

“Why the Virgin Birth?”

Fixing Our Eyes Upon Jesus, Our High Priest

Matthew 1:1-25

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Jeff: All right. Let me say a couple of things. First of all, I thought Bruce was excellent when I knew him.

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: And secondly, my credentials are sort of like a birth certificate. You’ll never see them. *(Laughter and applause)* You know, that was one of those jokes I should have thought about a little bit more before I told it. *(Laughter)* Anyway,-- *(Laughter)*

Participant: If you had a million dollars to hide it,--

Jeff: That’s right. Well, Sig assured me that this website was buried so deep that nobody would ever find it anyway. *(Laughter)* Just saying it. All right. What are we doing? *(Laughter)* How about leading us into prayer?

Participant: Okay.

Jeff: Okay.

Participant: Did you want to sing or did you just want me to play?

Jeff: Well, I could sing for you if I—Oh, you mean all of us. *(Laughter)* Well, you decide. What do you want to do?

Participant: Okay. Since it’s a Christmas-centered message, we all know the first verse of “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”, don’t we?

Men: I hope so.

Transcriber’s Note: The men sing:

Hark! The herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King!”
Peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.
Joyful all ye nations rise!
Join the triumph of the skies!
With angelic hosts proclaim:
“Christ is born in Bethlehem!”
Hark! The herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King!”
(Applause)

Jeff: Well, let’s pray together. Father, thank You for this day. Thank You for the time that You’ve given that we might gather together. We recognize that our times are in Your hands, and we are to redeem the time. And so we understand that You are both providential in Your act of bringing us here, and we are redeeming the time by being here. And so, Father, we pray that You will work in us by and through Your word, that we might indeed be shaped and fashioned according to the image of Christ. Father, as we come here this morning, we are mindful that we depend upon Christ for our salvation and for our very lives. And so we look up to You and pray that You will indeed help us to

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remember that our lives are hidden in the Lord Jesus Christ by the power and might of Your Spirit.

Father, we are thankful for that evening long ago when the angels did sing the praise of the ages and we're thankful for that, because we realize that the incarnation of the Son was foundational and crucial to our reconciliation to you. Father, bless us now as we think upon it. We pray that Your hand would be upon us for good, and we ask it in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Jeff: Okay. Well, I want you to open your Bibles to Matthew chapter 1. And let me read the first 25 verses. Now I recognize that your hearts may be all a-flutter as I read to you. Try to contain yourselves. *(Laughter)*

“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, and Ram the father of Amminidab, and Amminidab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king.

“And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, and Asaph the father of Jehoshophat, and Jehoshophat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

“And after the deportation to Babylon Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, And Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Akim, and Akim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

“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 through the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

“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. She will bear a Son,. And you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.’

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“All this took place to fulfill what the LORD had spoken by the prophet: ‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which means ‘God with us.’

“When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the LORD commanded him. He took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a Son. And he called His name Jesus.”

I want you to flip backward with me to Isaiah. I want you to have another story in mind. I want you to go to Isaiah chapter 7. And I want you to have this story in mind as we proceed in thinking about the virgin birth. This is the text that Matthew quotes in 1:23, and so it’s important for us to have the context down before we get there. I was going to have us read it later, but I think I’d rather have us read it now and not interrupt the flow of things later. This is Isaiah 7. I’ll read most of the chapter, if not all of it.

“In the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, son of Uzziah, king of Judah, Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, the king of Israel came up to Jerusalem and waged war against it, but did not yet mount an attack against it. When the house of David was told, ‘Syria is in league with Ephraim’, the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind. And the LORD said to Isaiah, ‘Go out to meet Ahaz, you and Shear-Jashub your son, at the end of the conduit of the Upper Pool on the highway to the Washer’s Field. And say to him, ‘Be careful! Be quiet! Do not fear. Do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands, at the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria and the son of Remaliah, because Syria with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah has devised evil against you, saying, ‘Let us go up against Judah and terrify it. And let us conquer it for ourselves, and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it.’

