

Fulfilled: The Promise of God's Presence

Matthew 1:18-25

We often think of stories as mainly for children. And kids do love stories. Our kids have always loved it when we sit down and read to them before bed at night. It's vitally important that kids hear the right kind of stories as they grow because the stories they hear will shape them and form them into certain kinds of people.

But stories are equally important for adults. You do not reach a certain age where you leave stories behind and move into something else. Stories still shape your character and how you view the world around you and the people around you. In fact, you are no doubt living today out of a belief that you are inhabiting a certain story. One author put it like this: "*We make sense of our reality by interpreting it and retelling it as story.*" - Jeannine K. Brown

Every good story has a setting and characters, but it can't be a story without movement. There's a beginning, a conflict, a series of events that lead to the resolution of that conflict and the climax of the story which brings you to the end. We are obviously in the middle of December, and we are all thinking about the Christmas Story at the moment. And as you ponder Christ's birth it's so important that you see this as part of a much bigger story. There's a movement in the Bible from creation to consummation and the birth of Christ comes in the middle of that story as the realization of all that has come before. You can't really grasp the significance of the Christmas story without connecting it to the OT.

The Gospel writer Matthew makes this quite plain when you open to the beginning of his book. Turn to Matthew 1 with me. Look at verse 1. He explains that we are going to read the genealogy of Jesus Christ, but that list of names will focus on two main characters, David and Abraham. Both are crucial OT figures in moving God's plan of redemption forward. Both had key covenants established with them that promised God's rule and reign would once again be established. Now look down at Matthew 1:17. This whole genealogy has focused on 3 parts of the OT story, Abraham, David, and the exile to Babylon. God has established his covenant with His people through Abraham and David and His people have continually been unfaithful, which resulted in the exile to Babylon.

Matthew views the entire OT story of God's promises and purposes and Israel's unfaithfulness as finding its climax in the birth and life of Jesus Christ. It's because of that that we want to study these first few events in the life of Jesus and see how they are built on the back of the OT. Today we are going to look at this short account of the birth of Christ in Matthew 1:18-25 and we will see **3 Defining Features of the Birth of Christ that Bring us to Trust God's Purposes.**

1. It's a Supernatural Birth (vv. 18-20)

Look with me at the beginning of verse 18. It's not readily apparent in English but the same word is used for "birth" here as is used in verse 1 which connects this verse back to verse 1 and the whole genealogy. In addition to that I want you to look with me back to verse 16. This particular part of the genealogy is quite different from anything else. It places a major focus on Mary being the one of whom Jesus was born and presents Joseph as the husband of Mary. Now Matthew is going to explain the details of why this birth was so different.

Look at the rest of verse 18. It was common practice during this time for a young woman to be betrothed to a man for several years. They were not yet living together and had not consummated the marriage but according to the law they were considered married. We get a little insight behind the scenes here and Mary is pregnant by a supernatural work, the Holy Spirit. Joseph finds out and responds in verse 19. Joseph is a just or righteous man. This doesn't mean he is sinless. It just means he is a man of character and has pursued the keeping of the law.

When he finds out he has the legal right to divorce her for being unfaithful, but he wants to do this in a way that is quiet, so she is not subjected to public scorn. This is a very reasonable response here but then he gets more information. Look at verse 20. This is a messenger from God and notice what he calls Joseph, Son of David. This connects Joseph back to the genealogy and reminds us of Jesus's place in the story of the OT. The angel makes it clear that Mary is experiencing something quite unique, a work of the Holy Spirit.

Now let's be clear here. This passage is why we believe in the virgin birth. We don't need any other explanation than what Matthew has here. And what does the virgin birth communicate to us? God in the second person of the Trinity has become man. God has pursued mankind and the preexistent God of the universe has united to himself a human nature and become both God and man. *"But by*

means of Mary's virginal conception, God the Son, without ceasing to be what he is – the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the eternal Son and Word of God, took into union with his divine nature in the one divine Person of the Son our human nature and so came to be 'with us' as 'Immanuel.'" – Robert Reymond

And it's because He is both God and man that our second defining feature of His birth can be true.

2. It's a Saving Birth (v. 21)

The angel continues to instruct Joseph in verse 21. Joseph was to name this child Jesus, which is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Yeshua or Joshua and it means Yahweh Saves. This is what the Angel points out at the end of verse 21.

This phrase "he shall save his people from their sins" is familiar to us and we see this throughout the NT in places like Acts 4:12. But this phrase is drawn from the OT, from Psalm 130.

Psalm 130 is part of the Psalms of Ascents. These would have been the Psalms sung by Israelites as they made their way up to Jerusalem to worship and participate in Passover. This song isn't being sung by those enslaved in Egypt. It's sung by those in the Promised Land and by those anticipating the future day when God would deliver the Israelites from their ultimate problem, sin. There's an eschatological hope in this Psalm, which is exactly why the angel communicates this regarding the birth of Jesus. Let me read it and you can see that verse 8 is the verse alluded to in Matthew 1.

Now, it's interesting here that the angel changes the wording here from Israel to "his people". The OT prophets are filled with the expectation that God's salvation will extend out from the Jews to include Gentiles from every corner of the earth. They will be included in this eschatological salvation brought through this child as well.

