

Child Of Promise

Long Beach Alliance Church • December 17th, 2006 • Pastor Chris Lankford

**BUT AS FOR YOU, BETHLEHEM
EPHRATHAH, TOO LITTLE TO BE AMONG
THE CLANS OF JUDAH, FROM YOU ONE
WILL GO FORTH FOR ME TO BE RULER IN
ISRAEL. HIS GOINGS FORTH ARE FROM
LONG AGO, FROM THE DAYS OF ETERNITY.**

~MICAH 5:2 (NASB)

**FOR A CHILD WILL BE BORN TO US, A
SON WILL BE GIVEN TO US; AND THE
GOVERNMENT WILL REST ON HIS
SHOULDERS; AND HIS NAME WILL BE
CALLED WONDERFUL COUNSELOR,
MIGHTY GOD, ETERNAL FATHER,
PRINCE OF PEACE.**

~ISAIAH 9:6 (NASB)

1) The Ancient Promise Of A Messiah

- A) The only hope for sinners is God's promise of a Messiah who would save the world (Genesis 3:15) and be a blessing to all of mankind (12:1-3, 17:1-8).

- B) God's initiation of this promise would be revealed when a "virgin maiden*" would have a son whose name would be "God with us" (Immanuel ~ Isaiah 7:14).

- C) The virgin birth of the Messiah (Matthew 1:18, 24-25; Luke 1:26-35) would occur in the "little town of Bethlehem" (Micah 5:2, cf. Matthew 2:1, John 7:42).
- D) Bethlehem was where King David's family was from, the town of the royal-line (1st Samuel 17:12). Jesus was to be of the house of David (Jeremiah 23:5, Luke 3:23-38).
- E) Further, Jesus was to be of the line of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob & Judah (Genesis 22:18, 21:12, 35:10-12, 49:10; Numbers 24:17, Micah 5:2) which were all fulfilled in Christ (Matthew 1:1-16; Luke 3:23-38).

* The Hebrew word which is translated "virgin" or "young maiden" (al-mah/עַלְמָה) is more ambiguous than the clearer and completely unambiguous word for "virgin" (bethula/בְּתוּלָה) in Hebrew. This has led some to conclude that translators have inappropriately inserted the word "virgin" (*isogesis*, reading something "into" the text) in the Isaiah 7:14 passage, rather than simply leaving the word as "maiden," as Isaiah intended.

This perspective has even grabbed the attention of pop culture, as was seen in a recent television episode of "Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip" (ABC), where one character states, "the whole virgin birth thing is a farce. She was never supposed to be a virgin. The word translated "virgin" was actually "young maiden." Mary wasn't a virgin, and she didn't have to be. Jesus wasn't born from a virgin."

In a "closer to home" example, Rob Bell, the Christian author of *Velvet Elvis* and the impetus behind the 'Nooma' video series (hugely popular author and speaker), asks the question, "What if tomorrow someone digs up definitive proof that Jesus had a real, earthly, biological father named Larry, and archaeologists find Larry's tomb and do DNA samples and prove beyond a doubt that the virgin birth was really just a bit of mythologizing the Gospel writers threw in to appeal to the followers of the Mithra and Dionysian religious cults that were hugely popular at the time of Jesus, whose gods had virgin births? But what if as you study the origin of the word "virgin," you discover that the word "virgin" in the gospel of Matthew actually comes from the book of Isaiah, and then you find out that in the Hebrew language at that time, the word "virgin" could mean several things. And what if you discover that in the first century being "born of a virgin" also referred to a child whose mother became pregnant the first time she had intercourse? Could a person

2) The Promise Of God In The Flesh

- A) The Messiah was to be God in the flesh (Genesis 3:15, Psalm 2:7), clearly fulfilled by Jesus Christ (John 1:1, 14, 23, 34; Matthew 3:17).
- B) Jesus Christ came to reveal God to mankind (Hebrews 12:1-3; Matthew 11:27) by seeking and saving lost people (Luke 19:10). To know Jesus is to know God (John 10:30). To know God is to obtain eternal life (John 17:3).
- C) Receiving the gift of God (Jesus) is done by trust/faith (Ephesians 2:8-9) in Christ through the humble confession of sin (1st John 1:9), and complete trust in God for forgiveness (Colossians 1:13-14) and eternal life (Romans 6:22-23).

believe all of this and still love God? Could a person still be a Christian? Or does our belief all just fall apart?" (Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, pg. 26).

What can be said to compelling secular and Christian voices who see the "virgin" birth as mythology and see those who believe in the virgin birth as "faithfully misdirected?"

