of sinful flesh, it was not sinful flesh. So he came in the likeness of sinful flesh; he came in flesh but not in sinful flesh.

One other thing that I think that we must note here is that we read that his name is to be called Jesus. “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.” What a magnificent expression that is; our Lord Jesus’ name is to be called “Jesus.” Jesus is the Greek equivalent of the word “Joshua,” so that the Lord’s name was Joshua.

“Joshua” is a term that may mean “the salvation of Jehovah.” It may mean “O Jehovah save,” or simply, “Jehovah saves.” But it is sure that his name is connected with the word,

salvation. So the fact that the Lord Jesus is called “Joshua” is very suggestive spiritually. For he is—by virtue of the name that is given to him—he is to be another Joshua who shall lead Israel or his people into the Promised Land. And in this statement that his name shall be called Jesus, we have an acknowledgment of the fact that the problem that the Jews possessed was not Rome. The problem was sin.

As a matter of fact, this has very close application to us today. Our problem today is not the pollution problem. It’s not the environmental problem. Our problem today is not the economic problem. And our problem today is not the political problem. Our problem is the spiritual problem, and it is the problem of our Western civilization. Our Western civilization – a civilization is simply an experiment in social independence from God – is disintegrating in red ruin because we have not recognized and bowed to the doctrine of original sin and the doctrine of the atonement through the Lord Jesus.

That doctrine of original sin was slain by human contempt, but it has lived on to document itself in generation after generation of Americans and citizens of this Western world. It’s an amazing thing that we could have replaced that relevant and important doctrine of original sin by the brainless babble of Coue, and it’s so amazing that I find it of colossal marvel that it is practically as great a miracle as the miracle of the virgin birth. Imagine, Emile Coue, French psychotherapist, best remembered for his formula for curing bi-optimistic-autosuggestion: “Day by day, in every way, I am getting better and better.” And our American society is still permeated by this false conception of the nature of the human being.

As a matter of fact, there is no idiotic imbecility beyond the ability of great modern psychologists and philosophers and theologians to believe. Man’s greatest need is not to recognize the problem of economics or the problem of politics or the problem of our culture or the problem of our environment. Our greatest need is to recognize that our problem is our sin.

Isn’t it striking, too, the name that is given to the Lord Jesus? It is the simple name, Jesus. Jehovah saves. Every time someone pronounced the name of the Lord Jesus, he preached the gospel: Jehovah saves. God saves. Man does not save himself. Men do not save other men. God saves. Jehovah saves. Jehovah saves; come here. Every time his name was pronounced, the gospel was proclaimed. It was God’s way of impressing upon blind and dull minds the good news concerning the Lord Jesus.

I have often said, we like to call our men by different names, but our names are names that magnify the greatness of men. Alexander the Great. Charles the Bold. Richard the Lionhearted. These are names that we give men. Thou shalt call his name, Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.

Matthew is an interesting author. I hope you find him very interesting as you read through this gospel. But he is a very interesting author, and he likes, when he makes his points concerning the Lord Jesus, to cite texts of the Old Testament in support of his teaching. For after all, what he’s trying to do is to make plain to us the fact that Jesus is the Messiah as the Old Testament Scriptures have prophesied. And so he will interrupt his narrative from time to time by saying, “now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was written through the prophet, saying, behold a virgin shall be with child and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.”

And for his readers, he hoped that we would have some understanding of the Scriptures of the Old Testament. I’m sure that he would loved to have thought that his readers were individuals who, by the citation of a single passage, could bring to their minds whole sections of the word of God. And he would want, I know, for us to think about a section of the Old Testament which has often been called the Book of Emmanuel: Isaiah chapters 7 through 12.

In the 7th chapter is the text which he quotes here in the first chapter of Matthew, and there it is stated that there is to come an individual who is to be born of a virgin. Then in

the 9th chapter of that same Book of Emmanuel, “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, the Might God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.” And finally, in the 11th chapter, we read, “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots, and the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, and the result of his ministry shall be, they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”

And as you can see, the sweep of Isaiah’s argument is that the child who is born of the virgin in Isaiah chapter 7, is the child and the son upon whose shoulder the government shall rest, and it is through his ministry that we shall find a universal knowledge of the Lord throughout all of the earth in which we live. And when Matthew cites his text here, he wants us to understand that there is a great deal more to this than appears simply on the surface.

