

Center UMC/December 11, 2011/Psalm 25:1-5/Matthew 1:17-23/Isaiah 9:6-7

Interpreting the Signs: What Child Is This?

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I hope you agree with me that the conception and birth of Jesus Christ, is in no way normal. To come to grips with the story of His birth, and the miracle surrounding His conception is that it is either pure myth, or completely true. It cannot be partially true.

If Mary was pregnant by Joseph or another man, then the claims of the miraculous birth were ridiculously concocted stories. Now, either the whole bunch of us here, at least those of us who believe in the virgin birth are absolute fools, along with hundreds of millions throughout the centuries, or it is true. Yes, Mary was either pregnant by the Word of God – a Supernatural act, or she was pregnant by normal means and just who the father is will never be known. But please, who would create a story like that?

But is Mary's claim possible? You see, that is the question today. Is it possible that the God of the Universe, the God of the Hebrews and all who will serve Him, the God who reigns in unapproachable light, that God, spoke into the life of this young woman whom we otherwise have no record of prior to this? Is such a thing even to be considered?

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”

John Oswalt, Visiting Distinguished Professor of Old Testament at Asbury Seminary, wrote in his commentary on Isaiah: “In this chapter 9 segment Isaiah reaches the climax of the section begun at 7:1. In place of an unfaithful monarch whose shortsighted defensive policies will actually plunge the nation into more desperate straits, there is lifted up the ideal monarch, who, though a child, will bring an end to all wars and establish an eternal kingdom based upon justice and righteousness. As a child, he is the culmination of Isaiah's use of children to indicated God's providential mastery of history. Here, however, the names no longer express some future event or situation . . . Neither do they directly express the relations between God and His people, as does Immanuel. Rather, they express the remarkable nature of this individual and thus, indirectly, the saving character of his reign. In this respect, he is the ultimate expression of the truth that God is indeed with us (Immanuel), not for our destruction, but for our redemption” (pg. 241, NICOT, Isaiah 1-39).

We find that this virgin-born child will hold qualities and hallmarks of character that might be attributed to an earthly king if the translation is manipulated and forced that way, and maybe one king could qualify for each attribute. Wonderful Counselor, Almighty God (some argue that this text could be translated 'great hero') Everlasting Father (hardly likely because no kingship lasts eternally) and Prince of Peace. But, no earthly king can hold all of these capacities at once. Not one king in Israel's history remotely qualifies. So now, the OT prophet Isaiah brings a message for all time, a message as real for us today as in was in the day he gave it, and in the day it happened at Jesus' birth.

What child is this? What kind of sign is given?

We are told from Isaiah 7 that the sign observed and noted by all who see it should tell the story that causes us to take note. A virgin will be with child. Everyone knew in that day no woman could conceive on her own, and not even today. Science can do many things, but the seed of man is required for a birth. And yet, this sign tells us that man is not involved.

Such big words, such amazing claims about one person, even more a child. How can this be?

Even here we are told that this King's reign would not be limited to Israel at all. The obedience of the nations would be His. What kind of ruler is that? What kind of king rules not just one nation, or over one kingdom, or even over one continent, but instead, "the nations?"

Tertullian of Carthage, around 200 AD, wrote these words: "Likewise Isaiah also says: "For unto us a child is born." But what is there unusual in this unless he speaks of the Son of God? "To us is given he whose government is upon his shoulder." Now what king is there who bears the ensign of his dominion upon his shoulder, and not rather upon his head as a diadem, or in his hand as a scepter, or else as a mark in some royal apparel? But the one new King of the new ages, Jesus Christ, carried on his shoulder both the power and the excellence of his new glory, even his cross; so that, according to our former prophecy, he might thenceforth reign from the tree as Lord."

So, again we ask, 'What child is this?' The answer is: this child, who came to us, God in the flesh, yes God incarnate, that's who. This was God's plan and the only plan to save us. What child is this? Our Savior!