

# WHY FOUR GOSPELS? THE FOUR-FOLD PORTRAIT OF CHRIST

in  
Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John

A Series of Radio Messages

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## CHAPTER ONE

### WHY FOUR GOSPELS? THE FOUR-FOLD PORTRAIT OF CHRIST

As we enter upon the study of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry, immediately the question arises in our minds, “Why four Gospels?”

Why did the Holy Spirit guide four men to record this story — from the appearance of the angels to Mary and Joseph, even unto our Lord’s death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven? If one Gospel story did not suffice, why were two not enough? If more than two, why not a dozen or a score? Why has the Holy Spirit given to us these four records of the sayings and doings of Christ on earth, no more and no less? There must be some reason for this, a reason that has a vital bearing upon the Person and work of our Lord.

Again, as we read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, we wonder why practically all of Christ’s life on earth, from His infancy to the beginning of His public ministry at the age of thirty, is passed over by the Spirit of God? Only Luke tells us a single incident of this period, that of the Boy Jesus in the temple at the age of twelve, “**sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions**” (Luke 2:46).

Then, following this story, Luke adds that “. . . **he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them . . . And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man**” (Luke 2:51, 52).

This is the only glimpse we have of the childhood of our Lord on earth, after His return from Egypt with Joseph and Mary.

- We know that He worked with Joseph in the carpenter's shop.
- We know that, after Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph had four sons and some daughters. (See Matthew 13:55, 56; Mark 6:3).

We like to think of what a wonderful Child the Boy Jesus was in that humble home — never a cross word, never a selfish deed, never a disobedient act! He was without sin; and therefore, He could do no wrong! But why did the Holy Spirit not tell us of these things? Why do we not have a complete biography of Christ's life on earth, not even in all four of the Gospels put together? That we have only a few of the many words and deeds of the Lord, John states definitely in the closing verse of his record:

**“And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written”** (John 21:25).

Why do we not have a complete biography of Christ's life on earth? The answer is that the Holy Spirit had a purpose in what He omitted, as well as in what He recorded. If man had written the story of such a life, he would have done it differently. Thus the very nature of the four Gospels, presents one of the clear marks of inspiration by the Holy Spirit of God. The Divine Author had a special purpose, a definite design, in each of these inspired records — a purpose and a design that become clear as noonday, once we let Him teach us this sacred story.

### **THE FOUR-FOLD PORTRAIT OF CHRIST**

No painting, no canvas, no word of tongue or pen could fully paint the portrait of the Lord Jesus Christ; yet the four Gospels give us glimpses of that portrait from four different angles, as it were.

When a man has his photograph taken, he has a front view, possibly a profile, any number of different poses. All present a picture of the same person; yet no one is exactly like the other view. This but faintly illustrates how the four Gospels give us a four-fold portrait of the **“Man, Christ Jesus.”** Each has a different purpose and design; yet all tell of the matchless Person and mighty work of the Saviour of sinners.

This four-fold picture of our Lord is the unveiling of a four-fold prophetic portrait of Him who was to come, as set forth in the Old Testament.

We are told that more than three hundred definite prophecies of His first coming into the world are to be found in the Hebrew Old Testament; and these may well be grouped under four official titles for the Son of God who came to redeem lost humanity. And let us never forget that all these minute prophecies were written in God's Word hundreds of years before Christ was born in Bethlehem, in order that the world might recognize in Jesus of Nazareth the eternal Son of the eternal God.

Now these are the four official titles, found in the Old Testament concerning the promised Redeemer, of whom the four Gospels speak:

1. **“A righteous Branch . . . A KING”** (Jeremiah 23:5).
2. **“MY SERVANT the Branch”** (Zechariah 3:8).
3. **“THE MAN whose name is the Branch”** (Zechariah 6:12).
4. **“The Branch of THE LORD . . . beautiful and glorious”** (Isaiah 4:2).

These four official titles of our Lord might well be written over each of the four Gospels, respectively:

- Matthew presents Him as the King of Israel;
- Mark, as the faithful Servant of the Lord;
- Luke, as the perfect Son of Man;
- John, as the eternal Son of God.

Of course, each of the four evangelists tells us all this and more about Christ; but each emphasizes particularly the one aspect of His Person and work.

In other words, Matthew most assuredly tells us that He was the faithful Servant of God, the sinless Son of Man, and the eternal God, as well as King of Israel; and in like manner the other three writers tell all these things and more.

