

**SIGNS OF THE KING'S COMING**  
*"The Sign of the Virgin Birth"*  
*Isaiah 7:13-14, 9:6-8; Matthew 1:18-25*

Fairfield Presbyterian Church

Rev. Richard L. Haney

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**INTRODUCTION**

Visiting England once or twice a year has sparked an interest in British history. But for the life of me I cannot keep straight all the comings and goings of the many kings and queens... But here is one of the more famous (notorious) monarchs.

From 1558 until 1603 **Queen Elizabeth** sat upon the throne of England, in between two famous kings. She was preceded by her father-- **King Henry the 8th** and she was followed by **King James the 1st** whose name recalls the *Jamestown* settlement (1607) and the King James Version (1611). Because Elizabeth never married she was known as the **Virgin Queen** (Elizabeth—the movie version).

In 1584 she gave permission to Sir Walter Raleigh to establish a colony in America. Raleigh's early efforts failed, but he did name the territory he sought to settle "*Virginia*" after Elizabeth, the virgin queen.

In 1587 Raleigh's third expedition (Gov. White) reached Roanoke Island. Days after arriving, the governor's daughter, Eleanor, gave birth to a baby girl. Little "*Virginia Dare*" was the first English child born in America and she was named after the new country! But this story ends mysteriously because Virginia Dare and her parents were members of the **Lost Colony** that vanished without a trace.

But that's enough English and American history for today. We want to think about another birth story and another woman celebrated in history as a Virgin. And this story features not a virgin queen but a Virgin Mother--mother of the messiah. In Matthew's Gospel, chapter one has two parts: a genealogy and a birth story.

*"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..."*

What an opening statement! An engaged couple finds out that the girl is pregnant. Naturally *he* suspects that *she* has been seeing somebody else on the side. He (Joseph) properly resolves to end the relationship.

Do you remember Matthew's genealogy--the **four ladies**, *Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba*, foreigners, who were tainted by scandal or unusual marriages? Here is another irregular relationship. But the anomalies in the family tree already have prepared the careful reader for an unusual birth story!

Before **Joseph** acts to put Mary away--he has a dream.

In the dream an angel speaks to him and explains that these troubling circumstances are part of God's plan. **Mary** has not been unfaithful. She has conceived because of the work of the Holy Spirit. I'm glad *the angel* intervened and gave Joseph an explanation. Can you imagine Mary trying to explain this? It would have been easier for her today--she could have made reference to **artificial insemination** and **in vitro fertilization**.

Joseph did what the angel told him. He quietly obeyed--he **married** Mary and **named** the child as he was instructed. This is the first name given in the story. But there is a second name in Matthew's gospel that comes from a prophet.

Do you remember the Messiah's names in the genealogy? *Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham*. The birth record establishes Jesus as a descendant of both David and Abraham. He has a human family tree. His background covers 2000 years of Old Testament history.

But if Matthew's birth **record** belongs to the world of the human and ordinary, Matthew's birth **story** highlights the divine and extraordinary. A child is conceived through the Holy Spirit without biological father or human initiative. This child is from God—He is messiah, God's anointed one.

Let's look at his two names.

Joseph is told to name the child **Je-sus**, "*because he will save his people from their sins.*" Jesus is a Greek form of the Hebrew name "**Yeshua**." We are more familiar with it as **Joshua**. It means "*Yaweh saves.*" **God-saves**. In those two words we have the simplest explanation of who the Messiah is (GOD) and what He does (SAVES). Jesus is that rare individual whose name means exactly what it says. We must not dilute either part of the name. If He is not God He cannot truly save us. If He is not the Savior then God is only to be feared--not trusted, not adored.

At the same time, the name Jesus or Joshua was a common man's name; and Jesus is a completely human being. How Jesus is entirely human and entirely divine without either "*entirety*" canceling out or diluting the other is one of the great mysteries of Christendom. But Matthew is forthright in telling us (insisting) in his first chapter that Jesus is both: He is the **Son of David** and the **Son of God**.

The second name Matthew found in one of Isaiah's prophecies. "*The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel which means 'God with us.'*" The emphasis in this passage is on the names, **Jesus** and "**Immanuel**" rather than on the virgin birth. But in the modern world the notion of a virgin birth has been a controversial article of faith.

**Isaiah**---*almah* (young woman, maiden)

**Matthew**—*parthenos* (virgin)

**Isaiah** does not explicitly mention a virgin but **Matthew** certainly does. And twice he reminds us that Joseph had not been intimate with his fiancée. The virgin *birth* or more importantly the **virginal conception** of Jesus is a sign of God miraculously becoming a human being. If one has faith to behold the Savior's resurrection (his exit miracle) one's faith can accept also the virgin birth (his entry miracle). The *Apostle's Creed* reminds us that the church from its earliest days described Jesus as, "*born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate.*"

Immanuel means simply "**God-with-us.**" In the OT God usually was seen supremely as the **God-Above-Us** though he would visit earth occasionally via the angel of the Lord. In Islam *Allah* is always the **God-Above-Us**. *Allah* sends--angels, prophets, books--but he is too holy to come. For God to touch earth is called a *shirk* and anyone who claims God has a son or became a human being commits *shirk*, i.e. *blasphemes God's glory*.

