

Mt 1:18 “Now the Birth of Jesus Christ Was On This Wise”

I’m told that, on average, Christmas falls on a Sunday once every seven years. Today is one of those days—it’s both the Lord’s Day and Christmas Day. I guess that won’t happen again for another 11 years.

You might think that all Christians would be even more inclined to attend church when both the Lord’s Day and Christmas fall on the same day. That would be a combination of both Jesus’ birth and his resurrection, so it’s a very special occasion and a good reason to be at church. But oddly enough, many churches are closed today. People are used to doing other things on Christmas Day, and many churches don’t want to interfere with people’s plans for the holiday, so they just remain closed.

Well, we are open on the Lord’s Day, unless providentially hindered, even when it’s Christmas Day. *This* Lord’s Day is a special occasion because we are celebrating a particular event—the birth of our savior. It is entirely appropriate that we have the doors of the church open to celebrate this momentous event.

I would guess that most of us here today are quite familiar with the story of Jesus’ birth recorded in Matthew and in Luke.

Matthew begins his account with these words: “Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise” (KJV). That is, here is an account of Jesus’ birth; this is how it happened; here is how it took place.

Today I want to take a close look at the birth of Jesus. What does the Bible reveal about that great event? The Gospels of Matthew and Luke record specific information about Jesus’ birth, and other parts of the Bible give us information about it as well.

As we celebrate Christmas, we should understand and appreciate the following facts about the birth of Jesus. As Matthew tells us, “the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise.”

I. It was a prophetic birth.

We find several significant OT prophecies specifying important details about the birth of the Messiah.

A. God revealed that the Messiah would be a human.

1. Gen 3:15 is the earliest indication that the “seed” of the woman would deal a deathblow to the seed of the serpent. God’s solution to the problem of sin would be a human.
2. Isa 9:2 says, “Unto us a child is born, to us a son is given.” The text tells us that the Messiah would be “born” as a “child” and a “son.” I.e., he would be a human, but he would also have a divine nature. He’d be called “Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.”

Thus, we look for a human Messiah; a son of man and the Son of God.

B. God revealed that the Messiah would come through a certain family line—Abraham.

1. In Gen 12, God made a covenant with a man named Abram. God promised Abram that all the families of the earth would be blessed through his family line (Gen 22:18).
 - a) The problem with Abram and his wife Sarai was that they were old and beyond childbearing years. Sarai laughed at the idea that she’d bear a son in her old age.
 - b) The old age of this couple was no problem for God. God gave Abram a child in his old age—Isaac.
2. Isaac had an older step-brother—Ishmael. But Isaac was the child of promise; the line of the Messiah must go through Isaac, not through Ishmael.
3. Isaac eventually had two sons, Jacob and Esau. The messianic line must go through Jacob, not through his twin brother Esau.

Numbers 24:17 A Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel...

4. Jacob had four wives and a bunch of sons. We find out that the messianic line will go through only one of those sons—Judah.

Genesis 49:10 *The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.*

Most of the book of Genesis describes Abraham's family. These people are far less than perfect, but the messianic line runs through them in spite of their failures.

And that messianic line keeps getting more and more narrow. At almost every generation, the line gets more and more specific.

- C. God revealed that the Messiah would come through King David.

About 1000 years after the time of Abraham, a ruddy, good-looking youth by the name of David makes his appearance on the pages of Scripture. God decreed that the Messiah must come through his family as well.

The prophet Jeremiah said (23:5–6), *“Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.*

The NT refers to Jesus as the “son of David,” i.e., the offspring of David, over a dozen times. In fact, both Joseph and Mary are within King David's family line.

- D. God revealed that the Messiah would be born in a certain city.

Micah 5:2 stipulates that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, the city of David. Jewish scholars knew that very well. That's how they could tell the wise men where to go to find the newborn king.

- E. God revealed the timing of the coming of the Messiah.

