

GREAT TEXTS -- MATTHEW 1:1-25

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on September 30, 1962 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

On a deserted road from Jerusalem to Gaza, a chariot carried two men, one an Ethiopian nobleman, the other Philip the evangelist. There came a moment in the conversation when the Ethiopian said, "Behold, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." You know the rest of the story, "And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him." (Acts 8:36-38).

I mention this story to you primarily to emphasize the great confession: "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." This is the confession that everyone must make if he expects someday to share heaven with the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a confession that many of us have already made. Some of you made it years ago when you were children; others of you have made it in recent weeks. It is a confession that many, many thousands and even millions of people have made down through the centuries.

How do we know that Jesus really is the Christ? How do we know that he is divine? How do we really know? Well, there are a number of ways that we know. We would know if there were nothing more than the eye-witness accounts of his death and his resurrection. Three days after they had seen him die on the cross, after had seen him buried in a tomb, they saw him alive again. A little later, the eleven faithful apostles stood on a mountain and saw him as he was physically taken up from them into heaven, never to set foot on this earth again. His death, his resurrection, and his ascension prove beyond any shadow of a doubt that he was no mere man; he was divine.

We know it also because of the miracles that he worked. No man could do what he did--raising the dead, giving sight to blind eyes, hearing to deaf ears, and the ability to walk to lame legs--if he did not have the power of God within him. These miracles were not just psychological cures; these were cures of people who were organically ill. Certainly those who had been dead, as in the case of Lazarus, were not psychologically cured. When one was four days dead in a tomb and then was raised, it had to be real. We know he was divine also because of his great teachings. No one ever taught like he did. It must have been a dramatic moment when the soldiers who had been sent to arrest him came back to say, "Never man so spoke." That was their explanation for not bringing him.

Another Reason

There is another reason why we know that he was not merely a man. It was the way he entered this world, his birth. It, too, was a remarkable miracle. We do not mention it nearly as often as we ought. Come with me for a little while to the opening chapter of the gospel of Matthew where the miracle of the entrance of God into this world is described.

Ordinarily, when we open our Bibles to Matthew 1 we rather hurry past the genealogy. For most people genealogies are dull reading--so-and-so begat so-and-so, who begat so-and-so, but for a moment imagine that your name is in this list. If you can really imagine that your name, or the name of your family is in this list, it no longer is dull reading. It becomes exciting reading. When Matthew wrote this chapter in the long ago, and the Jews read it in the long ago, it was exciting reading because their ancestors are the ones who are mentioned. But I think it is exciting even yet if we will let it be.

Here is the way it begins, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." Immediately in that opening verse it is established that Jesus was a Jew. That means that later on there would be others of his race who would leave their mark on the world--Albert Einstein for one, Leo Trotsky, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, the house of Rothchild, the bankers of Europe. All these were Jews. The Jews have been influential in our world, not always for good, sometimes for evil, but always influential.

David's Throne

Jesus' lineage was traced back to Abraham, "Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judah and his brethren; and Judah begat Perez and Zerah of Tamar; and Perez begat Hezron; and Hezron begat Ram; and Ram begat Amminadab; and Amminadab begat Nashon; and Nashon begat Salmon; and Salmon begat Boaz of Rahab; and Boaz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse; and Jesse begat David the king." (Matt. 1:1-6). Jesus descended through David. David the king was in his lineage, which means that he is royalty. As the prophecies said, he would sit on David's throne.

At this point we go more rapidly, Solomon, Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joram, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amon, Josiah and Jehoniah. Do you recognize some familiar names in that list of fourteen? Then come another fourteen, Shealtiel, Zerubbabel, Abiud, Eliakim, Azor, Sadoc, Achim, Eliud, Eleazar, Matthan, "and Matthan begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ." (Matt. 1:7-16). Incidentally, the Greek helps us to know something

very important here. “Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom (and this pronoun is feminine, not masculine) was born Jesus, who is called Christ.” That pronoun tells us that he was virgin born, not born of Joseph, but born of Mary.

This genealogy has a great deal of meaning in it. In this list are the names of some of the greatest of God’s people as well as the names of some whose lives are sad and disappointing. Jesus was born into a Jewish family and that meant that he had ancestors just like any one of us. Sometimes ancestors are glorious and we thrill at being the son or the grandson of some illustrious man; at other times ancestors are a burden and we wish it were not known that so-and-so is in our ancestry. Jesus had some great and good forefathers; he had some who were weak and even wicked. If you are one of those who has suffered because of the family name, or because of the action of a brother or a father or someone who is in your kinship range, it helps to remember that Jesus also had some liabilities along the line.