But in the gospel we learn to think of God in a new way. God is so great He can come down. He is not trapped in heaven above. He loves us so much He wants to come down. He proves his love for us that He did come down and touched this earth. He even allowed himself to be "*shirked*" by men, condemned and nailed to a cross. The greatness of the gospel is that God not only sends, he comes.

**Christmas** is the story of God becoming one of us. The Father sends the Son!

The story tells us that Jesus experienced both honor and shame. Conceived by the Spirit, born of a virgin. This was unique. No one had ever stepped onto the stage of human history in such a miraculous fashion. Isaiah the prophet declared, "*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given... and he will be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."*

But with honor came also humility. Leaving **heaven** to live on **earth**. Being mocked and scourged and nailed to a cross. He endured the humility and the shame in order to become what he was named--the Savior of sinners.

Do you see this same pattern experienced by **Mary**? God chose an obscure woman, a very young woman, an engaged woman. The honor of being the mother of Jesus was hers. I can scarcely imagine a greater honor. Mary is called by the Orthodox "*Theotokos, Mother of God.*" And by Catholics "*The Blessed Virgin.*"

But when her friends heard she was pregnant--you know there were *sly* grins and *snide* comments. And people whispered when she approached and talked behind her back. "*What kind of woman was she?*"

How could she explain to others what the angel had said to her? *"Sure Mary, the Holy Spirit did what?"* The honor has been bestowed posthumously. The shame she endured right away.

And **Joseph**? With his fiancée pregnant, he too shared in the public disgrace of Mary's ill-timed pregnancy. Matthew honors Joseph by concluding the genealogy with him; he is the legitimate heir of David and the legal father of Jesus. And he has the honor and privilege of naming Jesus. But by offering to divorce Mary quietly, Joseph was prepared to take some of the social shame and guilt of the failed betrothal upon himself without complaint.

Matthew describes Joseph as "**righteous.**" *"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."* **Righteousness** in Matthew's gospel is to obey simply. And to be rightly related to others. Vertical righteousness pays attention to God. Horizontal righteousness pays attention to people. Joseph did what the angel told him and shared in the shame of circumstances not easily explained to curious friends and neighbors.

Is it possible that honor and humility are what God has in store for us too? What greater honor can you and I have than to be called a child of the king? God offers to adopt us in Jesus Christ--to make us His own. He is *Jesus*, **God-Saves** and He is *Immanuel*, **God-with-us**. It is an honor and a blessing to be his disciple. To be named *Christian* because you are in Christ. To receive his salvation and to experience his saving and sustaining presence.

But in order to belong to Him we must humble ourselves like little children. We must run to Him and confess our sins and return his love. That calls for humility. And when we seek to follow Him we will have opportunities to endure shame. People will misunderstand us and ridicule our faith.

**Story:** *minority* status Christians (Egypt, China, Japan, Turkey)

The Apostle Paul told the Corinthians: *"we preach Christ crucified--a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles ...God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong- He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not---to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him."*

Humble yourself in the sight of God that in due time He may lift you up and honor you *in Christ*

Mary and Joseph show us the way. Mary was the first person to have Christ-in-her. Literally and physically. We have Christ in us by faith. Literally and spiritually. At this

**Table** we partake of Christ. We eat and drink his “body” and “blood”, spiritually speaking. How does this become real? When the Holy Spirit takes Christ and puts Him inside us. Mary conceived by the Spirit. The Spirit put Christ inside her. It is the mission of the **Holy Spirit** to bring Christ to people and to put Him inside persons--to enable us to receive Him by faith.

The Spirit can make Christ real to you. Christ in you, the hope of glory! The Spirit can make Christmas, the event of His birth, something real for you.

Our God is a **sending** God. He has sent us angels and prophets; messengers with messages. And He is the **coming** God. In sending His Son God Himself actually came down to us.

He comes *in person*--not a letter or email or an angel or...

We believe God is personally present in the Supper—by His Spirit.

He came to us in a way miraculous and mysterious: "*the virgin shall conceive.*" And he came to us in a way ordinary and understandable: "*and she will give birth to a son.*"

When Matthew comes to the very end of his story, the end of his gospel, he tells us of Jesus' last words before ascending to heaven. Those words often are called the Great Commission. Do you remember them? "*And surely, I am with you always even to the end of the age.*" There is his name again. **EMMANUEL**, God-with-us!

Let us pray.