



MT. ROSE REFORMED
ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Lord Saves

Reverend Scott Johnson | December 21, 2025 | Matthew 1:18-25

Old Testament Reading

The Old Testament reading is Genesis chapter three, verses 14 and 15. And this is the inspired, infallible, and inerrant word of God. The Lord God said to the serpent, Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock, and above all beasts of the field. On your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. 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.

New Testament Reading

And now let's turn to Matthew chapter one, and this is our sermon text for today. Matthew Chapter 1 verses 18 through 25.

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 Emmanuel, 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.

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

The Name of Jesus

Last Lord's Day, we looked at the same passage from Matthew, and we considered the name Emmanuel, God with us. This was one of the two names that were given to Jesus at his birth. And the other name that was given to him, of course, was Jesus. And many of you probably know that the word Jesus, our English word Jesus comes from the Greek word, which is a word that is taken from Hebrew. And in Hebrew, it is Yeshua or Joshua. And the word means the Lord is salvation or the Lord saves.

In this name of Christ, Jesus signifies that with his birth, God was fulfilling his ancient promises that he had given to his people from long ago, that he would bring salvation to his people specifically, that the Lord would save his people from their sins. And that's what we'll focus on today. We'll consider how the birth of Jesus was God's accomplishing for us, a salvation, a salvation specifically from sin and from the death that we all deserve, the eternal death that we deserve because of our sin.

The good news of God saving us through his son, Jesus Christ, we hear this so often that it can become familiar to us. And we might forget that God was not under any obligation. God was not bound by anything outside himself to save us. God could have, and He would have been perfectly just, He would have been perfectly righteous, He could have simply left us in our lost condition, in our condemned state. And He would have been just as good, just as glorious, just as praiseworthy if He had done that.

But the fact that God did decree our salvation in eternity, the fact that He did send His Son into the world for that salvation, because he did not have to, this is purely the result of the unsearchable riches of his love and grace to us undeserving people, to undeserving sinners such as us. God freely chose to save his people, although we did not deserve it. And because God bound himself to this purpose because he did determine in eternity that he would save a

people, that he would save a sinful people, there was only one way that he could do that, and that is the way in which he did it, by sending his son, Jesus Christ.

Normally, rightfully, we are hesitant to speak about what God has to do or what God cannot do or what God must do because God, of course, is absolutely free, is not bound by any external considerations whatsoever outside of himself to determine what he does. However, we can say that because God did determine that he would save a sinful people, because he would take a people for himself through his son, that there was three things that the son of God had to do in order to accomplish the salvation.

First of all, the son of God had to humble himself. Secondly, the son of God had to become fully human. And thirdly, the son of God had to maintain his divine holiness. And these are the three truths that we'll consider today as we consider the incarnation of Jesus, the humility of Jesus, the humanity of Jesus, and the holiness of Jesus.

The Humility of Jesus

The first truth, then, that the incarnation teaches us is the humility of Jesus, that the Son of God, in order to save us from our sins, He had to humble Himself. He had to come down to us. Since we looked at this passage last week, I'll just briefly go over the details of all that this passage describes.

It's a familiar story to us. Mary, the mother of Jesus, of course, she was betrothed to Joseph. During that time of their betrothal, which was like an engagement, they did not actually come together yet, they were not married yet, they weren't living together, but during that time, Joseph discovered that Mary was pregnant. And of course, naturally, Joseph assumed that Mary had been unfaithful to him, that she had been with another man. And so, as Matthew tells us, Joseph decided that he would divorce Mary. But he would do so quietly. Joseph was not interested in exposing Mary to public disgrace, but he decided that he would put her away or divorce her discreetly.

But we know that Mary was not pregnant because she had been with a man, but she was expecting a child because the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, had come upon her and by the power of the Spirit in her womb, the baby Jesus was conceived. Now, after Joseph determined to divorce Mary, an angel appeared to him in a dream. And the angel told him this in verse 20,

do not fear to take Mary as your wife for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. And so now Joseph learns the truth that Mary has been faithful, but something extraordinary has taken place, something unheard of that, as a virgin, she is conceived by the power of God, by the power of the Spirit.