3. It Settles the OT Hope of God's Presence (vv. 22-25)

Now in verse 22 we get Matthew's editorial comments on what has been predicted by the angel. Look there. All this took place according to God's plan and for God's purposes. But I want you to notice this very important word "fulfill". We are using this word for the title of this short Christmas series and you will see this

word again multiple times if you read the first few chapters of Matthew. Even if you don't see this word Matthew quotes OT passages in ways that show clear connections between the life of Christ and the events happening to Israel in the OT.

There are two very different ways to understand what Matthew means when he uses this word fulfill in the early chapters of Matthew. First and this is what most of us think when we hear this word, Matthew uses this word for a **predictive prophecy** in the OT. What does that mean? We typically think that Matthew is saying, here's a place in the OT where a specific prophecy about something in the future was made and that prediction is happening in the life of Jesus right now. There are predictive prophecies that are fulfilled in the life of Christ and you can see an example of one of those in Matthew 2:5-6 with the prediction that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem.

But I don't think that's what Matthew means when he uses the word "fulfill" here and it's interesting that you don't see that word "fulfill" regarding the Bethlehem prophecy. So, what does Matthew mean by this word "fulfill"?

I think Matthew is using this word in a typological way. You probably can think of other examples of typology in your Bible. For example, Moses is a type of Christ. The Passover Lamb prefigures Jesus's sacrifice on the cross. What makes something a type? Two elements: historical correspondence and escalation. Ok, what do those mean? Well, the events have the same pattern and quite striking similarities and when we go from the OT to the NT we see an escalation in significance.

So, Matthew uses this word "fulfill" to indicate he's about to draw a type from the OT. What type and from where? Look at verse 23. The passage quoted here is from Isaiah 7 and in order to understand the typological connection between these passages we need to briefly understand the context of Isaiah 7. The quote is from verse 14 but let's start in verses 1-2. So, remember, the kingdom is divided into northern and southern kingdom and Ahaz is the king in Judah, the south, and the king of Syria and Israel, the northern kingdom are trying to destroy Jerusalem, the capital of Judah. You can see in verse 2 that this terrifies Ahaz and his people.

So, God sends Isaiah to speak with king Ahaz, who is part of the Davidic line in verse 3. Look what Isaiah says in verses 4-6. Basically, don't be scared. Why? Look

at verses 7-9. God says that within 65 years he will crush these two nations and Ahaz and his people only need to trust God to do this.

God is going to confirm his faithfulness to Ahaz by giving him a sign. Look at verses 10-11. Ahaz doesn't want to ask God for a sign for whatever reason and this is frustrating. Look at verses 12-13. So, God decides to give him a sign of his choosing. Look at verse 14. Here's our verse from Matthew 1 and here's the promise of a sign to Ahaz that God will be faithful to him and deliver him from these two kings.

Now, let's talk about this sign. The word translated here could mean virgin or it could mean a young woman and I don't think the way you translate this matters much as to the reality of the virgin birth because this is not predicting the birth of Jesus in the way we normally think of predictions and prophecies. This is describing a child who would be born in Isaiah's day that would be a sign to Ahaz. How do I know that? Look at verses 15-16. And in fact, it appears that Isaiah's wife bears this son. Look at 8:3-4. And God will keep His promise to destroy Syria and the northern kingdom by bringing Assyria. Look at verses 5-8. But even in all this, the most important point is that God will be with His people. Look at what the Lord says in verses 9-10.

So, what is the situation here in Isaiah 7-8? The line of David is threatened by two foreign kings and God's promises to His people are in jeopardy. The Davidic king on the throne, Ahaz, is not a godly man nor a faithful ruler. The people are suffering and are terrified. God seems absent. Yet God promises to give a sign, the birth of a child which will indicate His presence with His people. This child is born, apparently to Isaiah and his wife, and God comes through on His promise to destroy these other nations and confirms His presence with His people. The people simply need to trust God's sovereign care and watch Him work.

So, what is the situation in Matthew 1? The line of David is no longer on the throne at all and hasn't been for a long time. Rome rules over the people and the king in Israel is not even a Jew. The people are suffering and doubting whether God will come through on His promises. God seems absent and distant. Yet, God promises to give a sign, the birth of a child. But this will be no ordinary child as was born in Isaiah's day. This child will be born of a virgin through the power of the Holy Spirit. The birth of this child won't just prove that God is with His people,

He will actually be God coming to dwell among His people. And His ultimate goal won't be a political deliverance, it will be a spiritual deliverance from their biggest problem, their sins. And God brought this to pass. (vv. 24-25)

So, what do we learn from this? This isn't just a predictive prophecy about the birth of Jesus. It teaches us more than just that God can prophecy about the future, but it teaches us about the birth and work of Jesus through the typological connection to the OT. The NT is vitally connected to the OT and the OT provides the background for making sense of the life and ministry of Jesus. The birth of Jesus is God showing up in a major way to save and deliver His people, especially when it seems that God is absent and His promises will fall apart.

The primary response to God when we see something like this is worshipful trust. God is the great author who is providentially overseeing all of history to accomplish His purposes. The beauty of this is that our lives fit within this story and the same God who does this work is working right now in and through us. Let's pray.