

God had determined that the eternal Son would enter humanity and become man. We might ask, what is the best method by which He might attain this?

He could not merely take possession of an existing human being. That would result in nothing more than an indwelling. Nor could He simply appear among men as one of them without a natural human origin. In such a case His true humanity could never be established, nor His rightful relation to the people of the earth. It is thus essential that He enter humanity as all others do. In this way there could be no question of the genuineness of His humanity or the permanency of it. (see Chafer's Systematic Theology, V, 47, 48). However, if Jesus were to come by means of the union of two human parents it would be hard to conceive of how He could be fully God, since His origin would be like ours in every way.

The divine answer to this problem is that the Holy Spirit came upon Mary and through her Jesus possessed complete humanity. He is the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Judah, and the heir of the David's throne. His genealogy traces his human origin back to Abraham (Matt 1) and Adam (Lk. 3).

As a descendent of Abraham, He could fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant, specifically that through Abraham's seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed. As one in the line of David He could fulfill the Davidic Covenant and be the rightful heir of the Davidic throne. His perfect kinship with mankind makes Him mankind's perfect mediator and redeemer.

At the same time the Son retained His deity. As Colossians 1:19 says, "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell". Colossians 2:9 also says, "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form." In other words, the person of Christ was both God and man. The two natures, that of God and that of man, were united in the one person. Christ is truly man; He is truly God. Yet He is not two persons, but one. We can never fully understand this, but this passage tells us the means by which it was accomplished.

Lastly, He was unsullied by sin. Luke 1:35 says that due to the virgin birth "the child to be born will be called holy." Hebrews 2:17 says, "*He had to be made like His brethren in all things.*" But then 4:15 adds, "*yet without sin.*" In other words, the virgin conception broke the line of descent from Adam (in part) so that Christ did not inherit Adam's sin. Because of this Jesus could be the spotless Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

1:18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

1:19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

In 1:1-16 Joseph has been shown to be "the son of David", the heir to the royal dynasty, but in verse 16 Matthew abandoned his normal formula and indicated that Jesus was the son of Mary, not of Joseph. It reads: "**and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.**" What then is the relevance of this dynastic list to Jesus if he is not genetically related to Joseph? Furthermore, if Mary is the mother who is the father?

Verse 18-25 will show how Jesus was conceived and in what sense Joseph was His father.

The **“birth of Jesus”** is literally “the origin of Jesus”. The repetition of the word “origin” (γένεσις - translated as “birth” here and “genealogy” in Matt. 1:1) links the theme of Messiah’s origin to 1:1-17.

Mary had been betrothed to Joseph. Betrothal was a pledge to be married. It was arranged by the parents and typically took place when their daughter was about twelve years old. The husband was usually about eighteen and was able to support a family. The actual marriage took place a year later when the husband ceremoniously took his bride home (Osborne, 75). This is what verse 24 means when it says Joseph **“took his wife.”**

A betrothal was legally binding and could only be dissolved by divorce or death. If the husband (he was considered as such) died, the engaged woman would be considered a widow. Infidelity during the engagement period was considered to be adultery.

In many cultures, as in the Hebrew culture at that time, husbands and wives learned to love each other after marriage rather than before. The wedding was often the first time they met.

“Before they came together” emphasizes that Mary’s pregnancy was before they were formally married and had consummated the marriage (Carson, 74).

Mary **“was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.”** In Greek, **from the Holy Spirit** (ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου) indicates that the Holy Spirit was the source (ἐκ), or the creative agent, of the conception. This makes it absolutely clear that Mary had not sinned.

The mechanics of how Mary could become pregnant is not explained. In Luke 1:35 the angelic announcement of the virgin conception is given to Mary. There the angel simply tells Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.” (ESV)

The expressions Luke uses demonstrate a close continuity to the OT. Three connections can be seen:

1. In the OT the Holy Spirit has a divinely active creative function; He is the agent in the old creation (Gen. 1:2; Ezek. 37:14; Psa.104:30; Isa. 32:15). Here, He works as the agent of the new creation. The Spirit who creates existence out of non-existence will cause Mary to become pregnant with new life. Just as God can create man from dust so He can create life in a womb.

One cannot help but to think of Psalm 139:

13 For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb.

14 I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well.

15 My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth;

16 Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them.

2. The idea of the Holy Spirit coming upon individuals is also found in the OT. The Holy Spirit often “came upon” people enabling them to accomplish God’s purposes for them.

3. To “overshadow” (ἐπισκιάζω) means to cover, and was used of the presence of God’s glory resting on, or overshadowing, the tabernacle in the cloud. The closest OT conceptual reference is probably Exodus 40:35 which says, “And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.” As Edwards says, “God infused the tabernacle with the presence of His glory. In the tabernacle, God chose to materialize and localize Himself with a particular time and space. . . The divine cloud that established His presence in a place now does so in a *person*. The divine overshadowing of the earthly tabernacle was a *foreshadowing* of the living tabernacle, the incarnation” (Edwards, 49).