But the Holy Spirit’s special purpose for each of the four records becomes unmistakably clear as we faithfully and prayerfully examine the Gospels themselves. And, to repeat for emphasis, the four-fold portrait presents our Lord particularly as King of Israel, Servant of the Lord, Son of Man, and Son of God.

Now let us read the four Old Testament passages from which we quoted a moment ago, to see that there can be no mistake about their prophetic reference to the promised Messiah of Israel and Saviour of the world. The word **“Branch”** means *“Shoot,”* or *“Bud,”* or *“Sprout.”* A similar use of the term is found in the prophecy concerning Christ in Isaiah 11:1:

**“And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots shall bear fruit.”**

1. ***“Behold . . . A KING!”***

**“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch (or Shoot, or Bud), and a KING shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS”** (Jeremiah 23:5, 6).

In these words Jeremiah was speaking directly to his own people, Israel.

And our study of Matthew will show us that through that disciple, the Holy Spirit was proving to Israel that Jesus of Nazareth was her long-promised Messiah and King, the One of whom Jeremiah had written centuries previously.

## 2. ***“Behold . . . MY SERVANT!”***

**“Behold, I will bring forth MY SERVANT the Branch (or Shoot, or Sprout)”** (Zechariah 3:8).

It is Mark who pictures the Lord primarily as the One who **“came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many”** (Mark 10:45). He describes the ceaseless deeds of mercy and the mighty miracles of grace of the faithful Servant of the Lord.

## 3. ***“Behold THE MAN!”***

**“Behold THE MAN whose name is the Branch (or Shoot, or Sprout); and he shall grow up out of his place . . . and he shall be a priest upon his throne”** (Zechariah 6:12, 13).

Luke dwells especially upon the perfect humanity of the **“Man, Christ Jesus.”** And is it not a marvelous token of divine inspiration that Zechariah should call Him **“the man whose name is the Branch . . . a priest upon his throne”**?

Our study of the book of Hebrews tells us plainly that the priestly work of Christ began with His death upon the cross, when He shed His precious blood as an atonement for the soul. Hebrews tells us that, in order to become a Priest, He had to become a Man, identifying Himself with His **“brethren”**; for every priest in Israel had to be **“taken from among men”** (Hebrews 5:1).

No angel was ever a priest. Aaron and his sons were priests in Israel, types of our Great High Priest and His believer-priests who are members of His body, the blood-bought church.

Moreover, Zechariah looked down the centuries and saw that the Lord should be **“a priest upon his throne,”** as the **“Man, Christ Jesus.”** What a wonderful portrait of Jesus, who will one day take His rightful throne, to rule and reign over a purified earth! Until that day comes, He is, indeed, seated **“on the right hand of the Majesty on high,”** as the New Testament repeatedly states. Yes; Luke pictures to us the sinless Son of Man.

## 4. ***“THE LORD . . . Beautiful and Glorious!”***

**“In that day shall the Branch of THE LORD be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel”** (Isaiah 4:2).

When Isaiah wrote of **“the Branch of the LORD . . . beautiful and glorious,”** he was thinking of the kingdom of Christ on earth, when He shall reign in righteousness and peace. **“The Branch of the LORD . . . beautiful and glorious”** is none other than the eternal Son of God, portrayed by the Holy Spirit in John’s Gospel.

What beauty and glory shine from every page of this most loved of all books of the Bible!

And why do Christians love it so? Because it exalts the crucified and risen Lord to His rightful position as God, equal with the Father and with the Spirit; the Creator, Redeemer, Lord, and King.

### **“THE LAMB . . . IN THE MIDST OF THE THRONE”**

In the fourth chapter of Revelation, where the throne of God is pictured in heaven, we get a glimpse of this four-fold portrait of our Lord. “**In the midst of the throne,**” where only Deity can dwell, John saw four “**beasts,**” or “*living ones*” (verse 6). These “*living ones*” are designated by the Prophet Ezekiel as cherubim, and have to do with vindicating the holiness of God. In the vision which John saw “. . . **the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle**” (Revelation 4:7).

*It is significant that this symbolism suggests the four-fold portrait of Christ — and in the very same order as that set forth in the four Gospels!*

Thus the Holy Spirit guided, even in the sequence of these four records of the life of our Lord!

