

We pause this week to learn about the birth of Christ and what it means for us all through the year. May the Lord grant us much insight and encouragement as we ponder the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary for our Salvation.

Monday: Read Matthew 1:1-16 and Luke 3:23ⁱ

A New and Better King

Have you ever opened a gift box which says, “Some assembly required,” only to discover that the directions are too vague to help you with the specific nuts and bolts? Thankfully, our accounts of the birth of Christ are very precise. For example, both Matthew and Luke are careful to deny that Joseph was the actual father of Jesus. In Luke 3:23 Luke carefully distinguishes Joseph’s alleged fatherly relationship to Jesus from the reality: “Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, **so it was thought**, of Joseph...”

Matthew also disqualifies Joseph from being Jesus’ actual birth father in Matthew 1:12, where Joseph’s family tree is traced directly back to a certain Jeconiah (otherwise known as King Jehoiachin in the Old Testament). This ruler is cursed by the Lord because of his wickedness in Jeremiah 22:30:

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.”

2 Chronicles 36:9 sums up Jehoiachin’s short reign of three months and ten days with the words, “He did evil in the sight of the Lord.” In this way, Joseph, as a direct descendant of Jeconiah, could never have fathered a son for the throne of David. Donald Barnhouse argues in his commentary on Romans 1:3, “If Jesus had been the son of Joseph, he would have been accursed and could never have been the Messiah.”

Meditate and Pray: Oh the wisdom of God to provide His own sinless Son to take the throne of David. Aren’t you thankful that none of Jeconiah’s offspring, including Joseph, the husband of Mary, ever ascended to the Throne of David? In this way, God ensured that Christ would inherit the Kingdom which Jeconiah’s family lost by sin. Praise God right now for the righteousness of Jesus’ reign!

Tuesday: Read Luke 3:21-38

True Son of David

If the line from Solomon was disqualified because of the sins of Jeconiah in Matthew 1:12 and Jeremiah 22:30, where Jesus’ claim to the throne of the Messiah, the offspring of David, comes from? How could Jesus take the throne of David legally if the legal line stemming from his adopted father, Joseph, back to Solomon, was barred from the throne by reason of curse? One answer which commends itself is that Jesus also had a claim to the throne, biologically speaking, through Mary. James Boice quotes Donald Barnhouse in his book, *Standing on the Rock* (pages 107-109) to postulate that Luke’s genealogy is that of Mary, not Joseph, traced not through Solomon (Matthew 1:6), but through Solomon’s brother Nathan (Luke 3:31). In this way Jesus, born of Mary, was truly a son of David according to flesh and blood, but without the curse on Joseph’s forebearers.

Meditate and Pray: Thank God for His wonderful plan of redemption, whereby everyone has their place and their role to play. Though Solomon's brother Nathan did not receive the honor of rule, he nevertheless was used by God to produce the line of Jesus' mother. Thank God for the surety of the Apostles' Creed in its Biblical description of Jesus' birth: "conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary."

Wednesday: Read Matthew 1:18-20 and Hebrews 4:14-15

A Sympathetic Brother

Even worse than opening a special gift to find the instructions confusing and unhelpful is discovering that the parts are defective and the finished product unuseable because of hidden flaws. But we can be assured that, in Jesus' birth, there are no hidden flaws in his background or humanity which would render Him an ineffective Savior. He is not subject to the sinful curse of Joseph's family tree, nor of any other hidden flaw. His humanity is perfect from conception – not because Mary was sinless, but because the Holy Spirit is able to make of our real, fallen humanity a new sinless Savior. We see this in the words of reassurance which Joseph receives in Matthew 1:20: "Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her *is from the Holy Spirit.*"

Meditate and Pray: Thank God for the impeccable work of His Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Jesus was truly "born of Mary" with our flesh and blood, so as to identify with us as our loving Savior and Elder Brother. But none of our sin's nature or defilement marred the conception of Jesus. In this way, He could grow up to be a sympathetic priest, "tempted in all ways as we are, yet without sin," (Hebrews 4:15).

Thursday: Read Matthew 1:21-25

Named to Save

John MacArthur writes in his commentary Matthew's Gospel about Jesus' family tree: "A careful look at the descendants both of Abraham and David in Matthew 1 reveals people who were often characterized by unfaithfulness, immorality, idolatry and apostasy. But God's dealing with them was always characterized by grace." We see this grace come to its fulfillment in the naming of Mary's child: "You shall call His name Jesus, because He shall save His people from their sins."