“Thus says the LORD God, ‘It shall not stand; it shall not come to pass. For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin. And within sixty-five years Ephraim will be shattered from being a people. And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah. If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.’

“Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz. ‘Ask a sign of the LORD your God. Let it be as deep as Sheol or as high as heaven.’

“But Ahaz said, ‘I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.’

“And he said, ‘Hear then, O house of David. Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the LORD Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the Boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted. The LORD will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father’s house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah, the king of Assyria.”

And I’ll not read the remaining verses there. But they do talk about the desolation of what will come upon Israel and Judah.

Participant: The word of the Lord.

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Men: Thanks be to God.

Jeff: All right. Well, let me ask you a question. But before I do that, let me tell you what we’re going to do. What we’re going to do is that we’re going to look at three points in particular. We’re going to look at some introductory things that will set us up for what we’re going to think about today with regard to the Virgin Birth. Then we’re going to look at *the promise of the virgin-born Son*. We’re going to look at *the identity of the virgin-born Son*. And we’re going to look at *the prophetic fulfillment of the virgin-born Son*. So those are the things that we’re going to look at.

Let’s move to the introduction, and let me ask you that question. The question is why the Virgin Birth? Now that’s an important question. And I think it’s one that we might all be able to answer, and quite readily so. I want you to think about how you might answer that. You would probably answer that by saying, “Well, the Bible tells us that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary, and therefore that’s why the Virgin Birth. The Bible tells us.”

And obviously, I think that’s a pretty legitimate answer. I think the bible is the final authority. And the Bible tells us that Jesus was born of a virgin. But the question still stands. The question is still there. Why? Why was Jesus born of a virgin? The Bible tells us that Jesus was born of a virgin. It prophesies that fact, and it reports that fact to us in the New Testament. And in fact Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin. The question is why is that the case?

And of course the Bible does tell us that. But the question is also what does Scripture say about that question? What does it say to us about the question of why Jesus was born of a virgin?

Well, some people might say, “Well, you can find places in the Scriptures that talk about this sort of thing.” For instance, you can go to 1 John chapter 4, verses 2 and 3. And you can find something of an answer to the question that you’re asking, Jeff. And here’s what we might find if we were to turn there. *“By this you know the Spirit of God. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.”*

And you know, you’ve probably heard this before. John is here battling what we know of as the *Docetists*. And the Docetists were named after a particular Greek word. And that word was *doceo*. And one of the meanings of the word *doceo* is “to seem.” And so there were those who were saying that Jesus did not really and actually come in the flesh. He only seemed to come in the flesh.

And if you remember, we talked about Gnosticism not too many weeks ago. And one of the things that we said was this. Those who believed in a Gnostic form of God believed that the highest God could not fraternize with the material. And therefore there had to be other gods in between that highest God and the God who created the heavens and the earth. And that God who created the heavens and the earth was a very menial deity, one of the basest of sorts. And He is different from Jesus, who came to give us knowledge that would take us back up to the highest deity.

But if that were the case, then Jesus Himself could not have been material. He only seemed to be material. And so that’s where the Docetists get their name.

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Now I want you to think about that just for a minute. If you’ve ever heard some of the extra-Biblical material quoted, especially in the news media today, you’ll find, for instance, that there is a book called *The Gospel of Thomas* that’s often enlisted by some of the reporters. And that book is a Gnostic and Docetic book. And this is what it says about Jesus while He hung on the cross. It says, “*He was silent, having no pain.*” Well, he was silent, having no pain, because He only seemed to be in the flesh. He really wasn’t in the flesh. He only seemed to be so.

And so this is in the background of what John is dealing with. Or it could have been in the background, at least in seed form, as to what John was dealing with.

But let me ask you the question. Again, the question is, but why? Why the Virgin Birth? It doesn’t seem to me that here John is answering the question why the Virgin Birth? What he seems to be answering here is that there was a virgin birth. And that virgin birth gave rise to a material body that the Savior possessed. And anyone who doesn’t acknowledge this is of the spirit of antichrist. And that seems to be what he’s arguing for in 1 John, and not answering the question why the Virgin Birth? Does that make sense to you all so far? All right.