We have, then, a prophecy here that is fulfilled in the birth of our Lord Jesus, he is truly born of a virgin, but it is the same person who is ultimately going to rule and reign over an entirely renewed earth in a kingdom of God upon the earth.

Now, here we have another name for our Lord Jesus, and it is not a name that suggests his human nature, but a name that suggests his divine. Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is “God with us.” So these two names are names which are designed to represent the two aspects of our Lord’s person. He is Jesus. He is the human person who was born in Bethlehem, he is the human person who was brought up in Nazareth, he was the human person who lived later in Capernaum and carried on his ministry. But at the same time, while he is the human person, he is also “God with us.” Divine person with human nature, but God with us. So one of these terms stresses the human nature of our Lord, the other stresses the fact of his divine nature.

It should not be too surprising for us to comprehend this great fact, and it should not be too difficult for us to understand something of it. A man may have two forms of consciousness, and yet have only one form of self-consciousness. I can feel cold with my body, and I can feel some relationship to God in my mind. I may pray in my mind. These two forms of conscious experience are wholly diverse and distinct. I do not pray with my body. I do not feel cold in my mind. But because I am one person and possess a body, I may have certain sensations, and because I am one person and have a mind, I may have certain thoughts and certain sensations as a result of my mind.

The divine nature had its own form of experience, like mind in the ordinary person, and the human nature had its own form of experience like the body in a common man. The experiences of the divine nature were diverse from those of the human nature, just as those experiences of my mind are diverse from the experiences of my body. The Lord Jesus was very conscious of this. For example, at the time which he was conscious of weariness and thirst by the well of Samaria, he was also conscious of the fact that he was the eternal and only begotten Son of God, the second person of the Trinity. And this is evident from the words that he spoke to the Samaritan woman, for he said to her, “Whosoever drinketh of the water which I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water I shall give him shall be a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” The first experience of the consciousness of weariness and thirst came through the human nature of his person. And the second mentioned consciousness of omnipotence and supremacy came through the divine nature in his person. If he had not had a human nature, he could not have felt weary. He could not have felt thirsty. And if he had not possessed divine nature, he could not have conviction concerning the essence of his ministry. But because he had both natures in one person, he could have both of these senses within his consciousness.

Now Joseph, then, responds, and we read in the 25th verse—24th and 25th—“Then Joseph, being raised from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him

his wife, and knew her not until she had brought forth her firstborn son. And he called his name Jesus.” That’s the name which marks him out, then, as the human person: Jesus.

I want to say just a word about this name, because I think there is more to it than what I have said up to this point. This is the name that is divinely given and expounded. In other words, it is the best, it is the most appropriate name that the Father could give the Son. And the fact that he chose the name, Jesus, is an evidence of the fact that this is the name which pleases him.

We often have said we should give our Lord Jesus Christ his whole name: Lord-Jesus-Christ. There is a sense in which I would certainly sympathize with that sentiment, because if we wish to say everything about our Lord that we would want to say, we could call him the Lord Jesus Christ. But this name Jesus is a very important name for our Lord, and if you read in the New Testament, you discover that in the Epistle to the Hebrews it is the favorite name of that author. And finally, in the last word that we have from the Lord Jesus in the New Testament, we have him speaking from heaven in the Book of Revelation, and he says, “I, Jesus.” So it is perfectly alright for us to think about the Lord Jesus as “Jesus.”

Now I must confess I don’t like to hear too often people referring to him as simply “Jesus.” I like for them to acknowledge the fact that he is the Lord Jesus. But this is the name that was divinely given and divinely expounded. And so when we plead the name of our Lord Jesus as the one who saves, we are bringing back to God his own affirmations concerning the Lord Jesus. He was actually called by the name of Jesus by man. His name is typically borne by another, Joshua, but it is now reserved for him alone. And it identifies our Lord with his people. It is the name of Jesus because he saves his people from our sins. And it is the name that marks out his main work.

Wouldn’t it be really a terrible thing to have known John Milton, but not to have known him as a poet? Or wouldn’t it be a terrible thing to have known Bacon but not to have

known him as a philosopher? Or wouldn’t it be a terrible thing to know Jesus Christ as a teacher, but not to know him as a Savior? And it is the name which is completely justified by the facts.