It is also used metaphorically of God’s protective hovering over His people (Ps. 91:4 “He will cover you with His pinions”; 140:7).

In the NT the same word was used of the cloud at the transfiguration (Matt. 17:5; Mk. 9:7; Lk. 9:34). Matthew 17:2 says that Jesus was transfigured before them and “His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.” Then in 17:5, “a bright cloud *overshadowed* (ἐπεσκίασεν) them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him’”.

In sum, the virgin conception was *not* an act of God working through natural processes, but a new, creative act of supernatural power (Marshall, 73).

The Holy Spirit functioned in a manner that maintained the sinlessness of the one who was to be born: “the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy- the Son of God” (ESV). Jesus was the only person created directly by the hand of God besides Adam (see Luke’s genealogy ends with “the son of Adam, the son of God” - Bock, 123).

“**Joseph . . . resolved to divorce her quietly.**” Engagement was almost as binding as marriage, and infidelity during betrothal made divorce almost obligatory. Joseph was a righteous man (a man who kept the law), so he could not in good conscience continue with his plans to marry Mary who was thought to have been unfaithful. Nevertheless, he was also kind and concerned about Mary, so he decided not to put her to public shame.

Had Joseph desired to carry out the full extent of the law, Mary would be made suspectable to being stoned (Deut. 22:23-24; Lev. 20:10). But the law also permitted a private divorce before two witnesses (Carson, 74). This would be the least hurtful to Mary, and almost certainly what Joseph had in mind.

1:20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

1:21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

Once Joseph concluded how to solve this problem (“considered” is an aorist tense participle suggesting that he had made up his mind what to do – France, 52) God intervened by sending an angel to Joseph in a dream (angelic appearances occur often in the first chapters in Matthew – Matt. 1:20; 2:2, 13, 19, 22).

The angel addressed Joseph as the “**son of** (i.e. descendant of) **David**” emphasizing once more his royal messianic lineage and tying this passage to the preceding genealogy.

First, Joseph was told not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife and that the conception was not a result of fornication, but a supernatural act of God. The conception was from the Holy Spirit (ἐκ ἁγίου Πνεύματος ἐστίν; see 1:18 above).

Secondly, Joseph was told, **“You shall call his name Jesus”**. Jesus means “Yahweh saves” (see notes on 1:1). In Luke 1:31 Mary was also told to call His name Jesus. However, by Joseph giving the child the name he was legally making Jesus his child (cf. Isa. 43:1 – “I have called you by name, you are mine”) and hence a “son of David”.

The mission of this child is reflected in the very name Joseph is commanded to give Him; **for He will save his people from their sins** (1:21). The verb **“save”** was used with a wide range of meaning; it referred to deliverance from physical danger (Matt. 8:25; 14:30), from disease (Matt. 9:21-22), from death (Matt. 24:22; 27:40, 42, 49), and from the eternal judgment of God (Matt. 9:25; 10:22; 24:13). Salvation in Christ is comprehensive, for Jesus will save us from all of these things. However, the emphasis here is on deliverance from the penalty of sin; Jesus will save us from the wrath of God.

The Messiah was expected to save His people [the Jews] from the oppression of the Gentile nations, but there was no expectation that He would save His people from their sins by dying for them (Carson, 76). “This verse therefore orients the reader to the fundamental purpose of Jesus’ coming and the essential nature of the reign He inaugurates as king Messiah, heir of David’s throne” (Carson, 76).

1:22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

1:23 “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).

Although most English versions conclude the angel’s words at verse 21, there is good reason to think that they continue to “Immanuel” at the end of verse 23 (see Carson, 76-77 for reasons). If so, the angel is telling Joseph that Mary’s virgin conception was necessary to fulfill the OT prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 (verse 23). Matthew then added “which means, God with us” in case any gentile readers did not understand the meaning or significance of the title “Immanuel.”

This is the first of a number of Old Testament references Matthew uses to show that Jesus fulfills the Old Testament (2:6, 15, 18, 23). In the entire Gospel there are twelve such fulfillment formulas, and more than fifty Old Testament quotations. “Matthew builds almost every paragraph following the genealogy and preceding the Sermon on the Mount around at least one text of Scripture. He thus invites us to read Jesus in light of Scripture and Scripture in light of Jesus -- to recognize that the person and work of Jesus are central to Scripture’s character” (IVPNTC).