And so we have to ask ourselves why the Virgin Birth? Why does the Scripture teach a Virgin Birth? Now you may think to yourself, well, this is very unimportant. And I think that if the Bible doesn’t tell us why there was the Virgin Birth that we need to just accept it as it is. And we need to believe that there is a Virgin Birth and be content with that. But I think that if the bible does teach us that there is a Virgin Birth, and if it does answer the question why?, then we ought to know it. We ought to know the answer to it. And I actually think that not only is there an answer to that question, but I actually think that it’s a wonderful time to be studying the book of Hebrews, because in answering the question why the Virgin Birth?, we see a parallel of sorts to something that we’re learning in the book of Hebrews. And I’ll get to that later. If I happen to forget that, please remind me, okay? (*Laughter*) All right.

Let me remind you of Isaiah chapter 7, verses 1-25. Let me talk to you about the situation that we read about. The situation is really an interesting one. What we find is two kings mentioned here. We find Pekah and we find Rezin.

Pekah is the king of Israel. Let me just throw this map up here. Pekah is the king of Israel. And there is Israel. You remember that after Solomon dies, and his son Rehoboam comes to power, that he is over all of Israel now. And Rehoboam says to Jeroboam who comes to him and says to him, “Boy, your dad was really tough on us. You need to lighten up.”

And Rehoboam consults the older men. And the older men say, “Be kind to them.” He goes to the younger men. The younger men tell him, “If you thought my dad was bad, wait till you get a taste of me.” And so Jeroboam says, “That’s fine. Ten tribes are going to break off from you.” And that becomes the Northern kingdom. And the two tribes of the South remain.

Now the two tribes of the South are the line and the lineage of David. With the ten tribes in the North there are no good kings, none. There are a few good kings in the

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South. But the good kings are never as good as they should be. We’ll learn about that in just a minute.

But Pekah is the king of Israel of the North. Now do you see that up there? It says Aram and Damascus. It’s referred to differently in different places in the Scripture, but it’s the same thing. Damascus has always been a thorn in the flesh of Israel, always. In fact it’s really interesting, because Damascus is really the pain to the people of Israel until Assyria rises. And if you look right up at the top, you see that Assyria is in the North. And what happens is that they rise to power. When they rise to power, all the smaller kingdoms say, “We are in big-time trouble!”

And so what happens is that Rezin, who is the king of Damascus, goes to Pekah, who he constantly heckles and attacks, and says, “Assyria is rising to power, and we are in trouble. We need to do something. We need to form an alliance, and we need to fight. That’s the only way we’re going to survive this thing.”

And so Pekah says, “Hey, I’ve got a great idea. We’ll be able to enlist Judah and Ahaz in the South. So we’ll go to him, and there will be at least three of us.”

So they go to Judah in the South and they talk to Ahaz. And they say to Ahaz, “Hey, here’s the situation. And here’s the way we’re going to solve it.”

And Ahaz says, “No, I’m going to pass on that one.” And so what happens is that Damascus and Israel say, “All right. We’re going to teach you a little lesson.”

And so they come to the South. And when we find Isaiah 7, what we find is that they are camped about twenty miles away from Jerusalem. And they’re going to lay siege to Jerusalem. Okay, so that’s the situation.

Let me show you a larger picture. Right in here is what we just looked at. There’s Damascus. This is Israel in the North and this is Judah in the South. But we now see Assyria and their kingdom. It’s a big kingdom, all right? It’s huge.

Now Ahaz is checking the water ducts. I don’t know if he’s out checking the fortifications of the city. I don’t know if he’s out checking how much water they have, making sure the water is okay. I don’t know what he’s doing. But he’s outside the city. And God says to him, “Go to him. Take your son and talk to him.”

And Ahaz is out. He meets Isaiah and Isaiah says, “All right, look. Here’s the deal. You’re the house of David. And God has made a promise to you to preserve you. So what you have to do is trust in the LORD.”