Charles Hadden Spurgeon, in one of his sermons that relates to this, says in connection with this that “The name Jesus is the name that perfectly expresses what our Lord really does. He saves people from their sins.” And then he, in illustrating it, recollected that he once walked into a cemetery, and noticed on a grave a little tombstone. It was a tombstone over the grave of an infant, obviously. And he said it read, “Sacred to the memory of Methuselah Coney who lived six months.” His life belied his name, but the Lord Jesus is called Jesus because he does save his people from their sins. And no one ever lived up to his name more than Jesus of Nazareth.

And I want to say to you this morning, that if you should come to the Lord Jesus and by the work of the Holy Spirit, be brought to the acknowledgement of him as the divine person who accomplished an atonement of Calvary by virtue of his sufferings there, and if by the grace of God through the Spirit, you have been brought to faith and trust in him and not in your works, you’ll discover that he infallibly saves. Infallibly saves—he has never lost anyone who has truly come to him.

I said I would say something about the importance of the King’s supernatural birth. I don’t really have time to do that. But I want to mention these facts anyway. This birth of Jesus Christ is extremely important in its relationship to the word of God. When Luke begins his gospel he begins by saying he’s going to give us a gospel by which we can trust. He wants to give us the certainty of things. But we discover as we read that the first thing that he discusses is the birth of our Lord Jesus.

What trust can we give to a book in which the author says he’s going to write something in which we can trust, and then he writes about the virgin birth, and we are of course not to believe the virgin birth? If in the very first thing he discusses he gives us something

that is not true to fact, what regard shall we have for the remainder of the book? It is important, therefore, that we accept this virgin birth as true to holy Scripture.

This is important with reference to the Son of God. Positively we have been saying the Lord Jesus is the divine person who is without sin. But the negative side of this question I haven’t commented upon. You see, the question is not, “Is our Lord Jesus a divine Savior, or was he born of the virgin birth?” The choice is not between a virgin birth and an ordinary birth. The choice is between a virgin birth and illegitimate birth. The choice is between a virgin birth and calling our Lord Jesus truly—I say it shrinkingly—a bastard. And the word of God states in the Old Testament, a bastard shall not come into the congregation of the Lord. Our choice is not so easy as we are sometimes, as we sometimes think.

In relationship to the salvation of God, without the authority of the person of Christ, this message is of little value. And as I mentioned last time, we can have no kingdom of God were it not for the fact that the Lord Jesus is truly Joseph’s legal son but not his actual son. Did you notice Matthew’s words, “God with us?” Is this really true? Phillips Brooks was right when he wrote, “O little town of Bethlehem how still we see thee lie, above thy deep and dreamless sleep thy silent years go by; yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light, the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.” But Phillips Brooks was a preacher, and he also emphasized the need of personal appropriation. Is he really God with us?

Have we responded according to the last stanza of the hymn? “O holy child of Bethlehem descend to us we pray, cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today; we hear the Christmas angels, the great glad tidings tell, O come to us, abide with us, our Lord, Emmanuel.”

I want to say one last thing if you’ll give me one more sentence. There is one word in this passage that I must say startled me just recently as I was reading through this passage again. It’s a most unlikely word. It’s the word “interpreted.” You’ll notice that when he

is said to be Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. I passed over that for thirty years without even thinking about it. Interpreted – why should it be necessary to interpret? Why should not the word Emmanuel be sufficient? What is the point of it being “interpreted?” Why my dear Christian friend, and my friend who is not a Christian, you see the reason we have an interpretation of this statement is that God wants it to be known! Which being interpreted—it is an expression of the desire of the heart of God to have you know that he is God with us. If we needed any confidence that God is interested in gathering his saints unto himself, it’s found in that word, “interpreted.” That’s his way of saying I want Gentiles, as well as Jews, to belong to this king. May God help you to respond. Shall we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] We are grateful to Thee, Lord, that Thou has interpreted to us who are Gentiles the name of our Lord Jesus. God with us.

And O Father, we pray that if there is someone in this auditorium who has not come into personal relationship with Jesus Christ, wilt Thou through thy Holy Spirit give them the grace to be able to say at this moment, not simply that he is God with us, but that he is God with me.

Now may the grace of our great God, Father, Son and Spirit, be and abide with us until Jesus Christ comes again.

We ask in his name. Amen.