I would add the following to the conversation... The word in question (al-mah/מַהֲמָה) is never used of a married woman in the Old Testament. Rather, the word itself carries with it the clear idea that the woman was unmarried, and thus, was a virgin. The two ideas are inseparable in the biblical mind-set. Our Western mind-set "reads into" (isogesis) our own cultural values (that one need not be a virgin in order to be a young maiden) to the words of Isaiah. However, this would be an enormous cultural mistake. The fact is, the Isaiah passage is left ambiguous because the focus of the passage is not on the virgin birth, but rather military kings with whom Ahaz was to be focused (cf. Isaiah 7:10-16). As is true whenever we translate and interpret Scripture, the context of the passage is our number one guide, not word usage.

All of this to say, I affirm the usage of "virgin" in Isaiah 7:14 for both contextual and cultural reasons. The promise of "God with us" would come from a virgin birth, a dual miracle which would be unmistakable in its fulfillment. That Mary was the "virgin" of Isaiah (Matthew 1:18, 24-25; Luke 1:26-35) is abundantly clear. The fulfilled prophecy further clarifies that Jesus Christ's prophesied birth affirms He is 'God with us!'

Summarized from various sources already noted. I am especially indebted to *The Book of Isaiah, 1-39*, by John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (NICOT), pages 209-211.

Advent Scripture Reading

What does the birth of Jesus Christ mean for mankind? Let's read about the birth and connect with the story of God coming in the flesh.

- **Read Matthew 1:18-25**
- **Read Luke 2:1-20**

There were a faithful remnant of people who were awaiting Christ's birth. These were people who lived in the anticipation of the light coming into the world -- the same way we are to live today in anticipation of Christ's Second Coming. Learn from their faithful example.

- **Read Luke 2:21-38**

There were also people who surrounded the birth of Jesus Christ, those who were on the periphery. What were their reactions and how do these parallel modern reactions to Jesus Christ?

- **Read Matthew 2:1-23**

There is something profound in the coming of Christ as God in the flesh. Different writers catch different aspects of Jesus and give us an amazing view. Let's read it together and learn of our great Messiah!

- **Read John 1:1-34**
- **Read Hebrews 1:1-13**
- **Read Philippians 2:5-13**

Advent Reading #3 ~ Martin Luther

Martin Luther (1483-1546) was a German monk and priest who later in his life became a highly influential church reformer and theologian. Luther is most remembered for writing his "95 Theses" in objection to the sale of indulgences by the Roman Catholic Church and his appeal for broad reform within the papacy. On October 31st, 1517, Luther tacked his '95 Theses' on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenburg, and the fire of reform was lit forever.

This moment, more than most others, lit the fire of the Protestant Reformation. Luther was most motivated by his own desperate study of God's Word where he found the doctrine of "justification by faith alone" to be foundationally formative for his life of following Jesus. Luther was excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church at the Diet of Worms (a "diet" is a meeting, and Worms is a town) where he was asked to recant his revolutionary ideas, to which he responded, "Unless I shall be convinced by the testimonies of the Scriptures or by clear reason (I will not accept the authority of the papacy or councils, as they have contradicted one another) my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not make any retraction, since it is neither safe nor honorable to act against conscience. God help me. Amen."

His most famous books include *The Bondage of the Will*, *95 Theses*, and several commentaries and catechisms. Luther also translated the Bible into German in the 1520 - 1530's, to make it more accessible for the common man. His "Luther's Bible" was an influential predecessor to the legendary 1611 King James Version of the Bible.

Luther died from the complications of a stroke on February 18th, 1546. He was buried in the Castle Church of Wittenburg, directly beneath the pulpit.

To You Christ Is Born

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Luke 2:10-11

THE GOSPEL TEACHES THAT Christ was born, and that he died and suffered everything on our behalf, as is here declared by the angel. In these words you clearly see that he is born for us.

He does not simply say, Chris is born, but to you he is born. Neither does he say, I bring glad tidings, but to you I bring glad tidings of great joy. Furthermore, this joy was not to remain in Christ, but it shall be to all the

people. This faith no condemned or wicked man has, nor can he have it. Christ has a pure, innocent, and holy birth. Man has an unclean, sinful, condemned birth; as David says (Psalms 51:5): "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." Nothing can help this unholy birth except the pure birth of Christ. For this purpose Christ willed to be born, that through him we might be born anew.

O, this is the great joy of which the angel speaks. This is the comfort and exceeding goodness of God that, if anyone believes this, he can boast of the treasure that Mary is his rightful mother, Christ his brother, and God his father. For these things actually occurred and are true, but we must believe. This is the principal thing and the principal treasure in every Gospel. Christ must above all things become our own and we become his. This is what is meant by Isaiah 9:6: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given." To you is born and given this child.