For example, the first beast which John saw was “**like a lion.**” In Revelation 5:5 Jesus Himself is called “**the Lion of the tribe of Judah.**” Even as the lion is the king of the forest, so this figurative expression answers to Matthew’s description of the Person and work of Israel’s King.

The second “**beast**” was “**like a calf**”; and the calf or ox is a beast of burden, an animal of service. Thus the Holy Spirit gives us the analogy to Mark’s presentation of our Lord as the faithful Servant of the Lord.

The third “**beast**” had “**a face as a man,**” speaking to us of Luke’s portrayal of the “**Man, Christ Jesus,**” in His perfect humanity.

And the fourth “**beast**” was like a “**flying eagle.**” The eagle soars into the heavens; and here we have a suggestion of the heaven-sent Son of God, forcefully and beautifully depicted by John in his Gospel.

We do not want to take time here to discuss fully the cherubim and their relationship to the throne of God; yet a brief word may add light to the symbolism of the fourth chapter of Revelation concerning the “**beasts,**” which Ezekiel identifies as the cherubim. (See Ezekiel 1:5; 10:8-22). These angelic beings are first mentioned in Genesis 3:24, where we are told that God placed them “**at the east of the garden of Eden . . . to keep the way of the tree of life.**”

The “**flaming sword,**” a manifestation of the Shekinah Glory, and these angelic creatures saw to it that sinful man did not partake of the tree of life, forever to live in sin and shame! It was judgment that drove Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden; but it was also grace, the grace of God, that did not permit them to live forever in a fallen state. And it was the cherubim who guarded the holiness of God, vindicating it before sinful humanity.

Again, when God told Moses to build the tabernacle for a “**sanctuary**,” in which He might dwell “**in the midst**” of His people, Israel, He told His servant to make a golden-covered chest, called the Ark of the Covenant. This was placed in the Holy of Holies, where only the high priest could enter, just one day a year — not without blood from off the altar of sacrifice.

Above that ark, hiding from view the broken law — the Ten Commandments were inside the ark — were two cherubim of gold, with outstretched wings, looking down upon the sprinkled blood, looking down upon the mercy seat. It was a picture of God’s judgment throne turned into a “**throne of grace**” for all who will enter into His presence by faith in the sprinkled blood of the Son of God. And it was the cherubim who symbolized the vindication of God’s holiness. He is both “**just, and the justifier**” of them that believe in the only Saviour of sinners. (Cf. Romans 3:26.)

Once again, the cherubim, embroidered upon the beautiful veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, were constant reminders to Aaron and his sons of the holiness of God. They were embroidered in blue, purple, and scarlet, upon fine, white linen — all of which speaks to us of the beauty and the glory of our crucified and risen Lord. When Jesus died on Calvary, “**the veil of the temple was rent in twain, from top to bottom**,” opening the “**way into the Holiest of all**,” even the very presence of God. Hebrews tells us plainly that the veil was a type of “**his flesh**,” which was broken for us (Hebrews 10:20).

It has been suggested that, as the beautiful veil of the tabernacle was displayed upon four pillars of shittim wood, covered over with pure gold; so also the four Gospels display the glory and the beauty of the Christ of God.

Not only were the cherubim embroidered upon the veil; but, in the same beautiful colors, upon fine, white linen, the cherubim were embroidered upon the hanging over the door of the Holy Place, and upon the covering above the whole tabernacle.

The priests within that sanctuary could never forget the lessons taught by the cherubim, which protect the holiness of God. That is why, when John wrote in Revelation of these “**beasts**,” identifying them with the very throne of God, where only Deity dwells, he symbolically set forth the four-fold portrait of our Lord. The Saviour is King of Israel, Servant of the Lord, Son of Man, Son of God — absolutely holy and just, yet “**altogether lovely**” in His mercy and grace!

How unfathomable are the depths of the written Word of our living Lord! The more we study the sacred pages, the more their hidden treasures are unfolded before our eager eyes! None but God could have written such a Book! And the Person it portrays is none other than “**God manifest in the flesh**,” “**Immanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us**”!

## THE FOUR EVANGELISTS

A glimpse at the four men, chosen of God to write these Gospels, will show us that divine wisdom is manifested in the human instruments selected to paint this four-fold portrait of our Lord.

