

The story is told of the renowned 19th century artist Paul Gustave Dore losing his passport while traveling in Europe. When he came to a border crossing, he explained his predicament to the guards. Giving his name to the official, Dore hoped he would be recognized and allowed to pass. The guard, however, said that many people attempt to cross the border by claiming to be persons they were not. Dore insisted that he was the man he claimed to be. “All right,” said the guard, “we’ll give you a test, and if you pass it you can go through.” Handing him a pencil and a sheet of paper, he told the artist to sketch several peasants standing nearby. Dore did it so quickly and skillfully that the guard was convinced he was indeed who he claimed to be. His work confirmed his word and he crossed the border.

About 2000 years ago a male infant was born in an animal stable located about 5 miles outside of the city of Jerusalem in Israel. In the context of the billions of people who have born throughout the history of the world, that event would be pretty meaningless – were it not for the fact that we, and countless others throughout history, believe that that baby boy was the fulfillment of God’s promise, to send a savior into the world to sacrificially pay the deadly price for the sins of fallen humanity, so that those who surrender their lives to him, will be forgiven and redeemed and restored back to God.

Now not everyone has believed or now believes or will believe that. We believe that infant, whose name is Jesus, was the Son of God sent by God to be our Savior - because the Bible, which is Word of God, tells us that. The text we are looking at today in gospel of Matthew, a book that was written by one of Jesus’ most intimate followers, clearly affirms that Jesus was the one whom God had promised to deliver us from the deadly effects of our self-righteous rebellion against God. And you would think most in the world throughout the last 2000 years would know that and believe that because the text we are looking today is celebrated every year during the Christmas season. The word “Christmas” itself means the “celebration of the anointed one.” Yet not everyone has believed or now believes or will believe that.

In our text for today the apostle Matthew will prove that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Savior of the World. And as just as the artist Paul Gustave Dore’s work confirmed his word, so did Jesus’ birth confirm the promise of God’s Word, that God Himself would come down into our world in the physical form of a man, to rescue us from the fatal effects of sin, in order to repair our broken relationship with God. And as the focus of Matthew’s gospel is on Jesus as Sovereign King, the words we read today will confirm, *by the circumstances of Jesus’ birth and the events that occurred in his early life*, that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the Sovereign King promised by God through the prophets in the Old Testament.

Matthew confirms, proves that Jesus is the Sovereign King in the first chapter of his gospel. Last week we began to see that confirmation by looking at Jesus’ *human family tree* which listed not only faithful saints but also faithless liars, cheaters, murderers, adulterers, and idol worshippers. Jesus’ genealogy revealed to us that Jesus is the Sovereign King who is sovereignly in control over of all history, assuring that the promises, purposes, and will of God for His people will be fulfilled – and the Sovereign King who faithfully extends grace to both scoundrels and saints, all of us who are in desperate need of a Sovereign Savior King. Today we begin by looking at the remainder of chapter one, where Matthew shifts from looking at the history of Jesus’ *human family tree* to looking at the history of his *divine family tree* to prove that Jesus’ birth was the coming and fulfillment of the promised Sovereign Savior King.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She

will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus. Matthew 1:18-25

The supernatural conception and birth of Jesus proves that Jesus is the Sovereign Savior King. His conception and birth were dramatically different from any other named in his human genealogy. Note that in Matthew 1:16 Joseph is named as *“the husband of Mary”* rather the *“father”* of Jesus, as are all of the others in Jesus’ family tree. This is affirmed in verse 18 when we are told that Mary *“was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.”* Jesus was born of an earthly mother without the need of an earthly father because he is the Sovereign Savior King. We also see this, in that every child born into the world is a new created being. But Jesus, being eternal God (John 1:1, 14), existed before Mary and Joseph or any of His human ancestors. If Jesus were conceived and born like any other baby, then He could not be God. But Jesus was conceived the Holy Spirit, born out the divine family tree of the Spirit of God.

We see that also, in that both Mary and Joseph belonged to the royal house of King David. The Old Testament prophecies indicated that the Messiah would be born of a woman (Genesis 3:15 - *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel”*); and of the seed of Abraham (Genesis 22:18 - *“In your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice”*); and through the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10 - *“The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples”*); and of the family of David (2 Samuel 7:12–13 - *“When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”* We’ve already seen those three families in Jesus’ human family tree. They are also connected to the spiritual family tree of Jesus.

Matthew also confirms, proves that Jesus is the Sovereign Savior King by the prophetic proclamation of an angel, that the One who would be supernaturally conceived and born was to be named *“Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”* The name *Jesus* means *“Saviour”* and comes from the Hebrew name, Joshua (*“Jehovah is salvation”*). There were many Jewish boys with the name Joshua (or, in the Greek, Jesus); but Mary’s spiritually conceived boy would ultimately be called *“Jesus the Christ.”* The word *Christ* means *“anointed”*; it is the Greek equivalent of *Messiah*. Jesus the Sovereign Savior King.