Then the angel said to Joseph in verse 21, she will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. And Matthew tells us that Joseph was obedient and he did exactly what the angel told him to do. Verses 24 and 25, 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.

Now, there is much to learn in this passage from the example of Joseph, from his obedience, his faith. He believed the word of the Lord. He received this message from an angel of God in heaven, and he believed it, he trusted it, and he acted on it. He did exactly what the Lord had called him to do. He showed himself to be what Matthew tells us what he was. He was a just man. But that is not the main lesson that the Lord would have us to take from this passage, but the greater lesson, what we are to learn from this passage is what God has done, what the Son of God has done, that He humbled Himself, He lowered Himself by taking to Himself a human nature.

And this is the wonderful mystery of the Incarnation. Something that we cannot begin to comprehend with our minds or to explain or to describe. How is it that God himself became man? That the eternal, the infinite God, that he took on a finite human nature. This is something that we simply trust. We believe that it is so because the scriptures declare it to us. We adore it. We stand in awe of it. We marvel at this mystery, this wonder that God became man. The second person of the Trinity, God the Son, the one who with the Father and the Spirit is true God from all eternity, he became man in the womb of Mary.

The Lord of glory, the one of whom Job said, the heavens are not pure in his sight. He not only became man, but he became a baby conceived in the womb. And so Jesus humbled himself. And it wasn't as we might thought it may be. If we were told that almighty God would come to us as a man, we would assume that he would come to us as the emperor of a great empire, a powerful king, a mighty warrior. But no, he came to us in the lowliest of conditions.

He was born to this obscure country girl in an animal stable, as you know, he was laid in a manger, born in this obscure little village in a far-flung province of the Roman Empire. And so he

came in the most humble of conditions. When the Son of God became man in the incarnation, we always must remember that he remained true God. He did not become anything less than what he has always been, Almighty God. And yet he did set aside his divine glory, his outward splendor, his majesty as God. He set it aside when he became man. And so if we were to lay eyes on the baby Jesus and did not know who he was, we would think he was just another baby boy.

And as incredible as it is, as amazing as it is that the Son of God should humble himself in this way, that he should leave the blessedness of heaven in order to come into our world in this lowly condition, that was only the beginning of an even greater humiliation to which Jesus would subject himself. And that is he would ultimately lower himself to the lowest possible place on earth, and that is he would be condemned to die the cursed, the painful, the shameful death of a Roman cross.

At that cross, though Jesus himself was and remained without sin and holy, nevertheless, he willingly took to himself the sins of his people. He bore them at the cross, and Jesus took on sin and guilt as though it were his very own, as though he were guilty before God and he bore that judgment, that condemnation that belonged to us at the cross. But Jesus had to humble himself in this way in order to accomplish our salvation. If Christ did not bear our sin as though they were his sins, if he did not come as a true man, as our representative, he could not have received in himself that judgment, that condemnation that belonged to you and me. And if that was the case, then God could not forgive us. We would still be in our sins. We would still have our guilt upon us because there would be no one to take that for us.

But praise God, that's exactly what Jesus Christ did. That's what the son of God did. Romans 8, three says, for God has done what the law weakened by the flesh could not do by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh. And so when we consider the birth of Jesus, we have to see it as the beginning of a greater condensation, a lowering of himself that would culminate at the cross. Philippians 2:8, to being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. And if you are Christ's, if you have come to him in faith, if he is your Lord and Savior, all this was for your salvation, for your redemption.

There are two other implications of the fact that Jesus humbled himself in his incarnation and birth. First of all, it demonstrates our helplessness as sinners. The fact that God became man

for our salvation, the fact that the Son of God came down to us in this way, it demonstrates the impossibility it is for us to do anything to save ourselves. Because of our sin, we are absolutely, utterly unable to please God, to render to God any kind of works or service or obedience by which we would be saved.

