



**LK. 1 & MT. 1 -- BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST; JESUS' GENEALOGY & BIRTH**

After John explains about Christ's preexistence, we now go to Luke 1 and Mt. 1 to cover the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus' genealogy and birth.

It's vital first to stress *the seamless unity* of the Old and New Testaments. In Malachi 3-4, the Old Testament closes with God's promise to send an Elijah-like messenger to prepare the way for the coming Messiah. And Matthew 1 *continues* the history with the birth of that messenger.

So when the New Testament curtain rises, the scene opens in Jerusalem, where an elderly priest enters the Temple's Holy Place to offer incense on the altar. Everything looks so normal, but now begins the fulfillment of the coming of that Elijah-like prophet—John the Baptist. The time of great miracles has arrived—and some 400 years in waiting!

We read, "There was in the days of Herod, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah" (Luke 1:5). According to the Jewish historian Josephus, each of these 24 orders had 800 priests-- some 20,000 in total. Zacharias was the chosen one to father the coming messenger—John the Baptist.

The account continues, "His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years. So it was, that while he was serving as priest...his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord...Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink [meaning he would be a Nazirite (see Numbers 6)]. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:5-17).

Zacharias, past the age of having children, as was his wife, was shocked at the news and doubted the prophecy. As a result, the angel Gabriel told him because of his incredulity, he would remain mute until the birth of his child. Soon afterwards, the elderly Elizabeth became pregnant--a great miracle--and hid herself for five months, or until the pregnancy became so obvious it would dispel any possible doubters.

Now the scene of amazing miracles shifts to northern Israel, to the small town of Nazareth.

We read, "Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary...Then the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob *forever*, and of His kingdom *there will be no end*'" (Luke 1:26-33).

Mary was shocked, but with Gabriel's explanation of how she would become miraculously pregnant, she humbly accepted God's will.

When she visited her cousin, Elizabeth, we read, "the babe leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she said, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb'" (Luke 1:41-43).

So Mary praised God with a beautiful hymn, where she humbly acknowledges she is not worthy of this honor as she was poor and common. She then recognize she is a sinner like everybody else that needs a Savior (Luke 1:47). This is a far cry from what she has now become in some Christian churches—a type of a goddess, immaculately conceived, never sinning, a perpetual virgin and ascending to heaven to become a mediator between God and humans—an abominable heresy that reduces Christ's role as our only mediator (see 1 Tim. 2:5).

Some months later, John the Baptist was born, and his father could talk again. There were many witnesses to all of this, as Luke says, "And all these sayings were discussed throughout all the hill country of Judea. And all those who heard them kept them in

their hearts, saying, ‘What kind of child will this be? And the hand of the Lord was with him’” (Luke 1:65-66). John’s name means, “God’s gift of grace.”

At that time, Zacharias received the spirit of prophecy and described his son’s ministry, saying, “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways. To give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins...To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.’ So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel” (Luke 1:76-80).

Since he had such a vital role to fulfill—preparing the way for the Messiah, showing Israel its sins, and facing strong opposition from the authorities—John, like Elijah, led a spartan and secluded life. He was powerful, direct and not soft or cushy. That is all we hear about him until about 30 years later, when Jesus as the Messiah is revealed.

So the scene now shifts to the events surrounding the birth of Jesus Christ. Genealogies might not be very important today, but they certainly were in Jesus’ day. Here is why and this is very important.

*The Bible Knowledge Commentary* explains, “If Jesus of Nazareth is the fulfillment of these two great covenants, is He related to the rightful line? This is [the first] question the Jews would have asked, so Matthew traced Jesus’ lineage in detail. Matthew gave Jesus’ lineage through His legal father, Joseph. Thus this genealogy traced Jesus’ right to the throne of David, which must come through Solomon and his descendants...Matthew’s genealogy answered the important question a Jew would rightfully ask about anyone who claimed to be King of the Jews. Is He a descendant of David through the rightful line of succession? Matthew answered, yes!”

*Thru the Bible Commentary* adds, “Genealogies were very important to the nation Israel, and through them it could be established whether a person had a legitimate claim to a particular line. For example, when Israel returned from the captivity, we find in the Book of Ezra, ‘These sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but they were not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood’ (Ezra 2:62). It was possible in Ezra’s day to check the register of the tribe of Levi and remove those who made a false claim.

“Evidently these genealogies were kept by the government and were accessible to the public. This genealogy was obviously on display and could have been copied from the public records until the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70 [The official records perished]. The enemies of Jesus could have checked them and probably did. This is interesting and important because they challenged every move of the Lord Jesus, even offering a substitute explanation for the Resurrection, but they *never did question* His genealogy. The reason must be that they checked it out and found that it was accurate.