Matthew was an official connected with the Roman Empire; he was, therefore, God's choice of one to write of Christ in His official connection with the rule of the heavens over this world in that day when His dominion shall be **"from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth"** (Psalm 72:8). Matthew was the only one of the four who occupied anything like an official position. He was a publican; that is, a tax-collector for Rome. He was despised by his fellow-Jews, because the nation of Israel hated the Roman who served Rome as unfaithful to Israel. Being a despised yoke; and they looked upon any member of their nation publican, Matthew could write, from a heart filled with bitter experience, of the One who was **"despised and rejected of men."**

Mark was not an apostle, but he was a servant of an apostle, one who ministered to the needs of others. He is known to us in Acts as John Mark, who served Paul and Barnabas. And in II Timothy 4:11 we read, from the words of Paul to Timothy,

**"Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry."**

It is fitting that Mark, one who served, should be selected to present Christ as the faithful Servant of the Lord.

Luke was **"the beloved physician"** (Colossians 4:14), a student of human nature and of the human body. Therefore, he could write with understanding about the human perfections and the sinless character of the Son of Man. He tells more about the beautiful, sacred story of our Lord's virgin birth than does Matthew; Mark and John do not record the story of His birth, for very significant reasons. And Luke portrays the Lord as the sinless Saviour of a fallen race.

John, who seems to have lived nearest the Lord, who leaned **"on Jesus' bosom"** (John 13:23; 21:20), was the Holy Spirit's choice for putting on record the story of Him who, **"in the bosom of the Father"** (John 1:18), is the eternal Son of the eternal God. John was the disciple **"whom Jesus loved."** And his portrayal of the Lord is beloved by all whose sins have been washed in the blood of Calvary's Lamb.

It was not by chance that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were chosen by the Holy Spirit for their God-given privilege and task of portraying the Person and work of the Lord!

It has been suggested that each of these four evangelists had in mind a certain people or class, who, in turn, were representative of the human race.

Accordingly,

- Matthew wrote particularly for the Jew; certainly there can be no doubt of that.
- Mark, presenting Christ as the Servant of God, made a special appeal to the Roman type of mind, the people who exacted strict obedience to law and government.
- Luke, an educated man, with a world-wide vision, possibly had in mind the learned Greeks, Gentiles of every nation, the whole race of man, rather than the nation of Israel, to whom Matthew most assuredly wrote in particular.

- John, writing a generation after the other three, in order to disprove the heresy that had crept into the professing church, which taught that Christ was not God — John, thinking of Christians everywhere in every generation, made an appeal that strikes at the heart of every true child of God.

He proved beyond controversy that Jesus of Nazareth ever was and ever shall be the eternal God **“manifest in the flesh.”** His message is to the church, composed of Jew and Gentile, bond and free.

## THE PURPOSE OF THE FOUR GOSPELS ILLUSTRATED

Before we consider, in some detail, each of the four Gospels separately, in their God-given order, let us think for a little while of a few selected illustrations of the Holy Spirit’s purpose in each of the four.

Let us remember that it is not our plan to attempt a detailed exposition of these four records — not at all. Rather, in all this series of studies concerning the life of Christ on earth, we seek only to present a bird’s-eye-view of the writings of the four evangelists, not only to make plain the way of salvation, not only to exalt the Lord Jesus, but also to show the divine perfections of these inspired records, in that each portrays Christ in a manner in keeping with the purpose of the book. In other words, we want to keep ever before us in these lessons the question with which we entered upon this study, “Why four Gospels?” Why only four?

As we compare the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, we are impressed with the significant omissions, as well as with the content of each Gospel. To some of these omissions and contents, we would call attention briefly before we look at each Gospel separately; for they illustrate the purpose of the Holy Spirit in each of these inspired records.

For example, Matthew quotes more frequently from the Old Testament than do the other three evangelists, some sixty or more references being found in this first Gospel alone, references which take us back to the Hebrew Scriptures. Moreover, Matthew did not find it necessary to explain his many allusions to Jewish customs and practices and laws. He was writing particularly to Hebrews who knew the Old Testament. He was seeking to show Israel that Jesus of Nazareth was the long-promised Messiah, of whom the Old Testament spoke.

In the first two chapters of Matthew alone, there are five quotations from the Old Testament concerning the birth and early years of Christ on earth: The prophecies of the virgin birth, Bethlehem as the place of His birth, God’s Son “called out of Egypt,” the “slaughter of the innocents” and the mourning of their mothers as foretold by Jeremiah; these are direct quotations of prophecy fulfilled. (See Isaiah 7:14; Micah 5:2; Hos. 11:1; Jeremiah 31:15.) And the quotation, “He shall be called a Nazarene,” Matthew says plainly, was in fulfillment of the prophets — probably from Isaiah 11:1, “where Christ is spoken of as ‘a netzer’ (or ‘a rod’) out of the stem of Jesse.” (See Scofield marginal note, Matthew 2:23.)