Many pages of ink have been spilled over the meaning of “virgin” in Isaiah 7:14. The Hebrew word for virgin (עַלְמָה -’almâ) occurs seven times in the Old Testament. It means a young woman of marriageable age, normally a virgin (Gen. 24:43). Nevertheless, the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament made about 150 BC) translated Isaiah 7:14 with the same word used in Matthew 1:23, a word that more specifically means “virgin” (παρθένος Feinberg, MSJ 22c, 15; Osborne, 78). As Machan says, “The question, we think, cannot be settled merely by a consideration of the meaning of the Hebrew word ‘almâ (עַלְמָה). It has been urged, indeed, on the one hand that the Hebrew language has a perfectly unmistakable word for ‘virgin,’ betûlâ (בְּתוּלָה), and that if ‘virgin’ had been meant that word would have been used. But as a matter of fact, there is no place among the seven occurrences of ‘almâ (עַלְמָה) in the

Old Testament where the word is clearly used of a woman who was not a virgin. It may readily be admitted that 'almâ (עַלְמָה) does not actually indicate virginity, as does betûlâ (בְּתוּלָה); it means rather 'a young woman of marriageable age.' But on the other hand one may well doubt, in view of the usage, whether it was a natural word to use of anyone who was not in point of fact a virgin" (Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, 288). In other words, though it is true that 'almâ (עַלְמָה) is not the common word for virgin, its employment always denotes a virgin.

Regardless of the semantic range of the Hebrew word "virgin" (עַלְמָה -'almâ), the New Testament gives a divine interpretation of the meaning of Isaiah 7:14 in relationship to Christ; Matthew, whose gospel is inspired by God, saw Isaiah 7:14 as a prediction of a woman who has not had sexual relations with a man.

Isaiah 7-11 is sometimes called *The Book of Immanuel* because this section of Isaiah introduces a child who is said to be born of a virgin and is called Immanuel in Isaiah 7:14. He is then spoken of again in Isaiah 8:8. There He is the ultimate owner of the land of Judah, the one in whom Judah's ultimate hopes reside. Although the child born in Isaiah 9:6-7 is not called Immanuel, it seems clear enough that this is the same child, only this time He is called Mighty God who rules on the throne of David. Lastly, in Isaiah 11 He is called a shoot from the stump of Jesse (a descendant of Jesse, the father of King David) upon whom the Spirit of the Lord would rest (Isa. 11:1-2). This is also a well-known messianic passage. Perhaps His relationship to Jesse is mentioned, instead of His relationship to David, because He is viewed as a new David. In sum, in *The Book of Immanuel* (Isa. 7-11) the prophet reveals the Messiah about to be born (7:14), Messiah born (9:5), and Messiah reigning (11:1-5). When we put all these verses together, Immanuel emerges as a messianic figure who will come as a child in the line of David and who will also be God (Isa. 9:6). In short, He will be "God with us" who will live as one of us. Matthew and Luke tell us how this has come to pass.

Both Isaiah and Matthew also show Jesus to be the ruler in the Davidic line that had been prophesied.

No one ruled as king in the Davidic dynasty between the time that the nation was conquered by Babylon and the coming of Christ. It was no mistake that Jesus' genealogy in Matthew begins by showing that He is of the line of David for one of Matthew's chief aims is to show that Jesus is the great Davidic king who inherits the disestablished dynasty. He is the heir to the messianic promises and the one who will bring blessings to the nations. In fact, this theme of kingship brackets the whole Gospel of Matthew: Matthew 1:1 begins with "The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David", and Matthew 28:18 ends with Jesus saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."

The same Immanuel/messianic-king theme is closely tied to Matthew 4:15-16. At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, Matthew quotes the Immanuel prophecy of Isaiah (Isaiah 9:1-2): "the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the gentiles-- the people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light, and those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, upon them a light dawned." In the Book of Isaiah this is followed by 9:6-7 that speaks of the child who would sit on the throne of David forever. In Matthew, this is followed by Jesus' announcement of the kingdom (Matt. 4:17): "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Lastly, the coming of Immanuel is both a fulfilment and a precursor of the glorious day when God will dwell among men. Isaiah 60:19-22 predicts a great future day when God will dwell with man in all His fullness. It says, "No longer will you have the sun for light by day, nor for brightness will the moon give

you light; but you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, and your God for your glory. Your sun will no longer set, nor will your moon wane; for you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, and the days of your mourning will be over. Then all your people will be righteous; they will possess the land forever, the branch of My planting, the work of My hands, that I may be glorified... I, the LORD, will hasten it in its time." Matthew's mention of Jesus as "Immanuel" ("God with us") points to the embodiment of God in human flesh, the divine presence among His people. Although Jesus' deity was veiled in flesh, God was dwelling among men in Him.

1:24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife,

1:25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Joseph's obedience is no less remarkable than Mary's. Once he understood the will of God, he did it without complaint or question. Furthermore, to once again emphasize that Mary did not get pregnant by Joseph, Matthew adds that he did not have any sexual relations with her (he **knew her not**) until after Jesus was born. "**Until**" naturally suggests that after Jesus was born, they had normal relations with each other.