

## From Start to Finish

Christmas Eve – 12/24/21 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Matthew 1:18-25 Pastor Keith Besel

v.18, “**Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way.**”

### **Introduction**

✘ You heard me read it from start to finish a few minutes ago; Matthew’s account of the “way” that Jesus’ birth “took place”. It only takes eight verses, from start to finish.

➔ And frankly Matthew’s introductory sentence doesn’t promote an awful lot of excitement. If I were to say the same thing about any other birth it might sound like this, “Now the birth of Sally Mae took place in this way”.

➔ And a large percentage of those listening would probably check out at that point, thinking to themselves, “So what? Every birth happens basically the same ‘way’. Sure there are a few differences in detail, but the basic story goes like this: A man and a woman come together and conceive, 7 to 9 months later, the woman goes into labor and soon afterward you have a new baby!” See, I didn’t even need eight verses to get through it.

### **I. The “simple” story that Is Not so simple.**

✘ BUT, this simple story was not so ordinary; not so simple after all. And we figure that out in the very next sentence in verse 18. It says, “When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, **before** they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.”

➔ That is anything but normal or ordinary or simple. Somehow this baby was conceived outside of the ordinary Man-and-Woman activity. It came about “from the Holy Spirit”.

✘ Then in verse 19 we’re told that Joseph was not just an ordinary guy either; he was “a just man” who was “unwilling to put [Mary] to shame” (v.19). Especially back in their day, an ordinary man would first be concerned about what his fiancé’s pregnancy would mean for him – especially considering that he knew the two of them had not been intimately together at that point.

➔ A “normal” reaction would likely include doubt, accusations of infidelity, extreme hurt and worry about how this was going to make him look in front of his peers. But Joseph, while he might have struggled with some of those thoughts, was thinking first of Mary’s reputation instead of his own. He wanted to “do the right thing” according to his God and his culture – but in the quietest manner possible.

✘ And so, as he is on his own, “considering” the best way to deal with things, God shows up with a far better plan – God’s plan! An angel comes to him in a dream and sets the record straight. Verse 20, “Do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit”. I can only imagine the relief and surprise. Mary has **not** been unfaithful after all, in spite of what all the scientific evidence would indicate!

➔ This is such an important side lesson for us all to take away from this story from Scripture tonight – a story that we have heard so many times that we might miss its significance. When God is at work, caring for and saving His people, even though He is the one who created science and put the laws of nature into place in His six 24-hour days of Creation, He certainly

has the right and the ability to work outside of science and the standard operating procedures of nature whenever He desires to do so!

→ We have a lot of examples of this in the Bible and many of us have witnessed examples within our own lives as well.

⊗ But back to the story of Jesus' birth. This was anything but a "normal" birth, from start to finish! The angel gives Joseph news that is far more miraculous than any ultrasound technology we have today. In our day the soonest a couple can find out the gender of their baby is around 14 weeks.

→ But here, basically just as soon as Mary knows she is pregnant the Angel tells Joseph, "She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins". "Jesus" means "Yahweh saves", so right there Joseph is told that this baby is directly connected to the one and only God.

→ In fact, He's told that this baby is coming to fulfill God's prophecy that He would send a Savior named "Immanuel" which means "God with us". You know, even though I've tried many times, I still can't fully wrap my mind around what this must have been like for Joseph. "This baby that your fiancé is going to have Joseph is the very presence of the one and only God; the Creator of all things, in human flesh!" Forget science here, it just won't work! This is 100% a matter of faith. Either you take God at His word or you don't.

⊗ Around the world tonight, churches are full and ears open. And yet with all of the Christmas traditions like, decorated trees, beautiful music, carol upon carol, all the sights, sounds, tastes and smells that we've come to love; we can so easily end up missing the forest for the trees.

→ All of those "other" things that we've come to love about Christmas can be used by Satan himself to make us miss the BIG picture; the main picture; the only picture; the message that Christmas is and must always be about.

⊗ So here in God's Word tonight, Matthew's "simple" story tries to get us to step back and see the forest – to hear again the passages of Scripture that connect this "cute" little story of a baby's birth to God's entire history of bringing His gift of salvation to His people.

→ The prophet Balaam said that the Savior would come from among the descendants of Jacob, also called Israel. Isaiah the prophet tells us the who, when, and where of the Savior – especially that He would be a Son from the house of King David, whose father was Jesse. And we hear from the prophet Micah that this Savior will be born in Bethlehem.

⊗ Now in the New Testament we see the fulfillment of all those ancient promises coming about, as if God has a check list that He's marking off one by one. This Son of God is the actual Word of God in human flesh, born in Bethlehem, in the days of Caesar Augustus, to a virgin named Mary.

→ As He becomes a man, this promised Savior gives His life in exchange for our lives; in payment for our sin. "For God so loved the world," we're told in John 3:16, "that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

→ This is also a crucial part of the "simple story" of Christmas. You and I sin, we deserve to die and be condemned forever because of that sin. Yet God loves each of us, and all of us, so

much that He sent His Son in the flesh of a man, born in a manger, to grow up and suffer in our place so that we can now have a glorious life forever in God's loving presence! As hard as it is for us to grasp all of that, when we simply let go of our human pride and put our faith in the one true God, it's really very simple.

## II. He is born for you!

✘ You see, that's the main point about this holiday. Christmas is about God's gift to you – the flesh-and-blood, real-life gift of His own Son, born into this world as Jesus of Nazareth so that He could walk in our shoes, and live in our skin, and experience what we experience. And, because He is God, only He could redeem us from the curse of sin, death, and everlasting condemnation.

➔ Christmas happened on one particular night in a specific geographical location in this world's history, yes, but Christmas is about so much more than just this earthly existence friends! It is about God's gift of hope far beyond this life; hope for you! Hope for a never-ending, perfectly blissful existence with God, just as He intended it from the beginning of His creation.

✘ And no matter how far you or I have wandered; no matter how buried the Gospel message has become under all of those other priorities in your life; no matter how bittersweet tonight's celebration might be for you because of sad memories or current conflicts and struggles or all of the sorrows you've experienced this year, God's simple Good News of Jesus is still for you tonight!

➔ As the angels told the shepherds, a Savior has been born – the Savior for you! His name is Christ the Lord.

➔ And 33 years later, when He went to the cross, He took all the baggage and guilt of your life upon Himself and paid for it in full when He died for your sins. In exchange, He offers you His holiness and innocence, His righteousness and adoption as sons and daughters. He promises that all who believe and trust in Him will be raised from death just as He was and be brought into His presence in heaven.

✘ Is this too good to be true? Well, yes, if you take the Triune God out of the equation. But when you stop trying to control everything and just allow God to be God, then this gift of hope comes in the name and the work of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit as His full and free gift for you and for all people! It is the gift promised of old, given in Bethlehem, paid for on the cross, and unwrapped for you this night.

## Conclusion

✘ You see, this is why *Joy to the World* crowns this *Silent Night*! Not only because a Savior was born, but because the Savior is born into your heart by His Gospel for your salvation. And what's great is that He keeps on giving His Christmas gift all year round in the communion of His Church – here in this very place – until He fulfills His final promise and He comes again at the end of time.

➔ There you have it – from start to finish! A Savior was born, and your Savior is born for you in the story of God's love; in the story of Jesus' birth. Amen.