

# The Gospel According to Matthew

By

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## CHAPTER TWO

### MATTHEW 1:18-23

WE have considered the genealogy of Jesus as recorded in the first seventeen verses.

Now we commence the study of the story of His birth.

Dr. Horton once ended a singularly beautiful sermon on the Virgin Birth of Jesus in words which are well worth reading as a preliminary to this study. After treating the story as constituting one of the idylls of the infancy and life dealing with it in a most reverent way, as being one of those sweet and sacred things that never could have been known unless told by Joseph, or Mary, or both he said,

“I believe, my dear friends, that you can do a great service to-day; you can relieve the minds and consciences of thousands of people if you can simply pass on the thought: I believe in the Divinity of Jesus Christ my Lord, on the grounds that Paul and John have given; and then, I believe in the stories of the infancy because I believe in the Divinity of the Lord, and I have found in them a beautiful illustration of what Christ meant when He said, ‘**I am from above . . . I am not of this world.**’ “

That position one is fully prepared to accept. Our belief in the truth of this sacred story is based upon the facts of the Person and purposes of Jesus as unfolded in the writings of the Apostles, which writings are in turn demonstrated true in our own personal experience.

The very position indicated makes it impossible to agree with Dr. Horton in a statement immediately preceding this. Speaking of the Virgin Birth of Jesus, he said, “Never give anyone the impression that the faith of Jesus depends upon it, or that a man cannot believe in our Lord because he does not believe in the idylls of the infancy.”

While recognizing the spirit of patience and toleration which such a statement breathes, it is impossible to accept it as logical. If belief in the teaching of Paul and John necessarily leads to belief in the truth of this story of Matthew, then it necessarily follows that to reject this story of Matthew is finally to reject the teaching of Paul and John, and so not to believe in the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. All our future studies will be from the standpoint of belief in the Deity of Jesus as taught in the subsequent writings of the New Testament, and therefore as accepting this story, as presenting in idyllic form, the sublime, mysterious, and infinite truth “**that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.**”

From this whole idyll we select the words which chronicle two prophecies.

The angelic prophecy is in the words:

**“She shall bring forth a Son; and thou shalt call His name Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins.”**

The angel’s quotation is from the prophecy of Isaiah, and follows immediately:

**“Now all this is was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, ‘Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, And they shall call his name Immanuel.’ “**

Eliminating the words which speak of the method of His coming - words which are so severely plain as to demand simple acceptance or equally simple rejection - because we accept them, for the reasons already stated, we shall take the two prophetic words concerning Him:

- **“Thou shalt call His name Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins.”**
- **“They shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.”**

The second is a prophecy of the past, expressing the hope of the people.

The past looked on, and looked up, and looked out, and sighed for **“Emmanuel God with us.”** The first is the prophecy which tells us how that hope has been realized. The angel declares that all that longing is to be answered, for Jesus is to be born, Who is to save His people from their sins. Observe carefully the angelic message. He is to fulfil the prophecy of the past, **“Emmanuel God with us.”**

While in the text the prophecies are placed in the order, first of realization, and then of the statement of the hope, in this study we will take them in the other order, which is that of their real occurrence in the Divine Library.

We will consider, then, first, the hope.

**“They shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.”**

And secondly, the realization:

**“Thou shalt call His name Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins.”**

**I. This old-time prophecy quoted by the angel, is from the seventh chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah.**

Look very carefully at its setting therein. It reads thus:

**“Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken.”** (Ch. 7:14-16).

To take the quotation in this way is at once to be brought into the presence of something that increasingly seems to have, as the history is examined, no connection with this great subject of the Birth of Jesus.

If the whole chapter be read, it will be found that the prophet Isaiah was talking to king Ahaz who was in peril, because Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, were coming up against Jerusalem. The prophet told Ahaz to be quiet; that there need be no panic in his heart.

Comparing the prophecy of Isaiah with the historical books, we discover that Ahaz was bent upon seeking aid from some other power.

The prophet appealed to him to do nothing of the kind, and said. **“Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above.”** Ahaz replied that he would not ask a sign of God. Then said the prophet, **“Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive.”**

**“For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.”**

He then proceeded to say that not only should the enemies be defeated, but that his own nation should be broken because of their lack of faith.

*That prophecy was perhaps partially fulfilled in the birth of a child to Isaiah.*

In the story in the following chapter there was a child born who was named Maher-shalal-hash-baz, the meaning of which is, *the spoil speedeth, the prey hasteth.*

For all local fulfillment this was the child referred to. The word, **“Immanuel,”** had never occurred before. It occurs twice in Isaiah once here, and once in the following chapter and never again until the angel whispered it to Joseph, as chronicled in the story in Matthew.

We can hardly understand the value of this in a study of the mere text. The whole context must be taken.

For an interpretation of this prophecy chapters six to nine should be studied. The reference to Immanuel in chapter seven is incidental not accidental but preparatory, a gleam of light flashing on a purely local circumstance.

