

Explore the Bible Series for December 24: Honor the Savior's birth with worship

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Honor the Savior's birth with worship

- Matthew 1:18-2:12

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Joseph, the husband of Mary, was a direct descendant of David. Jesus was not the physical son of Joseph. Mary conceived Jesus through the Holy Spirit. Christ is the "Anointed One."

We honor the Savior's birth by recognizing him as the King of Kings, who came to provide salvation for all sinners and by inviting him to be king in our lives. Jesus is the reason for the season.



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Heeding the angel's message (Matthew 1:18-25)

In Jewish culture, espousal was a covenant made about a year before the consummation of the marriage. It was during the one-year period of espousal that Mary was found to be pregnant. The fact that Mary was a virgin at this time is clearly implied by the phrase “before they came together” and by the righteous character of Joseph and his desire to divorce Mary when her pregnancy became known (v. 19).

Joseph wanted to divorce Mary on the grounds of infidelity. Joseph could have made the divorce a public matter, or he could have gone through a private ceremony before two witnesses. Being a gracious and “just man,” Joseph decided to keep it private.

“Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel” is a quotation from Isaiah 7:14. In this verse, the prophet Isaiah consoles King Ahaz of Judah. A coalition of two kings was opposing Ahaz. Isaiah tells Ahaz the plans of his enemies would not succeed. As a sign to Ahaz, a son would be born of a woman, and before that boy reached the age where he could tell right from wrong, the two kings would no longer be a threat to Ahaz.

Matthew makes it clear that Isaiah's words find their ultimate fulfillment in the virgin birth of Jesus, a sign to people of all ages that God was with

them.

Joseph “knew her not” is a Hebrew idiom for cohabitation and fatherhood (Genesis 4:1, 17, 25). He did not know Mary physically until after she gave birth to Jesus. The clear implication of verse 25 is that Mary was a virgin only until the birth of Jesus. The brothers and sisters of Jesus were younger siblings born to Joseph and Mary after Jesus’ birth (Matthew 13:55-56).

Seeking the King (Matthew 2:1-8)

The events of chapter 2 probably took place some months after Jesus’ birth. “Herod the king” is Herod the Great, who reigned over Palestine from 37 B.C. until his death in 4 B.C. Herod’s reign was marked by cruelty and bloodshed. The “wise men” were a priestly hereditary caste who uttered prophecies, explained omens, interpreted dreams and practiced divination (Daniel 2:2, 48; 4:9).

The words “born King of the Jews” would have struck terror and fury into the heart of Herod. “His star in the east” may refer to a star supernaturally introduced into the heavens. The star reappeared to guide the wise men to Christ (Matthew 2:9).

The first mention of the Jewish council—“chief priests”—reveals the Jewish leaders were alerted early to the coming of the Messiah. Their quick recital of Micah 5:2 showed their prophetic astuteness about the messianic prophecies (Matthew 2:6).

Honoring the Savior (Matthew 2:9-12)

The wise men undoubtedly would have been discouraged by their failure to find the King in Jerusalem among the leaders. The reappearance of the star

must have brought great joy and encouragement to them.

“Gold” symbolized royalty; “frankincense” was a fragrance; and “myrrh” was the ointment of death. “Being warned of God in a dream” underscores the supernatural character of Christ’s advent. In a revelatory dream the angel told the wise men they should not return to Herod, and they departed for their own country another way.

Discussion question

- How can we best honor the birth of Christ?

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