This, Matthew tells us, is proof that Jesus is the Sovereign Savior King, as it would be the fulfillment of the promise of God, spoken by the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 7:14 - *“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel.”* Matthew tells us that *“Immanuel”* means *“God with us.”* Jesus is God, the Son of God, the Sovereign Savior King who came down from heaven to be *“with us”* – in that he lived *with us* and sacrificially died *for us* and take our place *for us* on the cross and rose from the dead *for us* so that he could be *with us* forever after this life – but in the meantime he is *with us* by the power of risen Christ through the presence of the Holy Spirit *within us*. Jesus is the Sovereign Savior King: supernaturally born, of royal ancestry, purposed for salvation, committed to be with us.

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: “‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’”

Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. Matthew 2:1-12

Here we begin to read of the circumstances of Jesus' birth and the events that occurred as a result of his birth reveal and prove that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise to send a Sovereign Savior King. Matthew tells us that after Jesus is born "*wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.'*" We don't know much about these "*wise men.*" What we do know that the word for "*wise men*" refers to a group of scholars who studied the stars. These men were from Asia and they believed God had revealed to them a miraculous star that announced the birth of a King. The star led them to Jerusalem where they sought help in where they might find the Mighty King of Israel.

Again, we see this affirming Jesus Christ as the promised Sovereign Savior King, in that this fulfilled the prophecy of Balaam in Numbers 24:16-17 - "*The oracle of him who hears the words of God, and knows the knowledge of the Most High, who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down with his eyes uncovered: I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel.*" And so in believing they had seen the "*star*" that would lead them to the "*king of the Jews*" the "*wise men*" diligently pursued the path that would lead them to the Sovereign Savior King. We don't know how many "*wise men*" were in this group. People have assumed there were just three wise men because three gifts were given. Likely there were more men, as travelling caravans were fairly large.

What is significant in all of this is that these "*wise men*" were not Jews. They were Gentiles. And because they could travel long distances, they would have been wealthy, as well as being scholars in their own right. They were a people of great position, power and possessions who were looking for someone far greater and beyond than themselves – a Sovereign Savior King: "*Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.*" These were not comforting or encouraging words to King Herod, who was ruling and reigning over Israel. Herod was afraid of the King and wanted to destroy Him. This was Herod the Great, called *king* by the Roman senate because of the influence of Mark Antony. Herod was a cruel and cold-blooded man who permitted no one, not even his own family, to interfere with his rule or prevent the satisfying of his evil desires. A ruthless murderer, he had his own wife and her two brothers slain because he suspected them of treason. He was married at least nine times in order to fulfill his lusts and strengthen his political ties.

It is no surprise that Herod would ultimately try to kill Jesus, for Herod alone wanted to bear the title of "*King of the Jews.*" But there was also a *family-tree* reason. Herod was not a full-blooded Jew but he was descendant of Esau. The age old spiritual struggle between the carnal line of Esau and divine line of Jacob was still at work. And so Herod summoned his "*chief priests and scribes*" to find the promised Sovereign Savior King. And after they searched the scriptures, they quoted Micah 5:2 and they told Herod and the wise men that they would find the King of the Jews in Bethlehem: "*And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.*" And so Herod asks the "*wise men*" to find the newborn King of the Jews for him – and they left Jerusalem and found Jesus in Bethlehem and worshipped him as the Sovereign Savior King - while Herod, and his chief priests and scribes, who knew the Scriptures and who had pointed others as where to look for Jesus, did not themselves go to look for or worship the Sovereign Savior King.

Matthew reveals, confirms, proves that Jesus is the Sovereign Savior King in that when he appeared He was honored by Gentiles rather than Jews. This was God's plan as the Sovereign Savior King is for not just the Jews but for all people groups. When Jesus came into the world he was sought and worshipped by Gentiles, but he was hated and ignored by the Jews. The spiritual leaders of the day quoted Micah 5:2 but they did not obey it. Bethlehem is about five miles from Jerusalem. The chief priests and scribes were that close to the Sovereign Savior King yet they did not go to see Him. John 1:11-13 tells us that Jesus *"came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."* The passionate pursuit and worship of Jesus as Sovereign Savior King reflects what it will look like someday when all of God's people will worship the Sovereign Savior King together when His kingdom is set upon the earth. We see this in Isaiah 60, which begins by saying:

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples;

but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you.

And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Isaiah 60:1-3

Isaiah 60:6 tells us on that day we *"shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the Lord!* The wise men of the east joyfully encountered the Sovereign Savior King when 1) they followed the light God gave them, 2) confirmed their steps by the Word of God and 3) obeyed God without question. Bethlehem means "house of bread," and Jesus said: *"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever"* (John 6:51). Jesus is the Sovereign Savior King who can lead us into the joy of His presence and feed our souls with his resurrected life.