“This is most important because it puts Jesus in a very unique position. You remember that He said the Shepherd of the sheep enters in by the door but the thief and the robber climb up some other way to get into the sheepfold (see John 10:1-2). That ‘fold’ is the nation Israel. He didn’t climb into the fold over a fence in the back, and He didn’t come in through the alley way. He came in through the gate. *He was born in the line of David and in the line of Abraham.* This is what Matthew is putting before us. He is the fulfillment of everything that had been mentioned in the Old Testament. So the enemies of Christ never could challenge Him in regard to His genealogy. They had to find some other ways to challenge Him, and, of course, they did.”

As we study the two genealogies of Jesus in Matthew and Luke, they are a bit different—and rightly so. *The Life Application Bible* notes, “Because Mary was a virgin when she became pregnant, Matthew fits Joseph only as the husband of Mary, *not* father of Jesus. Matthew’s genealogy gives Jesus *legal* (or royal) lineage through Joseph. Mary’s ancestral line is recorded in Luke 3:23-38. Both Mary and Joseph were direct descendants of David. Matthew traced the genealogy back to Abraham while Luke traced it back to Adam. Matthew wrote to the Jews, so Jesus was shown as a descendant of their father Abraham. Luke wrote to the Gentiles so he emphasized Jesus as the Savior of all people.”

Halley reveals another important fact: “These genealogies, given more fully in 1 Chronicles 1-9, form the backbone of Old Testament annals. Carefully guarded through long centuries of epochal vicissitudes, they contain a ‘family line through which a Promise was transmitted *4000 years*, a fact unprecedented in history’” (p. 415). It’s incredible!

Some have wondered about how accurate the statement was that there were 14 generations from

Abraham to David, fourteen more from David to the captivity in Babylon, and from the captivity to Jesus are fourteen more (1:17). Much of the confusion has to do with the terminologies used in the Hebrew and translated into the Greek.

As Gleason Archer explains, “Matthew 1:9, which gives the genealogy of Jesus through His legal father, Joseph, states, ‘Ozias begat Joatham.’ These are the Greek forms of Uzziah and Jotham. Some are confused by this mention of Uzziah, because Jotham’s father is called Azariah...The names are different but they refer to the same king...Likewise Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim was also known as Jeconiah, and Zedekiah’s original name was Mattaniah” (*Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, p. 317). Thus, the 14 names are completed after David.

It is also important to note that four women are mentioned as Jesus’ descendants. Why? God has a way of choosing the humblest and the marginalized. As 1 Cor. 1:26 mentions, “For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, nor many mighty, nor many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things...that no one should glory in His presence.”

*The Bible Knowledge Commentary* points out, “Another interesting fact about Matthew’s genealogy is the inclusion of four Old Testament women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Solomon’s mother, Bathsheba. All of these women (as well as most of the men) were questionable in some way. Tamar [played the prostitute once and Rahab was a harlot], Ruth was a foreigner, a Moabitess, and Bathsheba committed adultery. Matthew may have included these women in order to emphasize that God’s choices in dealing with people are all of His grace. Perhaps also he included these women in order to put Jewish pride in its place.”

We now go to the account of Jesus’ birth in Matthew. “Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly...and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son.” (1:18-19, 25).

What does betrothal mean here? *The Life Application Bible* points out: “There were three steps in a Jewish marriage. First, the two families agreed to the union. Second, a public announcement was made.

At this point, the couple was ‘pledged’ [or betrothed]. This was similar to an engagement today except that their relationship could be broken only through death or divorce (even though sexual relations were not yet permitted). Third, the couple was married and began living together. Because Mary and Joseph were engaged, Mary’s apparent unfaithfulness carried a severe social stigma. According to Jewish civil law, Joseph had a right to divorce her, and the Jewish authorities could have had her stoned to death (see Deut. 22:23, 24).”

Note also that it says Joseph did “not know her till she brought forth her firstborn,” which means as a married couple they had sexual relations *after* the birth of Jesus. After all, why does the Bible call Jesus the “firstborn” son if He was the only one. There is a perfectly good Greek word for “only” son (*monogenes*), but firstborn was used because Joseph and Mary had several children after Jesus was born.

Yet, this is denied by the Catholic Church to back their belief that Mary remained a perpetual virgin all her life—even after having Christ and using the birth canal for his birth—they even have a technical term to say Jesus passed that birth canal without breaking it—*in partu*—or without birth pangs or rupture of the hymen, and *post partum*—a virginity after birth, and *semper virgo*--she always remained that way. So they also denied Jesus had any other brothers and sisters thinking even marital relations would have defiled Mary. As Halley said, “Who were the ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’ of Jesus, mentioned in Mt. 13:55-56 and Mark 6:3?...The plain, simple, natural meaning of these passages is that they were Mary’s own children...There would never have been any other meaning read into these passages, except for the desire to exalt celibacy as a holier form of life.”

Now back to the story. Joseph then receives in a dream the instructions from an angel to keep Mary as his wife because, “that conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Mt. 1:20-21). So Joseph humbly received her as his wife and protected her from then on from the swirling rumors.