Meditate and Pray: Even from birth, Jesus' purpose was to deliver His people from their guilty and polluted past. He was unafraid to touch us in our unclean family associations, because He knew that He had the authority to lift us out of the mire and set our feet firmly on the Rock of His Salvation. Thank Him now for His saving power for guilty sinners in the words of hymn # 552 from our *Trinity Hymnal*:

*From out the depths, I cry, O Lord,
to thee; Lord, hear my call.
I love thee, Lord, for thou dost
heed my plea, forgiving all.
If thou dost mark our sins, who then shall stand?
But grace and mercy dwell at thy right hand.*

Friday: Read Isaiah 7:13-14; 8:18-9:6 and Matthew 1:22-23**It Was the Worst of Times**

Isaiah prophesied about the Virgin Birth of Jesus in days of great darkness and national crisis. Isaiah describes the spiritual disintegration of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, with the people reverting to spiritism for help and cursing God. The same darkness of unbelief which hangs over the North also hangs over the Southern Kingdom of Judah, the House of David. Its current King Ahaz is rebuked for his unbelief even while the sign of the Virgin Birth is granted him: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14).

Meditate and Pray: It was into this darkness that God sent the light of the promise of the Virgin Birth. It was into just such a day, so much like ours, that God promised to send His own Son, God of God, to be “Immanuel,” which means “God with us.” Thank God that His Son humbled Himself to come into the world at its worst. He was unafraid of the terrible morass of our sin. In fact, we can even say that God saved His highest accomplishment in the Virgin Birth for the lowest of and worst of times, in order to show us once and for all: If He can save sinners from *that* darkness and level of depravity, then He can save sinners in our day, and save us no matter how deep and dark the pit of our sin may be. Praise His Name.

Sat/Sun: Read Luke 1:1-4, 3:38, &19:10**Back to Adam’s Sinful Race**

We can now focus on the theme of Luke’s Gospel, which is that Christ Jesus came into this world, “to seek and to save that which was lost.” Matthew emphasizes Christ as sent to the lost sheep of Israel. But it was not just the Jewish race for which our Savior would accomplish salvation. Christ was sent to the world lost in sin, “to seek and to save the lost” – including the Gentiles. Hence, Luke’s genealogy goes all the way back to Adam in order to offer hope for all nations, created in the image of God.

The world-wide message of the church is to be sent out in Jesus’ name to all the children of Adam, no matter their location or language. See how Luke begins the second volume of his work (my emphasis):

So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, **and to the end of the earth.**”

Acts 1:6-8

All those created in the image of God are to hear the free offer of the Gospel from the writings of Luke. And what a compassionate, so very human Savior we have, able to reclaim our humanity, lost ever since the fall of Adam. This is what Luke stresses – that this Jesus was truly man, truly born of the flesh of the virgin Mary, yet without sin. As the Roman centurion, in charge of Christ’s execution, put it: “Certainly this Man was innocent.”

That man praised God as he saw Christ take His real humanity and die with it on the Tree. May we also praise the Lord Jesus Christ, so full of compassion towards us in all our human temptations and weakness. Use *Trinity Hymnal* # 250 to praise our compassionate Lord and Savior:

1 Throned upon the awful tree,
 King of grief, I watch with thee.
 Darkness veils thine anguished face:
 none its lines of woe can trace:
 none can tell what pangs unknown
 hold thee silent and alone.

2 Silent through those three dread hours,
 wrestling with the evil pow'rs,
 left alone with human sin,
 gloom around thee and within,
 till th'appointed time is nigh,
 till the Lamb of God may die.

4 Lord, should fear and anguish roll
 darkly o'er my sinful soul,
 thou, who once wast thus bereft

that thine own might never be left,
 teach me by that bitter cry
 in the gloom to know thee nigh.

ⁱ In dealing with some of the complex questions regarding the two different genealogies of our Lord in Matthew and Luke, I allow for many different opinions. Some, like R.C. Sproul, perhaps wisely concludes that he is not sure how to harmonize the differences between these genealogies. In the following

notes I adopt the harmonizing theories of James Boice and Donald Grey Barnhouse. Moreover, please note that the theory that Luke's genealogy traces Jesus' human lineage through Mary is an old theory, dating back to the church father, Eusebius.