While Mark, Luke and John also quote from the Old Testament, yet they do not quote it nearly so often as does Matthew, whose special thought was for the Jew.



Matthew has more to say of the King and His kingdom than do the others. He tells us of the birth of the King, the herald of the King, the laws of the kingdom; and in like manner, throughout the book he speaks to us of the King of the Jews.

Luke tells us more of the story of the virgin birth of Christ than Matthew does; “**the beloved physician**” was presenting this sacred record from an entirely different view. He was picturing the sinless humanity of our Lord!

Neither Mark nor John tells the story of our Lord’s genealogy or birth, for highly significant reasons. Matthew gives us Jesus’ legal right to the throne of David through Joseph; Luke presents His natural right to David’s throne through Mary; but both Mark and John are silent upon this vital theme. Why? Because Mark is portraying the faithful Servant of the Lord; and who asks for the genealogy of a servant? John is presenting the eternal Son of God, who has neither beginning nor end, who “**in the beginning**” was the Word, even very “God.”

All John tells us about Bethlehem’s manger is that the eternal Word of God “**was made flesh, and dwelt among us**” (John 1:14).

It was not by accident that Mark and John omitted the record of the genealogy and birth of Christ. To have included these would have been contrary to the Holy Spirit’s purpose for the books. And whether Mark and John themselves realized it or not, they were being guided by the infallible Spirit of God, even to the very letter!

Mark opens his record with the beginning of our Lord’s public ministry; his key words are “**straightway**,” or “**immediately**,” or “**forthwith**,” words that speak of work promptly done, service faithfully rendered.

Mark tells us about more of Christ’s miracles than do the others; indeed, his record leaves us almost breathless — from the very swiftness of movement, as the untiring Servant of God went forth “**to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.**”

Luke tells us most about our Lord’s prayer-life; for as a Man, He was subject unto His Father, and needed to pray — for fellowship and strength for His labor of love. Luke tells us the only incident from our Lord’s Childhood, as a Boy in the Nazareth home. He has much to say about man’s frailty and the need of a Saviour; much to say about the ministry of women in the Lord’s work. His is the Gospel of the home; setting forth the perfect humanity of the Son of Man.

- Luke tells us that, in His agony, angels ministered unto our Lord;
- Matthew tells us that, when He comes as King, He will command angels!

Whereas Matthew, Mark and Luke tell the story of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness, John makes no reference to it. Why? Do we need to explain so marvelous a fact? John was presenting the portrait of the eternal God, who was ever holy! James tells us that “**God cannot be tempted with evil**” (James 1:13).

Let us not forget that Matthew, Mark and Luke, just as emphatically as John, tell us that our Lord was absolutely holy, that He withstood every temptation of Satan, that He could not be tempted to sin! (Cf. Hebrews 4:15.) But they were portraying Christ as Israel's coming King, to rule over the earth; as the Servant of God; and as the **"Man, Christ Jesus."**

Their purpose was quite different from that of John. And the Holy Spirit included only such matters as pertained to each separate Gospel. Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us how the sinless Saviour met and overcame the devil. John is telling us of the eternal God, whose power over Satan and all his hosts is absolute and unquestioned; therefore, why should he mention the temptation?

John gives us many divine titles for our Lord, which none of the others tell — not that the other evangelists did not recognize His right to them; it simply was not in keeping with their purpose to include them.

For example, the Prologue of John plainly states or definitely implies that Jesus is the eternal

- "Word of God,"
- The "Creator,"
- "The true Light,"
- "God,"
- The only begotten of the Father."

And later portions of this wonderful Gospel proclaim him as

- "The Lamb of God,"
- "The Son of God,"
- "The Bread of Life,"
- "The Christ,"
- "The Light of the world,"
- The eternal "I AM,"
- "Lord,"
- "The Good Shepherd,"
- "The Resurrection and the Life"

These and many more names applied to Christ by John tell us that He ever was and always shall be the eternal Son of the eternal God!

We might go on and on, continuing this comparison between the four Gospels, to show the distinct purpose of each. But this we hope to do, with even greater blessing to our souls, as we study each book separately, in some detail.