And he says to him, “Look! God so loves the line of David, the house of David, that He has said, ‘Ask anything,’ and He will demonstrate His love to you. Ask anything. Ask for a sign in the heavens above. Ask for a sign in the depths below. Ask for a sign and God will give it to you.” And Ahaz says, “I’m not going to put the LORD my God to the test.”

Now you have to ask yourself a basic question at this point. He’s been offered help by Damascus and Israel. He’s been offered help by the living God. And he says no to both. And the question that you have to ask yourself is why would this fool refuse help from either of those, especially God, especially when he’s that small of a nation, and Assyria is that large of an empire? Why would he do that?

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The answer is that Ahaz has a plan. What’s the plan? Well, you find the plan in 2 Kings 16. I’m going to throw it up here. I want to read it to you. And I want you to listen for what it says

“So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, saying, ‘I am your servant and your son. Come up and rescue me from the hand of the king of Syria’—that’s the king of Damascus—, “and from the hand of the king of Israel who are attacking me.”

The reason why he’s refused help from Damascus and Israel, and the reason why he’s refused help from the living God, is because he has asked for help from the king of Assyria. The king of Assyria is his savior. But there is something profound in that letter that he says that ought to stagger every one of us. What did he say? “I am your son.” What is he saying? “I no longer want to be a son of David. I want to be a son of Tiglath-Pileser, the king of Assyria.” That’s staggering! But I want to tell you something. Though it’s staggering, it’s important to answering the question why the Virgin Birth? Okay?

Participant: Jeff, what is the citation from 1 Kings, or was that 2 Kings?

Jeff: 2 Kings 16:7. So this is how the prophet responds to him. “Hear then, O house of David.” He’s reminding him who he is.

And then after that what does he promise? He promised that God will send a sign. And God’s sign will be a virgin-conceived and virgin-born Son. Now that still doesn’t leave us with an answer to the question of why the Virgin Birth. But it’s a building block for us to understand it, okay? It’s a building block for us to understand it. God will send a faithful Son of David.

Now let’s move on to *the identity*. But let’s see if you have any questions or want to clarify anything at this point.

Participant: Jeff, are you going to get into the translation of the Hebrew word which says “*virgin*” here?

Jeff: No. I’m going to take for granted that we believe that. Anybody else? No? Okay, so let’s—

Participant: Even though the word *alma* is the Hebrew, which could mean *virgin* or *young woman*. And then in the Septuagint the choice was made for *parthenos*, which means *virgin*. So God’s sovereignty was working through that to be interpreted in the right time, in the right framework, pointing to Jesus in the fullness of time.

Jeff: And the New Testament makes it clear, which is the meaning that we’re supposed to read the Old Testament with. Yes, thank you very much. Anybody else? No? Okay.

All right. So let’s think about *the identity*. Isaiah does not disclose the identity of the Messiah. But Matthew does.

Now I want you to think about a couple of things here. I want us to think about a few things related to the genealogy that we find here in Matthew’s Gospel. The first thing that I think is important for us to realize or to think about when we look at the genealogy is that it talks about a new creation. I mean, when you look at the genealogy, one of the things that jumps to your mind is, and at least some scholars point this out, that there’s a

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parallel here between Genesis 1 and 2, or a portion of 2, at least up through 8 or 9, and Matthew chapter 1.

How so? Well, when you look at Genesis 1:1-23, what you find is a general account of creation. On day one God made, on day two God made, on day three on up to His rest. But then in 2:4-2:9 there is a very specific account of what happened on day six, the creation of man.

Transcriber’s Note: Genesis 2:4-9, ESV. *“These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens. When no bush of the field was yet in the land, and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up, (for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the land), and there was no man to work the ground, and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground, then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. And the man became a living creature.*

“And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden in the East, and there He put the man who He had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”

Jeff: So there’s a general account of creation, and then a very specific account of creation. Now think about it. When you look at the genealogy, you have this very general genesis. In fact, that’s the way the genealogy starts. This is the genesis of Jesus. You have the very general genesis of Jesus. And then in verses 18-25 it begins with the word *genesis* again. And you have a very specific account of the genealogy or the genesis of Jesus. And so there’s an interesting parallel between the first creation and the new creation in Christ. So there’s an interesting parallel, kind of neat, I think.