Four Women

For example, in this lineage four women are mentioned. Tamar is the first, then Rahab, then Ruth, and finally, though the name is not given, reference is made to Bathsheba in the words, “David begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Uriah.” Of the four women who are named in this genealogy three were women of ill reputation. Tamar’s story is an embarrassing one; Rahab is described as a harlot; Bathsheba shared his sin with David. But also in this list there is the name of Ruth who is one of the purest and finest and noblest women who ever lived and her story is one of the purest and finest and noblest of the inspiring stories of all times. All these are in Christ’s lineage. But it does not greatly matter. When Jesus was born the past did not tarnish his perfection.

In this lineage you notice that Matthew, who was a Jew, traces back to David who was the greatest of Israel’s kings and then on back to Abraham, the father of the Hebrew race. He traces the lineage down through Joseph, because Joseph, though only the foster father of Jesus and not the actual father, was the legal ancestor of Jesus because he was the husband of Mary. Luke, who was a Gentile, traces the lineage from Adam down to Jesus through Mary. His lineage goes back through Mary’s parents.

Son of the Most High

The chief reason that I have chosen this passage for our text comes in verse eighteen, “Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise.” Just here I want to interrupt our reading of Matthew’s account for a moment, in order to hear Luke tell of Christ’s coming, “Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary. And he came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee. But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this might be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God. And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David; and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. And Mary said unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the most high shall overshadow thee: wherefore also the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God.” (Luke 1:26-35). There is prophecy, plain and simple, that the Messiah would be virgin born.

Turning back to Matthew’s account we read, “Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, (The word betrothed is a word we know, for it is like our engagement, though stronger. From Patriarchal times betrothal was almost tantamount to marriage. It covered a period of about a year prior to marriage and during that time of engagement if either party were unfaithful to the other it was considered adultery. At the end of that year of betrothal they were married) before they came together she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.

Divine and Human

What a beautiful, beautiful thing this is. This means that when Jesus came to the earth and became flesh he was part divine, having no earthly father, and part human, being born of an earthly mother. Jesus had to be divine in order to have the power to redeem man from sin, but Jesus also had to be human for his redemption to mean anything. He had to be human in order to suffer the same temptations that we suffer. By overcoming them with the same means that we have available he then earned the right to be our example and guide. Had he been wholly divine his power would have been unappreciated by us; had he been wholly human he would not have been able to redeem us. So, in the infinite wisdom of God there had to be this perfect blend--human on the one side, but divine on the other. How better could it be done than for a baby miraculously to be born with the Holy Spirit as his father and a pure virgin as his mother?

And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.” He did not understand, so he was doing what was decent and right. He did not wish to tell it publicly for she would be stoned, but disappointed, crushed in heart, he would put her away privately. “But when 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.” You see, Jesus’ life began with a great birth miracle; it ended with a great resurrection miracle. It was divine all the way. He was no mere man.

Virgin Born

Then our text says, "And she shall bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus; (The word literally means Savior. In the Hebrew it is the word Joshua; in the Greek it is the word Jesus) for it is he that shall save his people from their sins." That is why Christ came. Now all of this is come to pass, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, (Isaiah 7:14 is quoted) Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son. And they shall call his name Immanuel; which is, being interpreted, God with us." (Matt. 1:18-23). Seven hundred fifty years before Jesus was born Isaiah told a story with two meanings. He said to King Ahaz, "Before a virgin can bring forth a child God will deliver you from your enemies Syria and Israel." This happened. The story also had a second meaning--a virgin would bring forth a child that would deliver the whole human race from their sins. His name would be Immanuel, which means God with us.

God in the person of Jesus Christ came down and dwelt among men to show how to live, to teach us God's way and to redeem us from our sins. I believe in the virgin birth because it is taught in the scriptures. It is a glorious thing. It is no more difficult to believe than Christ's resurrection, or his ascension, or his miracles.

As we close this brief look at the genealogy of our Lord, I would mention three passages of scripture. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16). "Everyone therefore who shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven." (Matt. 10:32-33). Then finally, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matt. 11:28-30). Would you be a Christian? Would you confess Jesus as Lord? Will you come, now?