However, before we enter upon the study of Matthew, we would compare the first two chapters of Matthew with the first two chapters of Luke. We have observed already that these two give us our only record of the genealogy and birth of our Lord.

A careful reading of these four chapters will unfold veritable marvels of the wonders of this portion of God's Word. As we read, we shall note that the facts recorded in the first two chapters of Matthew are given nowhere else in the Bible; and the facts recorded in the first two chapters of Luke are found nowhere else in the Bible. Yet the two genealogies (Luke's is recorded in chapter three) and the two stories of the nativity of our Lord dovetail into the most perfect, the most sublime, picture the world has ever seen — that of the eternal God's coming down to be born among men — in a manger! Perhaps a brief outline will best show the striking contrast set forth in these two records of the genealogy and the birth of Christ:

## THE GENEALOGY OF CHRIST

### *Matthew*

1. Genealogy of Joseph.
2. Begins with Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel, and traces the genealogy forward to Christ.
3. Presents Christ's legal right to David's throne, through Joseph.
4. Refers to David, the king; and to Solomon, descended from the kingly tribe of Judah.
5. Uses the word "begat" until Matthew 1:16; but there carefully guarding the doctrine of the virgin birth, the Holy Spirit says,

**"Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ."**

The Holy Spirit does NOT say, "Joseph begat Jesus," for this was not true!

6. "Jacob begat Joseph" (Matthew 1:16).

### *Luke*

1. Genealogy of Mary.
2. Begins with Jesus, and traces His genealogy back to Adam, the father of the human race.
3. Presents Christ's natural right to David's throne, through Mary.
4. Tells that Mary came through the family of Nathan, another son of David.
5. Uses the words, "the son," which are in italics in our English Bible. This means that these two words were not in the Greek, but were added by the translators, to make the meaning clear. Again, the doctrine of the virgin birth is safeguarded in Luke 3:23,  
**"Jesus . . . being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was (the son) of Heli."**

6. "Joseph was" son-in-law "of Heli" (Luke 3:23).

## THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

### *Matthew*

1. The appearance of "the an-gel of the Lord" to Joseph.
2. The Christ Child was born of the Holy Ghost.
3. "Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins."
4. The virgin birth of Christ was in fulfillment

### *Luke*

1. The appearance of the Angel Gabriel to Mary, six months after he had appeared to Zacharias, to tell him that he and Elizabeth were to be the parents of John the Baptist.
2. The Virgin Mary became the mother of the Saviour, who was born of the Holy Ghost.
3. Thou **"shalt call his name Jesus."** ("Jesus" means "Saviour.")
4. **"And the Lord God shall give unto him**

of Isaiah 7:14; cf. Matthew 1:22, 23.

5. The wise men went to Jerusalem, and from there to Bethlehem, to present gifts to the King.

6. The wise men followed the star.

7. The flight into Egypt. Herod's slaughter of the innocents.

The return to Nazareth.

Four times God spoke to Joseph "in a dream" concerning the birth and infancy of the Christ-Child. (See Matthew 1:20; 2:13, 19, 22.)

**the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever"**  
(Luke 1:32, 33).

5. The shepherds saw the angels, found the Christ Child in a manger, and worshipped Him.

6. The shepherds followed the bidding of "the angel of the Lord."

7. Mary's visit with Elizabeth. Mary's song of praise — "The Magnificat."

The birth of John the Baptist.

Zacharias' prophetic blessing — "The Benedictus."

The decree of Caesar Augustus which led Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, in order that the Scriptures could be fulfilled! Otherwise, humanly speaking, Jesus would have been born in Nazareth. The circumcision of Jesus, in fulfillment of the Law of Moses.

The adoration and prophecy of Simeon.

The adoration of Anna.

The silent years at Nazareth.

The Boy Jesus in the temple at the age of twelve.

What an array of beautiful stories; yet all one sacred story of the coming into the world of Israel's King and the world's Saviour! Nothing in all history can compare with it for majesty and beauty — nothing save the story of the cross and the empty tomb!

As we compare these two records of the genealogy and the birth of Christ, one may ask: Why did Matthew begin his record of the genealogy with Abraham? Why did he not go back to Adam as Luke did? Because he was writing to Jews, who already knew the Genesis record of Abraham's descent from Adam.

Why did the Holy Spirit deem it necessary to give us Joseph's genealogy, since he was not Jesus' father? Simply because, as the oldest Child in that royal family, Jesus inherited the legal right to the throne of David, through Joseph, the legal father of Christ, not His natural father!

