

December 19, 2010
Advent 4

"The Virgin Birth and Its Impact on Your Life"

MATTHEW 1:18-25

T*his is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"--which means, "God with us." ²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.*

Imagine for a moment that you had a dream that totally changed your life. Usually dreams don't do that but in the case of Joseph, he had a dream that totally changed his life.

Dreams are interesting aren't they? Have you ever had a dream that frightened you, or made you sad or made you laugh? Do you have this reoccurring dream that leaves you unsettled when you wake up? I have such a dream that keeps repeating itself on Saturday night. I cannot find my tie to get ready to come to worship. 10:00 AM when worship starts I am looking for my tie. 10:15 comes and I am still looking for it. By the time I find my tie and get to the church, almost all the people have left and gone home. Dreams are strange and interesting, aren't they?

Joseph's dream was not ordinary dream. The Lord had an angel appear to Joseph in a dream and tell him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife, because the child she was carrying in her womb had been conceived by the Holy Spirit. This is exactly what Mary had been trying to tell him but he had a hard time believing what she was saying about being pregnant and having an angel appear to her and tell her that she would give birth to a Savior, God's Son.

Imagine what it must have been like for Joseph to wake up from that dream realizing what Mary had told him about the Virgin Birth was actually true. Can't you see him smiling from ear to ear, even laughing for joy? Can't you see him jumping up from his sleep, getting dressed and running as quickly as possible to tell Mary what had been told to him? This good news of the Virgin Birth given to him in a dream totally changed his life. This morning we want the blessing of the Holy Spirit as we meditate on the huge impact the Virgin Birth of our Lord Jesus Christ has on our faith and life.

The Virgin Birth glorifies the miraculous

Here is how the miraculous conception of Jesus is described by Matthew. "This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit." Mary was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. When Mary wondered how she could give birth to a child without knowing a man intimately, the angel Gabriel told her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God." As further proof and evidence of this mighty miracle the angel told Mary about her cousin Elizabeth who was going to have a child in her old age.

How did Joseph receive the news from Mary that she was going to have a baby? It says, "Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly." There is no smile on Joseph's face when Mary announces to him that she is going to have a baby. There are no words from his lips that so, "Oh, Mary that is so wonderful." Joseph and Mary never had relations with each other even though they were engaged or pledged to be married. He assumes his beloved Mary, the woman of his dreams, has been with another man and been unfaithful to him. He is further devastated by Mary's strange story about an angel appearing to her, a conception by the Holy Spirit and giving birth to Son of God, the Savior. He was unwilling to accept and share in what she told him about this miracle. He loved Mary. His heart was broken. He wanted to divorce her quietly because of unfaithfulness he falsely perceived to be present in her life.

If the Holy Spirit had not opened your heart to believe in miracles, you would be like Joseph. You would be like millions of other people in our world today who do not accept this miracle that took place when Jesus came into our world. I think about what Larry King once said about the Virgin Birth. He was once asked, "If you could interview any person in history, who would you choose?" He responded, "Jesus Christ." And then the interviewer asked Larry King, "And what would you ask him?" King responded, "I would like to ask him if he was indeed virgin born. The answer to that question would define history for me." If you believe in the Virgin Birth of Jesus then this miracle totally defines history for you. It opens the door to believe that God performed mighty miracles.

A college student came home for Christmas and was impressed by a sermon he heard in his church about the importance of believing in the Virgin Birth and in miracles. After the service, the student struck up a conversation with his pastor and then told him how much he appreciated the sermon. Then he asked, "Why is it we hear so few sermons about the Virgin Birth?" The pastor suggested that it may be that we don't realize the huge implications this has for our lives today.

What an impact this had on the life of Joseph as we mentioned earlier. God's angel appeared to Joseph in this dream and says to him, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name of Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." That's exactly what Mary told him had happened to her. Mary also told him the baby's name was to be Jesus, exactly what the angel told Joseph. The good news of this mighty miracle told to him by Mary and now told to him by the angel totally changes his life. When he woke up from the dream, he took Mary home as his wife. Joseph with the sad face (show sad face) is now Joseph with smiling, happy face

(show face).

The miracle of the Virgin Birth has a way of turning our sad faces into faces filled with joy, because it leads us to see that beyond our present world and present lives with all their problems and troubles is a whole world of miracles. What if you still lived in a world where you did not believe in miracles? How dark and empty your world would be! What if you were the person who said to me a few years ago around Christmas time that he would only believe in things that he could see, smell, and hear, and touch and feel? How sad it would be to live in such a world.

If I did not believe in miracles as they recorded for us in the Bible then I would be left to imagine on my own how the world began. Then I might believe as some do that it just happened by chance and that I evolved over millions of years into the person I am from a celled form of life. If I did not know about miracles, I would be left on my own to figure why I am here. I would be aware of my failings and short coming as all people are. I would devise my own system to sooth my conscience by trying to be nice to people with the hope that God might love me if there is a God. I would be among this who blithely say, "I will try and do my best and hope in luck for all the rest." If I did not believe in miracles then I would have no hope for life after death. A daughter asked her agnostic mother, "Mommy what happens to us when we die." The mother said, "We are eaten by worms." Imagine a world where all you can hope for is to be eaten by worms after you die.

Picture in your mind a cat that was born in a house and is a housecat all its life. It sits on the couch, looks out the window and sees a world outside but knows nothing about the outside. One day, the door is left open and the cat emerges into a whole new world with sights and sounds and smells it has never experienced before. I am born into this world encapsulated by my belief system that says the only thing that is real is what I can see, smell, and taste and touch. Then God throws open the door to a whole new world. He opens my mind and heart to believe in miracles. In this world of miracles God comes down in human flesh into our world as a baby, conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. In this new world I see God's Son living on this earth and performing miracles that break into our world and change the lives of people. I see a whole new world where God's Son takes upon himself the sin that plagues my conscience and condemn me to hell. I see this Jesus, my Savior, my Deliverer, miraculously taking my sin upon himself, suffering for that sin, and then rising from the dead. Miraculously this risen Lord and Savior can hear my prayers and direct my life. He does this not just for me but also for millions of people all over the world who believe in him. The Virgin Birth opens the door to believe in miracles. This belief in miracles radically alters and changes our lives. It changes our sorrow into joy and fills our lives with hope.

The Virgin Birth glorifies the Scriptures

This Virgin Birth just didn't suddenly happen. God revealed it was coming 700 years before it happened with a special message that was delivered through the prophet Isaiah. Matthew tells us, "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel which means 'God with us.'" Christmas is an opportunity to celebrate Jesus' birth. It is also a time to celebrate how the Lord fulfilled prophecies he made in the Old Testament about the Savior to come. One prophecy told how he would be born in Bethlehem. Isaiah

told how the Lord would give the sign or miracle of the Virgin Birth.

The Virgin Birth stands out like a voice calling out to the world to believe the words of the Bible because every prediction about the life of Jesus came true just as it was promised. When I hear the words once again this Christmas I know these words are true. I can listen to the words about the miracle of Jesus birth and know these are meant just for me and just for you. "It came to pass in those days..."There were shepherds out in the fields..."Fear not I have good news of great joy...Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior which is Christ the Lord...The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Let the Virgin Birth of Jesus have a huge impact on your life this Christmas. Let it change your life this week from sadness to joy just as it did for Joseph. Amen.