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more." Matthew 2:13-18

Matthew reveals, confirms, proves that Jesus is the Sovereign Savior King in that his birth created hostility in the world. It's been said that person is identified not only by his friends, but also by his enemies. Herod's stated desire to worship the newborn King was nothing more than a pretense to destroy Jesus. God warned Joseph to take Jesus and Mary and flee to Egypt. Egypt was close and there were many Jews there, and the treasures received from the wise men would more than pay the expenses for traveling and living there. But there was something more at work here beyond the pragmatic purpose of preservation – but rather a fulfillment of Hosea 11:1 - *"Out of Egypt I called my son."*

Matthew introduces the theme of hostility against the promise and purpose of God here – and we will see this in all throughout his gospel. It begins here with King Herod as he lies to the wise men and then murders male infants – to which Matthew quotes Jeremiah 31:5: *"A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."* Now before we go too far, we need to understand that when this read this, we must not envision hundreds of little baby boys being killed. There would not have been that many male children of that age in a small village like Bethlehem. Even today only about 20,000 people live there. It most likely that not more than 20 children were slain. But, of course, one is too many. But in order to understand how this horrendous event fulfilled the purpose and plan of God, we need to look at some Jewish history.

The first mention of Bethlehem in the Bible is in connection with the death of Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel in Genesis 35. Rachel died giving birth to a son whom she named Benoni, which means "son of my sorrow." Jacob renamed Benoni with the name Benjamin, which means "son of my right hand." Both of these names point to Jesus, for he was a "*man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*" (Isaiah 53:3), and he is now the Son of God, who is "at God's "*right hand*" (Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Heb. 1:3). Ultimately Jacob would put up a pillar, a monument to mark Rachel's grave which is near Bethlehem. Jeremiah's prophecy in Jeremiah 31:5 was given about 600 years before Jesus was born. It grew out of the captivity of Jerusalem. Some of the captives were taken to *Ramah in Benjamin*, near Jerusalem; and this reminded Jeremiah of *Jacob's* sorrow when Rachel died. However, now it was *Rachel* who was weeping. She represented the mothers of Israel weeping as they saw their sons going into captivity. It was as though Rachel said, "I gave my life to bear a son, and now his descendants are no more."

Jacob saw Bethlehem as a place of death, but the birth of Jesus made it a place of life! Because of Jesus coming as the Sovereign Savior King, there would be spiritual deliverance for Israel and, in the future, the establishment of David's throne and kingdom. Israel, "*the son of my sorrow,*" would one day become "*the son of My right hand.*" Very few people today think of Bethlehem as a burial place; they think of it as the birthplace of Jesus Christ. But the purpose of his birth was to die for our sins, so he could rise from the dead and give us eternal life. We shall live forever with our Sovereign Savior King in the glorious city within the majesty of His Kingdom where there is no more death or tears. Matthew proves that Jesus is the Sovereign Savior King in that his birth will transform hostility into life-giving joy!

But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene. Matthew 2:19-23

This event in Jesus' early life mirrors an event of Moses' mid-life. As the Sovereign Savior King of God's people, Jesus was *in Egypt*, hiding for his life, and God called him (he and his family, through Joseph) to go *back to Israel*. As the patriarchal leader of God's people, Moses was *outside of Egypt*, hiding for his life, when God called him to *return to Egypt*. Though somewhat different, in both cases, God's purpose and plan of rescue, redemption and restoration was involved. It took faith and courage for Joseph and his family to leave Egypt, and it took faith and courage for Moses to return to Egypt. Archelaus was one of Herod's sons, and to him Herod willed the title of king. However, the Jews discovered that, in spite of his promises of kindness, Archelaus was as wicked as his father. Joseph knew that he and his family were no safer under the rule of Archelaus than they had been under Herod the Great. And so they went to Nazareth to live. Matthew tells us this happened "*so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.*" Well, there is no specific references in God's Word that speaks of a "*Nazarene*" – but it is a common prophetic theme that the promised Sovereign Savior King would live a lowly life of rejection - and in Jesus' day Nazareth was considered to be the lowest, most despised towns in Galilee. Even one of Jesus' disciples asked: "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*" (John 1:46). Yet even this reveals, confirms, proves that Jesus is the Sovereign Savior King. His low, despised, humble beginnings remind all of us of our own desperate need for God. But there is also a spiritual meaning to the name "*Nazarene.*" In Hebrew it means "a branch or shoot" and Isaiah 11:1 declares: "*There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.*" Because Jesus lived in a despised place he was like a lowly branch. But that branch has blossomed with the beauty of new life and great glory. Jesus is who He claimed to be. His birth, his life, his death, his resurrection and his work in our lives prove he is our humble Sovereign King: supernaturally born, worthy of worship, source of the joy of life, crucified and risen Savior!