If there had been a king upon Israel's throne in his day, Joseph would have been that king; but the Jews were a subject nation, ruled over by the Romans. The Jews knew that Jesus had every legal and natural right to the throne of David; that is why they "**killed the Prince of life**," saying, "**We will not have this man to rule over us**." Had they not known that He had every legal and natural right to the throne, they would have ignored Him as an impostor!

Why was Mary's genealogy not given in her own name? Because it was the Jewish custom to keep the family records in the name of the man. Joseph was son-in-law of Heli; and Heli, too, was of David's line.

Now the Jewish espousal, or betrothal, was as binding as our marriage law, we are told. About a year before the Jewish marriage, the bride-to-be was "**espoused to**," or engaged to be married to, the bride-groom-to-be. That meant also that Joseph was responsible for Mary's legal affairs, from the date of the espousal. This fact and his obedience to the direct command of "**the angel of the Lord**," accounted for Joseph's faithful care of Mary.

How wonderful that a heathen Caesar in Rome should issue the decree for all the world to be taxed "*enrolled*", just at the time when Jesus should be born in Bethlehem, the city of David, and the city of Joseph and Mary!

This was God's way of fulfilling the prophecy of Micah, written seven hundred years previously, declaring that the Messiah should be born in Bethlehem! "**The Scriptures can not be broken!**" And God always works out His own, eternal purpose!

### **THE CROSS — IN ALL THE GOSPEL RECORDS!**

We have seen something of the purpose of the Holy Spirit in presenting certain details of the Saviour's genealogy and nativity in Matthew, and certain other of these details in Luke. We have seen also that the very omission of this story from Mark and John is in accordance with the special design of those Gospels. There are not many incidents in the life of Christ on earth which are recorded by all four evangelists. The feeding of the five thousand seems to be the only miracle performed before His death, and given by all four; and all of the evangelists tell of the ministry of John the Baptist and of his baptism of Jesus.

But, in this connection, one thing is both significant and fundamental: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John — all four tell the story of the cross and the bodily resurrection of our Lord! All four explain repeatedly and in no uncertain terms:

- That He came into the world to die for sinners;
- That He came and died and rose again in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy;
- That He received worship as very God, as in the case of Peter's great confession;
- That He rode into Jerusalem to offer Himself officially to Israel as her Messiah and King;
- That He was betrayed by His "**own familiar friend**";
- That He was crucified on the Jewish Passover, because He Himself was the Paschal Lamb;
- That He suffered in Gethsemane's Garden and on the cross for a guilty world.

All four of the Gospel writers dwell much upon these facts, devoting whole chapters to the crucifixion and the bodily resurrection of our Lord. Then all four tell us that we are to be His witnesses, going into all the world to preach the Gospel to every creature, even as the Father sent His Son to die for us.

Why do all four of the evangelists record these matters in great detail, when other portions of Christ's life on earth are passed over by one or more, or even all four writers? There is only one answer: The cross and the empty tomb are central, fundamental, indispensable to the Gospel story!

Everything in our Lord's life led to His cross; and had He stayed in the tomb, we should have no Saviour. No matter from what angle the portrait of the Son of God should be painted, no picture would be perfect or complete without the portrayal of the very purpose for which He came into the world. And if His redeemed do not go into all the world with this message, how shall the lost know that He died for them?

Do you see, my friend, something of the special design of the Holy Spirit shining from these sacred pages? And we have touched only their fringes!

In our next study we hope to enter upon a more careful view of The Gospel According to Matthew. The Holy Spirit, who wrote it through that disciple, will teach us the things of Christ, if we open our hearts to His guidance. Not until we get to heaven shall we fully know the wonders of His Person and work. Even throughout all the endless ages, we shall still be finding out the indescribable beauty and the fathomless love of Him who died that we might live. Meanwhile, during our earthly pilgrimage, may we let the Spirit of God teach us more and more to love and worship and honor Him.

My unsaved friend, do you want to share with us in the wonders set before us in these sacred pages? Then look to Him for everlasting life. He died for you; He ever lives; and He longs to be your Saviour and Friend. Let Him into your heart; then you will have "**peace with God**" by faith in His shed blood; then you will know "**the peace of God, which passeth all understanding**"; for "**the God of peace**" will be your Redeemer and Lord.

**"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world"** (John 1:29).

~ end of chapter 1 ~

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