But that’s not the only thing. The next thing that we need to notice is that this particular genealogy is very much about David himself. David is mentioned some five times here. You find him in the beginning. You find him in the end. You find him named as king.

And there’s something else. If you look at Hebrew numerology, one of the things that’s very fascinating is this. You find that this genealogy has three sections, fourteen generations for each section. David’s name has three letters in the Hebrew. There are no vowels, just Hebrew consonants. And the numerical value of them equals fourteen. So there are fascinating things both in the text and underlying the text that would lead us to believe that the genealogy that we’re reading here is a Davidic genealogy. This is the line and the lineage of David. It’s about David.

In fact, it’s kind of interesting, because when you look at the genealogy some scholars have pointed out that he leaves things out in order to create three sections of fourteen generations for each section. And it almost looks as if he’s doing that on purpose. Okay, I think he is. (*Laughter*) Actually, I don’t think he’s forgotten. I think this is what he’s doing.

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Now with that in mind I want you to notice a third thing. *This genealogy is Joseph’s genealogy.* Now I want you to think about it. It says it in verse 16. This is Joseph’s genealogy.

Now every single one of us ought to be sitting here saying, well wait a minute! If Joseph wasn’t the earthly father of Jesus, then why does this genealogy matter to us a single bit?

Participant: Because of His humanity.

Jeff: But he was not human in the line of Joseph.

Participant: That’s right.

Jeff: He’s Mary’s Son. Okay, so that ought to intrigue us. But it’s another building block in answering the question why the Virgin Birth? Okay?

The other thing that we notice is this. Joseph in verse 20 is the Son of David.

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: And Joseph is told by the angel to name Jesus. And that is an act of adoption. One scholar says that in naming Jesus Joseph “Davided” him. And in fact this is so important in this particular section. I want you to see this. It’s an inclusio.

This is what you find in verse 21. “*You shall call*”—and the *you* there is Joseph—“you, Joseph, shall call His name Jesus.” And in verse 25, “*And he*”—that is, Joseph, “*called His name Jesus.*” In other words, Joseph is adopting Jesus into the line and lineage of David.

Here’s the question. The question has to be this. Why? If this was supposed to be a Son of David who would sit on the throne, then think about it. Why in the world not make Him—

Participant: Biological?

Jeff: Biological. Think about it. There’s an answer for that. But I want you to notice something else before I tell you what the answer is. You’re probably forming it in your head by now. But right in the middle of the inclusio, Joseph shall call His name Jesus. And Joseph called His name Jesus. We have verse 23 and Isaiah 7. “*They shall call His name Immanuel.*”

Now here is what we are to gather from this. God is saying that a son of David could not produce a faithful Son of David. And therefore God would have to send a faithful Son of David to be a faithful Son of David. And make no mistake. That Son He sent is Immanuel, God with you, God with us. And that God with us is the Son, the second Person of the Trinity.

Now I said to you that there’s an interesting parallel between this and what we’re looking at in Hebrews. Have you noticed that the priestly line was Levitical? And yet it paled in comparison to what Jesus would be. So we have to reach for the Melchizedekian priesthood and say that it is so different, the priesthood of Jesus. It’s analogical to the Levitical priesthood, but it is so different. We have to use another priesthood in order to speak about it, the Melchizedekian priesthood.

Well, here he’s telling us that the line of David, a son of David, is so insufficient to produce a faithful, perfect Son that God had to send His Son to be adopted into that line

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in order to be the perfect Son of David who would sit on the throne forever. Isn't that interesting?

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: So think about the question. Why the Virgin Birth? The answer is that a son of David couldn't produce his own son perfect enough to sit on the throne. So God had to send His Son born of a virgin to be adopted into the line of David in order to fulfill the promise that God gave to David in 2 Samuel 7. Do you see that? Does that make sense?

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: Okay? Good, all right.

Participant: Jeff?

Jeff: Yes?