Let us epitomize chapters six to nine in order to see the setting. In chapter six the death of Uzziah is recorded, also the story of that marvellous vision, as a result of which Isaiah was anointed and consecrated for his work.

Then, immediately we pass into changed circumstances. Ahaz was on the throne; The two kings Rezin and Pekah had come up against Jerusalem, and Ahaz wanted to call in aid from without. The prophet besought him not to do this, but to trust in God; and told him that a son should be given.

Notice what is here stated concerning Immanuel, for the prophecy merges into something larger than the local setting, as prophecies always do.

It is impossible to study the prophecies of the Old Testament without discovering that the prophets looked down the vista of years, and sometimes described something quite close at hand; then saw how its lines ran out into the coming ages; and omitting intervening ages, described the final issue. So here Isaiah's prophecy merges into something larger.

He said that when Immanuel came He should eat "**butter and honey,**" *which signifies that He would come into the midst of circumstances of poverty and trouble.*

Turn to chapter eight.

A son was born to Isaiah, and the prophet announced the coming of Assyria in verse eight "**He (Assyria) shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel.**"

There was a person in the mind of the prophet, not yet focused or revealed, as he spoke of the Virgin's Child, Immanuel. As he saw desolation coming to the land of the ancient people he spoke of it as the land of Immanuel. He evidently contemplated the incoming foes and spoke of them, and said, "**Gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces . . . Take counsel together, and it shall be brought to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand; for (Immanuel) God is with us.**"

The name is mentioned in the local prophecy, but thus it merges into a larger application when the prophet speaks of the land as Immanuel's land. It includes a still larger outlook when the prophet declares that the foes coming against the land will be defeated because Immanuel will be with Israel.

The Messianic quality gradually grows as we read through the prophecy. Who is Immanuel? What is He to be? He is to be a sanctuary, and a rock of offence.

The Person Immanuel, incidentally mentioned in local connection, in chapter seven, blazes out into splendid light in the ninth chapter as the prophet wrote,

**"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 mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon His kingdom, to order it, and to establish it."**

*Long centuries passed, and an angel came in a dream to a man and told him that the ultimate fulfillment of that prophecy was at hand.*

While the words of Isaiah had local applications, they had vaster values than such applications could contain. So the birth of Jesus was for the fulfillment of those vaster values that lay within the old-time prophecy. This hope must be interpreted in its local setting, and yet with that more spacious intention which it evidently contains. From this examination of Isaiah's prophecy we make general deductions. Take the first and the last of these verses.

- The first (ch. 7:14) "**A virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, And they shall call his name Immanuel;**"
- The last (ch. 9:6) "**Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given.**"

This one great prophecy - beginning in such a simple circumstance and growing to such a sublime declaration, expressed the hope that God would presence Himself in actual human life through a human birth; that by some mysterious method which could not be expressed fully in human language, God would come and manifest Himself in a four-fold character.

The Bible may be divided around that description of manifestation.

- "**Wonderful, Counsellor;**" so man first knew Him.
- "**Mighty God;**" so was He revealed through all the processes of the history of the Hebrew nation.
- "**Everlasting Father;**" so is He known in this dispensation.
- "**Prince of Peace;**" so shall He be revealed in the established Kingdom.

All that was focused in this Child.

Thus the immediate teaching of Isaiah's prophecy flashed its light forward.

- Immanuel shall come into the midst of His people's degradation and share it.
- Immanuel shall become a sanctuary and a stone of stumbling.
- Immanuel shall finally conquer all His enemies.

At last the God-inspired hope of His people, expressed through prophecy, is declared to be realized in the birth of the Child of Mary.

- Joseph heard it and believed it.
- Mary heard it and sang the Magnificat.
- Early disciples heard it, and hearing it believed it, and proclaimed it.

It is far easier for us to believe it than it was for any of these to do so, because we see the program carried out into the centuries. As we read carefully and ponder it, we discover the whole program of events, from the time Isaiah spoke until now, and beyond it, gathered round the word Immanuel. It was a great hope, and all that we see fulfilling the prophecy, is the result of His birth.

## II. Now let us go back to the first prophecy, made directly by the angel to the man Joseph

**“She shall bring forth a Son; and thou shalt call His name Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins.”**

*Take the local setting.*

This story is beautiful in its simplicity. Joseph was **“a just man,”** - a righteous man. One hardly knows which word is best to use. We talk to-day of a just man; and we may think of a man hard and cold. We talk of a righteous man, and we have said, **“Scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.”**

The good man is the man of the simple heart. A blunt commentary would be that Joseph was a straight man, a true man. Not that he was severe and harshly just; not coldly and cynically righteous; but he was a true man, the carpenter, the village builder.

Mary was his betrothed, and according to the old and beautiful Hebrew custom was bound to Joseph, the betrothal ceremony being as sacred as the marriage rite, after which the bridegroom took his bride home, with songs and rejoicing, and accompaniment of music. They were simple village folk of royal lineage, for when the angel spoke to Joseph he did not call Jesus his son, but Son of David. A straight strong man, and a simple, sweet maid.

