

Matthew 1b

How was the birth of Jesus Christ different from any of the other births mentioned in the genealogy (v. 18)? Previously we saw the repeated formula: "A was the father of B." But here we have the record of a birth without a human father.

What was the marital status of Joseph and Mary at this time? Mary had been promised in marriage to Joseph, but the wedding had not yet taken place. They were betrothed (engaged) to one another. Normally, a one year period of waiting followed the betrothal before the consummation of the marriage. During that year, the couple could only break their engagement with a divorce.¹

What was the dilemma that Mary and Joseph faced (v. 18)? During the betrothal period, she was found to be pregnant. Although an engaged couple did not live together until the marriage ceremony, unfaithfulness on the part of the betrothed was treated as adultery and was punishable by death.²

An angel had previously announced this mysterious event to Mary: "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God*" (Luke 1:35).

A cloud of suspicion and scandal hung over the now-pregnant Mary. In all of human history there had never been a virgin birth. When people saw an unwed woman who was pregnant, they had only one possible explanation.³

Verse 18 is a clear testimony to the virgin conception of Jesus (cf. Luke 1:34-35).

When he received the news, as a righteous man, what was Joseph's plan (v. 19)? While little is said about Joseph, one can imagine how his heart must have broken. He genuinely loved Mary, and yet the word came that she was pregnant. His love for her was demonstrated by his actions. He chose not to create a public scandal by exposing her unfaithfulness to the judges at the city gate. Such a public divorce could have resulted in Mary's death by stoning (Deuteronomy 22:23-24).⁴

A second option was to remain engaged and not divorce Mary, but this alternative appeared to Joseph to require him to break the Mosaic Law (Leviticus 20:10).

A third option was to grant her a quiet, private divorce, in which case Joseph needed only to hand her a written certificate in the presence of two witnesses (cf. Deuteronomy 24:1-4; Mark 10:4). This preserved his righteousness (i.e., his conformity to the Law) and allowed him to demonstrate compassion.⁵

What must have been going through Joseph's mind at this time? Even Joseph did not yet know the true explanation of Mary's condition. He might have been indignant at his fiancée on two counts: First, her apparent unfaithfulness to him; and second, though innocent, he would almost inevitably be accused of complicity. His love for Mary and desire for justice led him to decide to break the betrothal by a quiet divorce. He wished to avoid the public disgrace which normally accompanied such an action.⁶

While Joseph was mapping his strategy to divorce/protect Mary, what happened (v. 20a)? An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. The appearance of "*an angel of the Lord*" in a dream would have convinced Matthew's original Jewish readers that this revelation was indeed from God (cf. Genesis 16:7-11; 22:11-18; et al.).⁷

The angel's address, "Joseph, son of David," confirms Jesus' right to the Davidic throne. This address gave Joseph a clue concerning the significance of the announcement that he was about to receive.⁸

What message did the angel initially convey to Joseph (v. 20b)? He should have no misgivings about marrying Mary. Any suspicions concerning her purity were groundless. Her pregnancy was a miracle of the Holy Spirit.⁹

What did the angel further reveal to Joseph (v. 21)? He revealed the unborn Child's sex, name, and mission. Mary would bear a Son. He was to be named Jesus, (which means "Jehovah is salvation" or "Jehovah, the Savior"). True to His Name, He would save His people from their sins. This Child of destiny was Jehovah Himself, visiting earth to save people from the penalty of sin, from the power of sin, and eventually from the very presence of sin.¹⁰

What was the Old Testament link that Mathew reminds us of (vv. 22-23)? Mary's miraculous conception fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy, and her Son would truly be Immanuel ... God with us (Isaiah 7:14). In light of this declaration, Joseph was not to be afraid to take Mary into his home. There would be misunderstanding in the community and much gossip at the well, but Joseph knew the true story of Mary's pregnancy and God's will for his life.¹¹

As Matthew recorded these events; he realized that a new era had dawned in the history of God's dealings with the human race. The words of a messianic prophecy, long dormant, had now sprung to life. Isaiah's cryptic prophecy was now fulfilled in Mary's Child: All this was done so that it might be fulfilled.....that which had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah at least 700 years before Christ.¹²

What did Joseph do when he awakened from his dream (vv. 24-25)? As soon as Joseph awakened from this dream, he obeyed. He violated all customs by immediately taking Mary into his home rather than waiting until the one-year time period of betrothal had passed. Joseph was probably thinking of what would be best for Mary in her condition. He brought her home and began to care and provide for her. But there was no sexual relationship between them until after the birth of this Child, Jesus.¹³

As a result of the angel's intervention, Joseph abandoned his plan to divorce Mary. He continued to recognize their betrothal until Jesus' birth, after which he married her.¹⁴

In taking Mary as his wife, Joseph also took her Child as his adopted Son. This is how Jesus became legal heir to the throne of David. In obedience to the angelic visitor, he called the Baby's name Jesus.

Thus, the Messiah-King was born. The Eternal One entered time. The Omnipotent One became a tiny Infant. The Lord of Glory veiled that glory in a human body, and *"For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form"* (Colossians 2:9).¹⁵

¹ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Matthew, 2025 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 41.

² William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1205.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Louis A. Barbieri Jr., "Matthew," The Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Victor Books, 1985), 20.

⁵ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Matthew, 2025 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 42.

⁶ William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1205.

⁷ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Matthew, 2025 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 42.

⁸ Ibid., 43.

⁹ William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1205.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Louis A. Barbieri Jr., "Matthew," The Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Victor Books, 1985), 20.

¹² William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1206.

¹³ Louis A. Barbieri Jr., "Matthew," The Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Victor Books, 1985), 20.

¹⁴ William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1206.

¹⁵ Ibid.