Participant: You said later that you were going to tie in something with Hebrews. Is that it?

Jeff: That's what I was going to tell you, yes. So there's an insufficiency to the priesthood, so there is the Melchizedekian priesthood. There's an insufficiency to the line of David to produce his own heir, so God has to produce an Heir for him.

The interesting thing is that when you think about Prophet, Priest and King, to think now about the insufficiency of the prophetic office as portrayed in the Old Testament. But that's another matter. But it's kind of interesting how there's a parallel to that as well. But it's Christmas. *(Laughter)* So I'm thinking about this.

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: Okay. Any questions that you have about this?

Participant: In verse 11 of Matthew 1 he refers to Jeconiah. Jeconiah was cursed so that there would be no descendant of Jeconiah to sit on the throne. Do you have any comments about that?

Jeff: Yes. His descendant was cursed so that no descendant could sit on the throne. *(Laughter)* Nothing else. Does anybody else have a question that I don't want to answer? *(Laughter)* No? All right.

Participant: That buttresses your argument.

Jeff: It does.

Participant: And you've got something else connected with God.

Jeff: I'm still waiting for this. There's no place that's going to be a good place for your question. Do you want to ask it?

Participant: Yes. The Catholics believe that Mary herself was conceived immaculately.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: So comment on that.

Jeff: So I would say that there is no good place to answer that question here. But I'll answer it in this way. First of all, when you think about that, the Immaculate Conception means that Mary was rendered sinless. And that means that Mary didn't need a Savior. And that's problematic. In our understanding of things Jesus is the only sinless human being. So theologically that renders a problem for us.

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And secondly, if that were a theory of Jesus’ sinlessness that would be one thing. And that would be a theory that Protestants would likely reject. But it’s not a theory. It was spoken *ex cathedra* by the papacy. And so it’s an infallible doctrine of the church. It can’t err.

And so I have two problems with that. First of all, it renders Mary without the need of a Savior, which I think has produced some of the difficulties in the Roman Catholic church today in speaking of Mary as a co-mediatrix or a co-mediator. And secondly, I think that it raises that theory of how Mary is sinless. It raises it to the level of inspired and without error.

That is not to say that Protestants don’t have their own theories about how Jesus was rendered sinless, though born of Mary. We do. And there are theories about how that happened. But we should never raise those to the level of infallibility and inerrancy. Those kinds of things are like how sin is passed on to Adam’s progeny. How is sin passed on? How is that original sin passed on? Some people say *creationism*, which is not creationism versus Darwinism. It’s a different creationism, a creationism of the soul, and how that sin is then reckoned to that soul. Or *traducianism*. Is there something such that it is passed on and we are born with the sin of Adam? And those two things are theories about how Adam’s sin is passed on, but never to be raised to the level that this is the inerrant way to understand it, or the infallible way to understand it. Don, go ahead.

Don: Yes. I think that there are two Scriptures that militate against the Immaculate Conception. Mary says, “*My spirit rejoices in God my Savior.*” She expresses her need of a Savior. I know Rome has an answer for that, but I think that’s clear. And then also, “*There is none who does good, no, not one.*”

Jeff: Yes. Tom?

Tom: I have no idea how theologically correct this is. But I’ve often noticed that in Genesis when Eve takes a bite of the apple, it’s not noted that she falls immediately. It’s when Adam then takes a bite of the fruit. Then they both fall. And the thing that I think is so neat is that the sin is transferred. But the Father of Jesus is sinless. So therefore Christ could be sinless. It doesn’t depend upon the condition of His mother.

Jeff: It fits into federal headship. Yes.

Participant: I’m just looking this up on the infallible source, Wikipedia. *(Laughter)* And it says that “*Mary is born without original sin by the virtue of the merits of Jesus.*” So this idea of merits, Jesus doing more than He needed to do to be the Son of God, that kind of merit is distributed. And it got distributed to Mary. This did not become an infallible doctrine until 1854.

Jeff: Oh, I said 1858.

