

Sermon on Christmas Day

What really happened when Jesus became a man?

Matt. 1: 18 - 21

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him 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. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, ¹⁹because he will save his people from their sins.”

Luke 1: 26 - 38.

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷to 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 conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him 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 Jacob’s descendants 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 on 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. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail.”

³⁸ “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.

Luke 1: 46 - 48 And Mary said: “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me — holy is his name.

The story of what really happened when Christ Jesus was born begins with the engagement of Joseph and Mary. We are told that “Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph.” They had already gone through the first step of making marriage vows and were for that reason legally considered husband and wife.

But then we hear also a shocking thing: *“Mary was found with child before they came together.”* Joseph had yet to take Mary into his home and consummate the relationship - and she was already pregnant.

And all Joseph knew about the child Mary expected was that he was not the father. As a law abiding man he could not and would not take Mary into his home if she slept with another man.

As a righteous man, Joseph could not take a wife who was an adulteress.

As a righteous man, Joseph could not take a wife home who was not a virgin.

And Matt. 1: 19 tells us that Joseph was “a righteous man.” This means he was God-fearing and law-abiding. He was a simple and honest man. The Christmas story gives us a glimpse into Joseph’s righteousness: His righteousness required him to divorce the girl.

Yes, Joseph was righteous, but he was also a merciful, caring, and compassionate man. In spite of his disappointment and that his heart was broken, he did not consider revenge. He did not consider “discipline”. He did not want to humiliate Mary. He did not want to shame her in front of the entire community. He did not want to publicly accuse her of a serious sin. He did not want to subject her to a community trial. He did not want her to be stoned to death.

So he decided to divorce Mary quietly. *As a truly righteous man, Joseph showed compassionate love.* As a righteous man, Joseph showed love not only for God, but also for a pregnant fiancé who did not carry his baby.

And Mary, a modest, believing and obedient young girl, lived to honour and to observe the law and will of God.

Luke 1: 46 - 48 **And Mary said:** “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the **Mighty One** has done great things for me — **holy is his name.**

In her song of praise, (Luke 1) Mary confessed that the Name of God is holy. In her song she called God "LORD," "God my Saviour," and "Mighty One."

She knew the LORD as El-Shaddai – "The Almighty God".

She knew him as El-Olam – "God of Eternity", above and beyond time and space, the God who is sovereign for all eternity.

She knew him as El-Berith – the "God of the covenant," the God who remains faithful from generation to generation.

She knew him as Ancient of Days, Rock, Refuge, Fortress and Shield. She knew him as Judge, Shepherd, and Father.

Why is the Lord described by so many names?

Because the beauty, the fullness, and the magnificence of God cannot be expressed by just one name.

And when we read the New Testament, we find there are as many different names for Jesus as there are for God. Jesus is called the Chief Cornerstone, the Living Bread, the Hidden Treasure, the Way, Life and Truth, the Sure Foundation, the Great Physician, the Great Teacher, Lord of the Harvest, the Rock of Ages, the True Vine, the Righteous Judge, the True Witness, the Good Tidings of Great Joy, the Wisdom of God, the Good Master, the Giver of Rest, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world, the Son of the Living God, the Saviour, the Redeemer and Lord of all! Why is Jesus described by so many names?

Because the beauty, the fullness, and the magnificence of Jesus cannot be expressed by just one name.

So why did Mary praise the name of God as "holy"? An angel appeared to Mary, called her blessed and favoured and announced her privilege to give birth to the long expected Messiah, although she would remain a virgin. And then the angel added to this: "*For nothing is impossible with God.*"

Shall we not when we learn of the birth of our Saviour, also learn to respond to God's holy majesty and grace with praise and worship? So we sing great old hymns and carols. We worship him. We praise his holy Name! This is what Mary did when she realized the holiness of God's Name. She said, "*My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour...*" (Lk 1:46-47).

What a great couple Joseph and Mary were! Righteous merciful Joseph and believing, modest and God-obeying Mary!

And how clearly they show us the believer's response to the proclamation of the birth of Christ, the coming of God to us in Jesus!

Shall we not respond in worship when the birth of Christ is proclaimed to us? When Mary was commissioned by God to become pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit and carry the Son of God, she said "*I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said*". (Lk 1:38) She surrendered to God's plan for her life.

She became a follower of Christ even before she became his mother.

As we wait to finally meet the Messiah, not as a helpless Babe but as the holy Judge who will come on the clouds, we want to be found to be righteous and merciful as Joseph.

And when we hear that nothing is impossible with the almighty LORD who called us to serve his Kingdom, we too, like Mary, should worship and obey our awesome God. We too should respond in faith to the sovereign grace of God as he encounters us in Jesus, as he did encounter Joseph and Mary.

This is the Word of God!

Thanks be to God for his Word. Amen.