

BaptistWay Bible Series for December 4: The birth of Jesus the Messiah

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Success in any endeavor depends greatly upon the beginning. Playing a game, building a house, cooking a meal. A good beginning encourages success. It's no different in life. A good start in life sets the stage for future success.

The birth of a child is a significant occasion. Preparations must be made. Parents hope and pray all will go according to plan. The birth of Jesus went according to plan. God worked in a significant way in the incarnation. God the Son became human. That had been God's plan all along as evidenced by Jesus' unique birth and by the circumstances surrounding his birth. The birth of Jesus gives credibility to the fact that Jesus is worthy to be followed.

Predictions

The birth of Jesus Christ, the messiah, had been predicted in numerous passages in the Old Testament. The Gospel of Matthew, in the birth narrative of Jesus, refers to Isaiah 7:14, Micah 5:2, Hosea 11:1 and Jeremiah 31:15. These prophetic predictions were made 600 to 700 years before the birth of Jesus.

Not only was the birth of Jesus predicted centuries before the fact, but it also was predicted just prior to his birth. Joseph discovered his betrothed Mary was with child. He evidently believed a moral lapse on her part had been the cause, so as a righteous man, he decided to divorce her quietly and without fanfare.

An angel came to Joseph in a dream with a divine message and prediction. He was to proceed with his original plan to take Mary as his wife. Her pregnancy was of God, just the opposite of an immoral action. In addition, Mary was going to give birth to a son, and Joseph was to name him Jesus. The name Jesus is understood to mean "God saves," and the angel explained the boy would save his people from their sins.

Miraculous birth

The birth of Jesus certainly was spectacular. Being born of a virgin is a miracle that stretches belief. One does not have to search long or far to find scholars who deny this event, but that says more about those scholars' preconceived ideas than the ways God can and does work in the world.

The claim of virgin birth calls attention to the fact a divinely spectacular event has taken place. This birth was different, because the newborn child was and is unique. No other person before or since has ever lived.

The incarnation means God became human and lived on this earth as a human (John 1:14). The name Immanuel meaning "God with us" was fulfilled in the person Jesus Christ. What a profound occurrence, God dwelling with humanity, God among us.

Recognition by others

Of course, Joseph and Mary recognized the unique birth of Jesus, but others also saw something different and significant in the birth. The magi, ancient astronomers, saw a star that defied their understanding of celestial events. In that star, they saw an indication something divine was taking place.

Somehow, the magi knew the star was indicating the birth of a special child who was to be the king of the Jews. They came from the east searching for the child in order to worship him. Only God is worthy of worship, so the magi recognized the deity of Jesus Christ right from his beginning.

King Herod also seemed to know something significant happened with the birth of Jesus. The magi met with him seeking direction to the birthplace of the king of the Jews. Herod was jealous of anyone who might even appear as a rival to his power, so he assisted the magi in finding Jesus. In reality, he wanted the magi to find the exact location of Jesus so he could execute the baby born king of the Jews.

Protection provided

Herod was not successful in his desire to find Jesus and kill him despite his diabolical attempts. Joseph took Mary and Jesus to Egypt for safety from the evil king. When Herod died, an angel told Joseph to return to Israel, but Joseph did not return to Judea. Herod's son, Archelaus, was ruling over that area, and his misrule motivated Joseph to withdraw to Galilee.

The protection of Joseph, Mary and Jesus from King Herod and then Archelaus was not miraculous in the sense that it was supernatural. Still, God was with this family, Immanuel in action, and protected them in ordinary ways. Faith is needed to see God work in these mundane events to realize how extraordinary they are.

Conclusion

The birth of Jesus Christ was unique. That is a simple statement pregnant with meaning. God planned from the beginning to save humanity by sending his Son into the world. That plan was predicted centuries before it took place. Only Jesus fulfilled all of the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. Jesus' birth also fulfilled the angelic prediction given to Joseph that Mary would have a son.

Jesus' virgin birth points to the fact that God was acting in a unique way. God came to dwell among us, Immanuel. Others recognized the uniqueness of the birth and what God was doing. They sought Jesus-the magi for worship and adoration, King Herod for destruction.

Finally, God provided protection for Joseph, Mary and Jesus. Although the protection was ordinary in the way it was accomplished, God's involvement in this work should not be missed.

Giving these facts of a unique birth, Matthew presents Jesus as the Lord and Savior for all to follow. Being a disciple of Jesus is a worthy life calling.