Participant: No, I’m impressed. *(Laughter)* The Feast of the Immaculate Conception, this celebration, is so—

Transcriber’s Note: A phone rings. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: That’s classic; I like it. It’s classic.

Participant: I guess that’s Mary. *(Laughter)* It is a holy day of obligation, which means that all Catholics must go to Mass on that day. That’s how important that doctrine is, which was made infallible in 1854, very recently.

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Jeff: Yes.

Participant: And relies on the merits of Jesus sharing His merits with Mary, born without original sin.

Second Participant: Jeff, I hope I’ve got this straight. I’ve always said that when Jesus was born that God would not allow Him to have the birth of a sinner, being Mary. I mean, after that we were all sinners. So that would make Mary a sinner also. But I’ve always thought, even when I was Catholic before I became a Christian, that God would not allow His Son to be tainted in a sinner’s body. Now you’re saying that Mary was without sin, correct? Is that not—

Jeff: No. That’s what Rome says. That’s not what Protestants believe. Protestants believe this. One theory is that Jesus was kept from sin by the Spirit’s instantaneous work in Him at conception.

Participant: It’s a miracle. You’ve got to locate a miracle somewhere, and we might as well do it with the Lord abiding with us.

Jeff: Yes. I like that.

Participant: I have a very simple explanation as to why Jesus was born sinless. Of God and Mary, who do you think has dominant genes? *(Laughter)*

Jeff: Strike that from the record, Don. *(Laughter)* All right. Well, let’s press on. And let’s just talk a minute about Isaiah 7. If you notice, Isaiah 7 talks about how this One would be born into the desolation of the land, darkness and gloom as it’s described in Isaiah 9. And let me just point something out to you quickly about the genealogy. If you look at the genealogy, the first set of fourteen generations talks about *the rise of David*. The second talks about *the fall of David*. And the third section of fourteen generations doesn’t talk again about the rising of the line of David. It talks about *the desolation of the house of David*. Jesus then is born into the desolation of the house of David.

And so the question that we have to ask ourselves is, where is the Davidic line at the time of Jesus’ birth? Well, it’s poverty. The line is in poverty.

How do we know that? Well, for instance, in Leviticus 12:6 this is what it says about what a woman is to do after she gives birth. It’s called the Days of Purification. *“When the days of her purification are completed for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the doorway of the tent of meeting a one-year-old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering. But if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons, the one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean.”*

Now if you look at Luke 2:22-24, you’ll notice that she brings “two turtledoves or two pigeons.”

Transcriber’s Note: Luke 2:22-24, NKJV. *“Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord’), and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, ‘A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.’”*

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Jeff: And so the idea then is that she brings Jesus into the poverty and the desolation that the line of David has descended into. And the point then is that Immanuel is born into the poverty of His people. And one of the things that you really have to understand is that poverty sometimes means poverty. But oftentimes poverty is symbolic for the spiritual poverty or the spiritual blindness of the people.

And so when, for instance, you find that here, I think that one of the things the darkness and the gloom is symbolizing is the darkness and the gloom of sin. And so it's not surprising then that you find that Jesus is described as the One who came to save His people from their sins in this very text. And so the idea then is that He's born into the darkness of His people, darkness certainly of poverty and desolation and the Roman rule and all that sort of thing. But that is symbolic for a deeper problem of darkness and gloom. And that is the sin of rebellion, and so on. And so Jesus is born into that in the likeness of sinful flesh in order to redeem those under sin.

And I think that's the reason for the Virgin Birth. The reason for the Virgin Birth is because the son of David could not produce a perfect, faithful Heir to sit on the throne. And so God sent His own Son, born of a virgin, to be adopted into the line and lineage of David, in order to be the faithful Son of David who would fulfill the covenant.

Participant: He also had to make the perfect sacrifice. So the whole atonement in *Cur Deus Homo* is cited. Who else could be our Savior?

Jeff: Yes, that's right.

Participant: We're born under the curse.

Jeff: That's right. Anybody else? Yes, Bill? Bill, are you proud of me?

Bill: Am I what?

Jeff: Are you proud of me? I didn't—

Bill: You didn't mess up yet. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: Go ahead.

