

The Birth of Jesus Christ

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the 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 Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife.

-Matt.1:18-24

The Apostle Paul writes, "great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh ... "(I Tim. 3:16) This manifestation is well described in the beginning of this text. Matthew writes, "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise"

This manifestation is remarkable in more ways than one. First of all, it was not, nor ever will be to us that read of it, pleasant to the natural mind. First, the unbelieving Jews, who still await their Messiah, expected Him to come in royal pomp to smite their enemies. To have Him come in the manner described was a far cry from their expectations.

But it was not God's will that He come as a "New Caesar." Instead, Jesus needed to comply with and fulfill the requirements for redemption which God had established, including natural birth. Likewise, His mother, the Virgin Mary, had to endure the punishment pronounced to Eve as a result of the fall, painful childbirth. Jesus, too, as a newborn babe, needed to fulfill the painful eighth day ritual of circumcision, and to keep the entire law of Moses throughout His life. Thus, Jesus could not come the first time in a manner which even we would have preferred. In the same manner, our natural mind has trouble coping with His shameful death on the cross, in which a perfect and innocent life had to be forfeited in a manner reserved for the grossest criminals.

This Christmas narrative also provides a glimpse of the faith of Joseph. Undoubtedly, he was shocked to find Mary "with child," and "was minded to put her away privily." God's children have the same mind. They do not condone premarital relations, let alone "look through the fingers" at such a life style. We can imagine Joseph's anxiety. That Joseph was justified in his intentions becomes obvious when God sends His angel to Joseph to explain this exceptional phenomenon.

When Jesus comes the second time, He will come in His glory, not in poverty, not lowly, not to suffer and redeem, but to claim His own. Then He will gather His small flock, those who have believed and kept His teachings. "These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God." (Rev. 14:4-5)

Such were Joseph and Mary. Such are we who today follow the Lord Jesus in life, suffering, and doctrine. The grace of God, which has appeared to all men, teaches us to live soberly, righteously, and

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godly in this present world. (Tit. 2:12) This same grace uplifts us to believe all our sins forgiven in Jesus' name and blood.

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