

November 30, 2008
Houghton Lake UMC

“The Great Arrival”

Matthew 1:18-25

There are two accounts of the birth of Jesus in the Bible. The first is found in Matthew, Chapter 1:18 through Chapter 2; the second is found in Luke, Chapter 2:1-40. These two accounts tell the same story from two different perspectives, each account adding unique material to our understanding of Jesus’ incarnation.

In Matthew we have Jesus’ genealogy from Joseph’s side of the family, even though he is not the actual father of Jesus. Joseph could trace his lineage back to King David, and this is proven in the genealogical record Matthew provides in his gospel. In Matthew we also view Joseph’s side of the Immaculate Conception – how, before the angel spoke to him in his dream, he was considering quietly divorcing Mary after learning that she was with child. Matthew also records the account of the wise men, King Herod’s ruthless search for the child, the escape to Egypt, and the family’s return to Nazareth after King Herod died. All of these kingly connections were told to emphasize the fact that the Divine King -- the Messiah -- had physically arrived.

Luke shares Mary’s perspective of the Immaculate Conception and the visitation of the Angel Gabriel at the well in Nazareth. Luke recounts Zechariah and Elizabeth and the conception of John the Baptist in their old age, the census that forced Joseph and Mary to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the fact that there was no room for Mary and Joseph in the inn, the angels’ announcement to the shepherds in the fields, and the experiences Mary and Joseph had at the temple with Simeon and Anna.

Only when one puts both of these accounts of Jesus' birth together can we get the full picture of what the birth of Christ was really like and how his birth affected the lives of so many faithful believers of that day.

Matthew and Luke, these two gospel writers, were giving public witness to the testimonies of those who had personally experienced these historical events. Matthew, a disciple of Jesus, could have heard these accounts from Jesus, from Mary, from others in Nazareth, and from Jesus' half-brothers since Matthew was a disciple of Jesus and walked with Jesus for three years. Dr. Luke, the physician of Paul and the most accurate historian of the gospel writers, was very likely retelling the story from Mary's own lips. Luke presents Mary's lineage (Chapter 3) as she also came from the lineage of King David, fulfilling the biblical prophecy that the Messiah would come from the line of Judah, and more specifically the line of King David. Dr. Luke also included the story of Jesus going to Jerusalem when he was twelve years old -- a story that could only have been told by Mary, the mother of Jesus. Since Matthew had written his gospel account first, Dr. Luke could easily have discovered that there was more to the story than Matthew recorded, so when he wrote his gospel Luke included the rest of the events we know today. Luke was including the very human situation surrounding Jesus' birth from the perspective of Jesus' very human mother.

All of this was very important to share with the world because God was doing a very powerful and important thing in their lives. The Messiah had come! It had been the great arrival of the very Son of God, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born through a virgin girl. It was something that only God could do and that only God had done. The people surrounding this birth could only passively watch in awe. God had done this great

thing himself, by his own initiative. Even Mary, after giving her consent to the angel Gabriel, could only watch what God was doing around her, inside her, and through her. Jesus was all God and yet all human. Jesus was the God/man born through a miracle that Joseph and Mary knew was true but the rest of the world would have to simply believe.

We use the term “Advent” -- a coming or arrival -- as the name of the four Sundays preceding Christmas. This is known as the Advent season because we are celebrating the historic event of the coming of the Son of God, Jesus the Savior, to the earth. Let me explain it further. Jesus, as a member of the Godhead -- Father, Son and Holy Ghost -- who existed before he was born, who had created the earth and everything in it, descended into the womb of Mary and God became a human being and lived among us. We call this miracle the “incarnation” -- the moment when Jesus descended from glory and laid down his authority, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, wisdom, knowledge, and power -- and he became a totally dependent baby in the care of a teenage girl. The advent of Christ was a time of total surrender for Jesus -- a time of emptying himself of glory to become a slave to his Heavenly Father’s will. At that moment both the Godhead and the earth forever changed because Jesus would never exist again as the Godhead, omnipotent. Jesus will be forever the exalted Messiah, the high Priest of heaven, and will be with us in heaven in his resurrected human form for eternity.

The Advent season is a time when we remember this great sacrifice of Jesus. It is a time when we remember where Jesus came from and the sacrifice he made in order to bring salvation to us. It is a season of preparation for the church and for the individual Christian disciple. It is the season the church celebrates every year, to again proclaim the fact that God came in the flesh to show us his divine love.

The New Testament was specifically written to proclaim this “good news” to the world. “God became flesh and dwelt among us.” This is declared by John, the disciple who was with Jesus from the very beginning of his ministry. This “good news” was shared around the ancient world by all of the disciples who literally gave their lives to tell their story and make disciples of anyone who would listen. Matthew declared that Jesus was the divine King who fulfilled the messianic promises of the suffering servant in Old Testament prophecy. John Mark declared that Jesus was the Divine Servant who perfectly obeyed the will of his Heavenly Father and did indeed become the Paschal Lamb, slain at the foundation of the world. Dr. Luke proclaimed that Jesus came in the fullness of human flesh and lived and suffered as we do, saving even the thief on the cross who recognized him as Messiah.

So, as Christians we celebrate this great event -- this great arrival of Jesus -- every year as a season of joy as we proclaim to the world just how much God loves us. Advent is the season in the Christian year where we spiritually prepare for the coming of Christ, when we read the Christmas story and remember how Jesus came into the world and also reflect on our own personal Advent stories, when Jesus came into our own individual lives. Christmas Day, December 25th, is the day we celebrate Jesus’ birth, even though we do not know on what specific date Jesus was actually born. The gospels share that the shepherds had their flocks in the fields, so we know that it was after the fall harvest. We also know in the chronicles of historical record that human history changed after Jesus was born, lived, died, and the church was born through the coming of the Holy Spirit. All of this is historical, biblical, and observable even today as the ministry of the church works to share the gospel in this sin-filled world.

What is important as we begin this Advent season is that Jesus is alive today and has given many of us in this room our own Advent experience. God has come into our lives and made them new. Jesus has also established a covenant with us based on his blood shed on the cross and he bids us to join him in this covenant -- to follow him by faith in this life, learning truth and righteousness as a student of Jesus, trusting him even in death, with the hope of the place Jesus called Paradise. It is to this covenant that each of us is called.