Bill: I just wanted to say that when I think of the story of Anna and Simeon, they were still looking for the Savior that was promised. A King was promised over Israel. They were still looking. Think of all those generations who were mentioned, how disappointed they were that they never got to see it.

Jeff: Yes. You know, let me say something very practical to you at this point too. The Puritans were big on praying the promises that are found in the Scriptures. And if you go through the list, some of the Puritans would put the list of promises in the back of their books that are on that particular subject. And they'll say, “These are the promises that you are to pray for.”

Now when you buy *Promises to the Graduate*, sometimes that's a little sketchy. Do you know what I'm talking about? Sometimes when you look at *Promises to the Graduate*, you go, “I don't think this is a promise to a graduate. And I don't think this is a promise to anybody in the New Covenant.” You know, it's a little sketchy. But the Puritans were a little more careful about “this is a promise to you that you ought to pray.”

One of the things several years ago that struck me as interesting was that I was reading through this list of promises that one ought to pray. And “Jesus was born to save His people from their sins” was one of those promises that we would pray. And the Puritan

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that I was reading went on to explain why. What he said was that we oftentimes think about this as an eschatological promise. In other words, we are going to be saved from hell. It’s an eternal salvation that’s in mind. That’s what we oftentimes think. And he said, “That’s true. This is salvation from hell to heaven.”

But he said that the idea is that we are being saved now from our sins. And so if I’m struggling with a sin, I ought to pray and say, “Lord, this is a promise that You’ve made to me, that You will save Your people from their sins. Save me from this particular sin with which I struggle.”

And I don’t know about you, but that has really ministered to me over the years. I’ve utilized that as a prayer of my own. And it’s really been helpful and important to me. And that can be something very practical that comes out of this text that not only answers why the Virgin Birth, but also answers a practical need of ours. Anybody else? Yes?

Participant: I was just thinking that the Fall was by Satan. And so the New Testament tells us that the whole human race is under the power of the devil. Only the Son of God could also be great enough to overcome the power of Satan. No other human being could.

Jeff: Yes. You know, it’s interesting. You raise that point, and it’s interesting. We all understand that when we think about any doctrine, it comes in service of God’s glory and His reconciling work on our behalf. But it is interesting that when you divide up the three offices of Christ—Prophet, Priest and King--, the idea that John talks about Jesus coming to defeat—actually, let me just read it. It’s in 1 John chapter 3. And he says in 1 John chapter 3 verse 8 that *“the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.”*

And you think about that and you say to yourself, “That strikes me as a kingly function,” right? And here is where oftentimes we think about the penal substitutionary view of the Atonement, right? Jesus was punished for my sins. But there are other theories of the Atonement. As long as we don’t take them out and say that this is the only theory, but to support this view, this was what was called in the church “Christus Victor.” And so here in 1 John chapter 3 verse 8 we find the victory of Christ, the King, Jesus Christ, who triumphs over His enemy the devil as a King.

And so when you think about what we’re thinking about now, why the Virgin Birth, we needed this sort of King to triumph over the kingdom and the power of darkness. And so it’s just another way of bringing it into understanding. Anybody else?

Participant: I have a question.

Jeff: Yes, please.

Participant: When you read the part about the mother needing to present the pigeons or the turtledoves to cleanse her, if she was immaculate or without sin, why would Mary have to present anything to the priests to be clean? I mean, is that an accurate connection?

Jeff: Yes. You have to understand that people who are in debates about these things will have answers for those kinds of things. But I think that’s a perfectly legitimate point to make. Anybody else? No? Okay, why don’t we pray, then?

Father in heaven, thank You for this day, for the time You’ve given. And thank You for the Incarnation which leads to the Atonement, to our reconciliation. Thank You, Father, that You loved us even when we were sinners, and sent Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ to

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die, that we might have life in Him through His resurrection. And in that resurrection we have life. Father, we pray that You will not only bless us but our families this week. We're thankful to be given the work to do that You've given. And we pray that You will bless it. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Men: Amen. (*Applause*)