Therefore see to it that you do not treat the Gospel only as history, for that is only transient; neither regard it only as an example, for it is of no value without faith. Rather, see to it that you make this birth your own and that Christ be born in you. This will be the case if you believe, then you will repose in the lap of the virgin Mary and be her dear child. But you must exercise this faith and pray while you live; you cannot establish it too firmly. This is our foundation and inheritance, upon which good works must be built.

The Gospel does not merely teach about the history of Christ. No, it enables all who believe it to receive it as their own, which is the way the Gospel operates. Of what benefit would it be to me if Christ had been born a thousand times, and it would daily be sung into my ears in a most lovely manner, if I were never to hear that he was born for me and was to be my very own? If the voice gives forth this pleasant sound, even if it be a homely phrase, my hart listens with joy, for it is a lovely sound which penetrates the soul.

If Christ has indeed become your own, and you have by such faith been cleansed through him and have received your inheritance without any personal merit, it follows that you will do good works by doing to your neighbor as Christ has done to you. Here good works are their own teacher. What are the good works of Christ? Is it not true that they are good because they have been done for your benefit, for God's sake, who commanded him to do the works in your behalf? In this then Christ was obedient to the Father, in that he loved and served us.

Therefore since you have received enough and become rich, you have no other commandment than to serve Christ and render obedience to him. Direct your works that they may be of benefit to your neighbor, just as the

works of Christ are of benefit to you. For this reason Jesus said at the Last Supper: "This is my commandment, that you love one another; even as I have loved you." Here it is seen that he loved us and did everything for our benefit, in order that we may do the same, not to him for he needs it not, but to our neighbor. This is his commandment, and this is our obedience. Christ helps us, so we in return help our neighbor, and all have enough.

Notice then how far off those are who expend their energies uniting good works with stone. Of what benefit is it to your neighbor if you build a church entirely out of gold? Of what benefit to him is the frequent ringing of great church bells? Of what benefit to him is the glitter and the ceremonies in the churches, the clergy's robes, the sanctuary? Of what benefit to him are the many candles or the singing of vigils and liturgies? Do you think that God wants to be served with the sound of bells, the smoke of candles and such fancies? He has commanded none of these, but if you see your neighbor going astray, sinning, or suffering in body or soul, you are to leave every thing else and at once help him in every way in your power and if you can do no more, help him with words of comfort and prayer. Thus has Christ done to you and given you an example for you to follow.

Here Jesus does what he says: "And the poor have good tidings preached to them," and "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 11:5; 5:8). Here are no learned, no rich, no mighty ones, for such people do not as a rule accept the Gospel. The Gospel is a heavenly treasure, which will not tolerate any other treasure, and will not agree with any earthly guest in the heart. Therefore whoever loves the one must let go the other, as Christ says, "You cannot serve God and mammon" (Mt. 6:24).

This is shown by the shepherds in that they were in the field, under the canopy of heaven, and not in houses, showing that they do not hold fast and cling to temporal things. And besides being in the fields by night, they are despised by and unknown to the world which sleeps in the night, and by day delights so to walk that it may be noticed; but the poor shepherds go about their work at night. They represent all the lowly who live on earth, often despised and unnoticed but dwelling under the protection of heaven; they eagerly desire the Gospel.

That there were shepherds means that no one is to hear the Gospel for himself alone, but every one is to tell it to others who are not acquainted with it. For he who believes for himself has enough and should endeavor to bring others to such faith and knowledge, so that one may be a shepherd of the other, to wait upon and lead him into the pasture of the Gospel in this world, during the nighttime of this earthly life. At first the shepherds were sore afraid because of the angel; for human nature is shocked when it first hears in

the Gospel that all our works are nothing and are condemned before God, for it does not easily give up its prejudices and presumptions.

Therefore let us beware of all teaching that does not set forth Christ. What more would you know? What more do you need, if indeed you know Christ, as above set forth, if you walk by faith in God, and by love to your neighbor, doing to him as Christ has done to you. This is indeed the whole Scripture in its briefest form: that no more words or books are necessary, but only life and action.

Let everyone examine himself in the light of the Gospel and see how far he is from Christ, and what is the character of his faith and love. There are many who are enkindled with dreamy devotion, and when they hear of the poverty of Christ, they are almost angry with the citizens of Bethlehem. They denounce their blindness and ingratitude, and think, if they had been there, they would have shown the Lord and his mother a more kindly service, and would not have permitted them to be treated so miserably. But they do not look by their side to see how many of their fellow humans need their help, and which they ignore in their misery. Who is there upon earth that has no poor, miserable, sick, erring ones around him? Why does he not exercise his love to those? Why does he not do to them as Christ has done to him?

Advent Notes