There is no love story quite as sweet as the love story of mountain, hill and village. All the conventional arrangements of marriages are of hell. Love that is a dream, breaking in upon the soul, is always beautiful.

In the midst of that period of betrothal came that awe-inspiring and Holy Mystery, that sacred Mystery that we meditate in solemn silence; the Holy Mystery the touch of God upon the simple life that made it forever sublime. A thing not to be repeated; unique, and alone in the history of the race. The word of God is not void but powerful; and the maiden was possessed with the Holy Mystery. Then the angel visitor came, and announced the name, **“Thou shalt call His name Jesus.”**

It was just an ordinary Jewish name about as common in Judaea as John is common amongst us. The name had not the significance that we understand to-day. Thank God it has gathered so much beauty and fragrance about it, that we can never dare call our children by that Name, and we are right. It was a beautiful, Jewish boy's name, a common name of the common people. But here, as everywhere in the great spiritual movement, God took hold of the commonplace to show that there was something infinitely more than the common.

*Jesus is a Greek form of the Hebrew Joshua, meaning Saviour.*

Other men had borne that name. Many a mother called her boy Joshua, in the hope that he would be a savior, and break oppression, and set the people free. Now the angel said: Give that name to this Boy; **“For He shall save His people from their sins.”**

Take the human name, sweetest of them all, and give it to the Child of the Holy Mystery; the Child Who is not of Joseph, but of God, Tell His sweet mother Mary to give Him this name Jesus. Moreover, the name means “*The Lord is Salvation.*”

*Mark the intention of it.*

They are “**His people.**”

Give Him the name as one of His people; calling Him by the ordinary name of His people; He is coming in identification with them. They are under a yoke, eating curds and honey; He is coming to eat curds and honey with them, as the prophet said. They are an oppressed and a devastated people; He is coming in identification with them; give Him the name signifying identification in all its deepest meaning. He is coming to suffer.

*Then mark how the angel told heaven’s secret in heaven’s language.*

What the people thought they wanted was a Joshua who could reveal himself to this material Jerusalem as King, break the power of Rome, and set up an earthly Kingdom.

The angel said the deeper trouble was not that of the Roman yoke; or that they had been beaten in battle; the trouble with them was that they were sinners “**He shall save His people from their sins.**”

He will not come to battle with externalities, but to grip sin at its heart.

We look on as the angel speaks, and we see the Cross, the way by which “**He shall save His people from their sins.**”

The name is a prophecy. Joseph was commanded to give it to Jesus, and when Joseph gave it to Him, it was prophecy only ““**Call His name Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins.**”

A generation passed away, three score years, and, at the close of the period, the story was recorded by the evangelists.

At last the Apostle of the Gentiles told it also. Jesus, “**Being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men**” (Philippians 2:6-7).

He did not abhor the virgin’s womb, but came in “**the likeness of men.**” That is the apostles’ story of the incarnation.

Now follow the story: He “**became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name.**”

What name is this? Joseph called Him Jesus because the angel said that He was to be named so. It was a prophecy; but it was fulfilled by His birth, His Cross, and His Resurrection.

God gave Him the name when He ascended. What name was it? **“That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.”**

- It was prophecy at His birth.
- It is an evangel on the Ascension morning.
- It was an indication of purpose when He was born.
- It is a declaration of accomplishment when He ascended on high.

“Jesus, name of sweetness,  
Jesus, sound of love;  
Cheering exiles onward,  
To their rest above.

“Jesus, oh the magic!  
Of the sweet love sound,  
How it thrills and trembles  
To creation’s bound.”

Never was there so much music as there is in that Name. So came the King.

Standing back to-day, and looking over the centuries, we see the merging of the Hope, Immanuel, into realization in Jesus. God is born of a virgin into human life. God is born into the midst of the degradation of man. God moves in this Man to the Throne of imperial and unending Government. God through this Man saves from sins, and establishes and upholds a Kingdom forever. God performs all this in His own zeal through Jesus Christ.

“O little town of Bethlehem,  
How still we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep  
The silent stars go by;  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth  
The everlasting Light;  
The hopes and fears of all the years  
Are met in thee to-night!

“For Christ is born of Mary;  
And gathered all above,  
While mortals sleep the angels keep  
Their watch of wondering love;  
O morning stars ! together  
Proclaim the holy birth,  
And praises sing to God the King,  
And peace to men on earth.



“How silently, how silently  
The wondrous gift is given!  
So God imparts to human hearts  
The blessings of His heaven;  
No ear may hear His coming;  
But in this world of sin,  
Where meek souls will receive Him still,  
The dear Christ enters in.

“O holy Child of Bethlehem,  
Descend to us, we pray;  
Cast out our sin, and enter in  
Be born in us to-day!  
We hear the Christmas angels  
The great glad tidings tell  
Oh, come to us, abide with us,  
Our Lord Emmanuel!”

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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