We could consult the book of Daniel (9:25) to find information about the timing of the coming of the Messiah. Jesus was born at the right place, at the right time, to the right people. Everything happened according to God's eternal plan worked out in human history.

Trans: The OT contains many details about the coming Messiah. His birth was prophetic.

II. It was a timely birth. Gal 4:4

- A. Jesus arrived in “the fullness of the time.” A definite point was reached in God’s timetable. This was all the result of God’s planning.
- B. Several things about this period made it the “fullness of time.”
 - 1. God planned for the OT prophecies to be fulfilled at some point in time. The time had come.
 - 2. The spread of the Greek language throughout the civilized world made it the right time. The Bible was written in a language that was spoken throughout the Roman Empire. Most educated people could read Greek, which led to the message spreading quickly.
 - 3. The presence of Jewish synagogues in many places made it the right time. This enabled Christian missionaries to reach the Jews that lived throughout the Med world.
 - 4. The network of Roman roads and, to some extent, from the enforcement of Roman peace (*pax Romana*) made it the right time. The work of the Roman Empire helped facilitate the spread of the message.¹

All these factors made it a timely birth.

III. It was a humble birth.

- A. Jesus, as the Second Person of the Trinity, existed eternally in the glory of heaven.

John 17:5 And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.

¹William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 8, *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of Galatians* (Accompanying biblical text is author’s translation.;; New Testament Commentary, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001), 157.

- B. Jesus laid aside the glories of heaven, coming to earth as a man.
2 Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.
- C. Jesus' coming to earth was a huge step down, a great condescension.
Php 2:5-9 Jesus ... made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.
- D. Everything related to Jesus' birth speaks of humility.
1. Joseph and Mary were a peasant family. They were relatively poor, working class people.
*Lu 1:48 For he hath regarded **the low estate of his handmaiden:***
 2. The place in Bethlehem where Jesus was born was a very humble dwelling. Jesus' bed was a manger—a feeding trough.
 3. The shepherds who came to see Jesus were blue-collar farmer types. They were often looked down upon even by other Jews.
 4. I don't doubt that Joseph and Mary deeply appreciated the gifts that the Wise Men brought.

Trans: So the birth of Jesus was a very humble event. Jesus humbled himself by leaving his glory to come to earth, and he was born in a very humble setting to poor parents. Truly, "he became poor."

IV. It was a miraculous birth. Isa 7:14/Mt 1:18, 23/Lk 1:34

- A. Jesus was born of a virgin—a young, unmarried, chaste woman.
- B. In Matthew's account of Jesus' birth, he attributes this fact to the fulfillment of prophecy found in Isa 7:14—a virgin would become pregnant and give birth to a son who would represent God's presence with his people.
- C. The Gk uses the specific term for "virgin" (παρθενος) combined with the state of pregnancy—a baby in the womb. That's a miracle.

- D. An ordinary conception and birth of a baby to a young woman is no miracle or sign. But a pregnant virgin is a remarkable miracle.

Trans: Jesus' birth was miraculous. But on the other hand...

- V. It was a human birth.

Luke 2:7 ... *she brought forth her firstborn Son...*

- A. The miraculous part of the story concerns to conception of Jesus. And the idea that a virgin would give birth is miraculous. But the birth itself was, as far as we know, rather normal.
- B. The fact that Jesus is 100% human is important.
1. The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus was human; he is “the man, Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5).
 2. The AH tells us that Jesus had to be a human to bear the sins of other humans. Jesus is the mediator between God and man—he’s both God and man.
 3. We affirm the true humanity of Jesus Christ.

- VI. It was a purposeful birth.

Matthew 1:21 ... *you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.*

- A. We see that purpose in his name.
1. Joseph received specific direction to name Him Jesus.
 2. Names often reflect something about the one so named. E.g. Esau, Jacob, Moses
 3. “Jesus” is Greek form of Heb. “Jehoshua” or “Joshua,” which means “Jehovah is salvation.”
- B. We see that purpose in his mission.
- Jesus came to provide salvation—that was his job, purpose.
- Luke 19:10 *the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.*
- Mt 20:28 *to give his life a ransom for many.*

John 3:16-17 — God sent his son to save the world.

