

The Jesus we never knew x01

VPBC Sunday 01 January, 2017. The birth of Jesus: **MATTHEW 1: 17 – 25.**

Introduction to the new theme.

One of my hopes for 2017 is that you and I will individually and together get to know Jesus better. That is the real Jesus of history and also personal experience.

This may mean that some of our misunderstandings and misconception about Jesus have to fall away. It will mean we take the New Testament especially the Gospels more seriously and hopefully that we do some new thinking and discovering too.

Now I've obviously to some of you adapted the title of Philip Yancey's (*) book of 1995 and his study guide 1997 (these will be useful background reading for any) but I'm concerned to encourage each of us to continue the journey of getting to know Jesus better. Some of us need to rediscover or discover for the first time the Jesus of the Gospels. (*) Born 1949, writer/ journalist at The Christian Post. Recently on social media he was one of the many who said he could not understand how evangelical Christians could support Donald Trump – if you see his Facebook page he endorsed neither candidate but raised concerns. (How do we select who to vote for in the UK: which candidates have the same values as Jesus and his Kingdom? Do we know?).

Are we willing to stand behind the real Jesus and are we representing him properly to our children, nieces, nephews and grandchildren? They and so many others who visit churches may have gathered some very strange ideas about Jesus: after all no one arrives on planet earth with a full understanding. If we are asking others to put their trust and base their lives on Jesus then it needs to be the real Jesus.

Today we begin with the historical accounts of Jesus' birth. We realise I hope that we need to separate these from many of the images that are pumped out on cards, religious art and films.

His birth ... laid in a manger?

Most historians believe [Jesus was a real man](#). To test the veracity of biblical claims, historians *typically compare Christian accounts of Jesus' life with historical ones recorded by Romans and Jews, most notably the historians Flavius Josephus and Cornelius Tacitus.*

And though a manger may or may not have figured prominently in the birth, scholars do agree that [Jesus was born](#) between 2 B.C. and 7 B.C. as part of the peasant class from a small village called Nazareth in Galilee. Historians also back the claim that Joseph, Jesus' father, was a carpenter, meaning Jesus would have gone into the family profession as well. (Livescience.com)

The Book of Matthew begins with a genealogy tracing the line from Abraham (to whom the promises were made), through David (who became the first king in the line of the covenant promises), to Jesus Christ. (14 generations: 7 + 7 the no of completion).

This genealogy shows that the family of Joseph was in the line of the kings--that Jesus was the “son” of David. Accordingly, Matthew will present Jesus as the promised King--the Messiah

The passage has a little introduction telling us that this is how the birth came about.

Could you recount the main facts quoted easily? The main clauses tell that Mary was pledged to be married, she was found to be pregnant, and Joseph was planning to divorce her, albeit in a kind way. But a revelation from God explained her condition, and so he completed the marriage agreement, but did not have sex with her until after the birth of Jesus. Mary’s own mouth declares she has not had sex with a man (virgin?).

Two things in the narrative give it all the meaning that it needs. The first is the quotation of what the angel said. Without that nothing in the story could be understood. And so a lot of attention will be focused on the revelation about the birth of Jesus. The second thing that is added to the story that is essential to the interpretation is the editorial explanation that Matthew makes in verses 22 and 23, telling us how this was all a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah. (Isaiah 7: LXX). No doubt Mary (and Joseph) understood this connection in due course, but perhaps not at the time of the event. The explanation is put in for the readers of the account that this supernatural birth is a fulfillment of a prophecy from God.

Mary is found to be with child (the verb is passive, and so the story is not emphasizing anything she did). Joseph is about to act, but is prevented from doing so by the Lord through a dream. Dreams are prevalent in Hebrew culture ...as a means of receiving messages from God (they may or may not be in ours but they may be in the culture of those we speak to).

Joseph’s actions are in response to the revelation from God. But it is God who is at work in the narrative: **God the Holy Spirit brings about the conception in Mary**, the angel from God reveals the mystery to Joseph and gives him the instructions, and all of this is a fulfillment of what God had prophesied hundreds of years earlier. (The Holy Spirit did **not** have sex with Mary as some Muslims (even though Quran says she was a virgin – they take offense that “Jesus is the Son of God”) and certainly some Mormons (Brigham Young- a physical impregnation) think the Bible teaches. Apparently even our own young people can seem to think that’s what it said too: the Holy Spirit did not have sex with Mary).

With the emphasis being on the work of God like this, the birth can only be seen as supernatural. What was conceived in Mary by God was not conceived with Mary. This is the tone that Matthew wants to set at the outset of his gospel--**there is nothing purely human about this Jesus**. The planned birth was of God, explained by God, in fulfillment of a prophecy by God. God planned it, God carried it out, and God made sure the main participants understood it (as much as they were capable of understanding).

The whole thing was supernatural. (Although of course the miracle is also that a human woman carried in her womb and gave birth to - the one whom John called the eternal word of God).

Joseph named him “Jesus.” This is a good Hebrew name very similar to the Old Testament name “Joshua.” The Hebrews loved to give names with meaning; and the meaning usually involved some word play on the name. The word play with this name is

on the verb “to save.” That verb in Hebrew is *yasha*’. Names like Hosea, Isaiah, and Joshua, to name but a few, are all based on this verb. The name “Jesus,” like the name “Joshua,” would mean “the Lord saves,” or shortened would mean “he saves.”

Therefore, the **significance of the name is then explained, “For he shall save his people from their sins.”** (Significance given to a common name).

So we begin with the birth of the historical Jesus: what we know and what we don’t know.

Will you explore and study with me to find: the Jesus we never knew – and get to know him better?