1 Tim 1:15: *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*

Matt 1:21 “He will save his people.” Not all will be saved. Some are excluded. Are you?

VII. It was a joyous birth.

A. Christmas ought to be a time of celebration and rejoicing. There are good reasons why celebrating Christmas is appropriate.

1. First, we have the example of Mary.

a) At the very beginning of the Christmas story, we learn how Mary responded to the news that she’d be the mother of the Messiah:

Luke 1:46–47 *Mary said: My soul magnifies the Lord, And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.*

b) Mary is clearly rejoicing over the fact that God chose her to be the mother of the Messiah.

2. Second, we have the examples of the angels.

Luke 2:10 *the angel said to [the shepherds], “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.*

a) The announcement of Jesus’ birth was a cause of “great joy.” If this is good news of great joy, what’s wrong with celebrating? I think it’s a very good reason to celebrate.

We often celebrate the good news that a child has been born.

b) Immediately after the announcement, a whole heavenly army of angels showed up in the first ever Christmas lighting display, saying “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” (Luke 2:14). So it seems clear that the angels celebrated Jesus’ birth.

3. Third, we have the examples of the shepherds.

- a) They were out in the fields watching over their flocks, minding their own business, when the angels appeared to them.
- b) Upon hearing this good news, they immediately decided to go to Bethlehem to see the new born king.
- c) They found Jesus and his parents, then went and told others what had happened.

*Luke 2:20 Then the shepherds returned, **glorifying and praising God** for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.*

Could we say that they were celebrating Jesus' birth? As they walked back to the fields, what were they doing? Sounds to me like they were celebrating.

4. Fourth, we have the example of the Magi/wise men.
 - a) We know that they arrived sometime after Jesus was born. The details of the story suggest that they were not actually there on the night of Jesus' birth.
 - b) But they could have arrived not too long after his birth.
 - c) When they saw the star guiding them to Jesus, it says they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. (Mt 2:10) They rejoiced at finding Jesus.
 - d) And of course when they saw Jesus, they gave him valuable gifts. So the giving of gifts in celebration of Jesus' birth is certainly biblical.

Can we say that the magi celebrated the birth of Jesus? Yes, I think so. After traveling close to 1000 miles and finally finding the one they came to see, they no doubt celebrated.

5. I think the primary fact that makes celebrating Jesus' birth acceptable is this statement:

Luke 2:10–11 *Then the angel said to [the shepherds], “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you **good tidings of great joy** which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*

This is very good news—*good tidings of great joy*. God is with us. Christ the Savior is born. Jesus came into the world to save sinners. I think celebrating Jesus’ birth and subsequent work is a thoroughly appropriate and fitting thing to do.

If you know the Lord as your savior, then celebrating his birth seems natural and fitting.

- B. Does everyone glorify and praise God in their Christmas celebrations? Sadly, many do not. Secular people and unbelievers don’t really have a reason to celebrate Xmas. If they don’t believe in Jesus, why would they celebrate his birth?
- C. Really, it’s only Christians who have the right to celebrate this holiday. Those who don’t know the Lord have nothing to celebrate. Jesus is not their savior. They are still lost, blind, and dead in transgressions and sins. They don’t enjoy any of the benefits that come from knowing Christ as Lord and Savior. They have no hope and are without God in the world.
- D. And because of that, they substitute the *mythology* of Christmas for the true *meaning* of Christmas. They focus on *frivolity* instead of on the *facts*.
- E. We have good reasons to rejoice and be glad as we contemplate the birth of Jesus. He is the reason for the season.

Where will you be 11 years from today? That’s the next time Christmas will land on a Sunday. As for me and my house, Lord willing, we will be at church on Christmas Day, 2033, to celebrate the birth of Jesus. I hope you will be, too.