We cannot make ourselves right with God by our good works. We cannot atone for our sins by extraordinary acts of penance. Apart from the grace of God, you and I are as helpless to save ourselves as a corpse is helpless to make himself come back to life. The Bible says that we are dead. We are dead in our sins and trespasses. We are spiritually without life, completely unable to do anything to help ourselves or save ourselves.

And so God had to come into the world as man. He had to, as man, live the righteous and obedient life that we did not live and cannot live. He had to come into our world as man to offer himself a sacrifice, to atone for the sins that we could not atone for. And for that reason, the angel said to Joseph, he will save his people from their sins. It does not say he will help his people to find redemption. He will assist his people in obtaining salvation. He will save. He will save his people from their sins.

And this is why when you think about the baby Jesus, and this time of year we have images in our head or we see, you know, nativity scenes and so on, or movies. And we think about the baby Jesus, a precious little baby wrapped in a swaddling cloth, lying in a manger. And what might be our natural response to that is probably the wrong response, because our natural response may be to think something like, what a precious thing this is, a helpless little baby boy born to Mary. But what we should be thinking is this, if God came into our world in this way for my salvation, how utterly and completely helpless and weak am I that I should do anything to save myself?

The baby Jesus should be reminded to you and me that God has accomplished a salvation that we could never do for ourselves. He has redeemed us through his son, Jesus Christ, and coming to us in the person of Jesus Christ. He has done what we could not do. And so the baby Jesus is a testimony to our helplessness as sinners before God.

A second implication of the humility of Jesus in the incarnation is that it demonstrates the greatness of the love of God to us. If I can speak in this way, what was it that compelled or drove the Son of God to come into the world to humble himself in such a way that he would be

born of woman, born in these lowly conditions? Well, the answer is it was love. It was love. God's love for sinners such as you and me.

1 John 4:10, in this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins. Now that speaks of the love of the father for us, but we can equally speak of the love of the son for us as well. because the love that the Father has for us is shared by the Son and the Spirit. And so we could change 1 John 4:10 to say not that we love Jesus, but that Jesus loved us and humbled himself by coming into our world as man to be the propitiation for our sins. This is what love is. This is the greatest manifestation there is of what true love is, the love of God for us, Christ coming into our world.

One thing that comes naturally to us is that we flatter ourselves in thinking that we are pretty good at showing love to others. We like to think of ourselves as basically loving people. And so we think, something like, as long as I have not offended my neighbor, as long as I have not committed some great crime or offense against other people, I've loved others. I'm doing pretty well. We like to pat ourselves on the back for our good deeds. On the way into Walmart the other day, I put some change in the Salvation Army bucket. On social media, I follow or like several Christian ministries. I've provided for my family, I'm kind to my children, I'm nice to my wife, I must really be a loving person.

But the incarnation shows us that true love means so much more than that. It means lowering yourself as Jesus did, denying yourself as the Son of God did, sacrificing yourself for the sake of another, just as Jesus did. He came not to be served, but to serve, to give his life as a ransom for many. And Christ-like love, true love, means that you are willing not just to not give offense to others or be nice to others or kind to others, but you are willing to serve others for their good, even serving others in a way that may be tedious and unexciting and unnoticed by others and even unthanked by the person whom you are serving.

And what's more, just as Jesus in the incarnation impoverished himself, that we might become rich, even though he set aside the riches of his divine splendor and majesty in order to come to us as man. So Christ-like love, true love, means that you make yourself poor for the sake of others by giving of what you have, of your time, your attention, your resources. And so the incarnation teaches us the true cost of love, what true love is all about. And that is self-giving, self-sacrifice, self-denying. In a sense, we can say true love costs nothing less than our very lives. We give ourselves up in order to serve others. And so the humility of Jesus demonstrates

the greatness of the love of God. It shows us what true love is. The Son of God loved us and he came to us. He lowered himself for us and he gave himself up for us.

The Humanity of Jesus

The first lesson then that the incarnation teaches us is the humility of Jesus. The second lesson is the humanity of Jesus. The Son of God had to become fully human in order to save us. When the angel spoke to Joseph, if he had said this, it would be a different gospel. The angel said to Joseph in verse 21, she will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus for he will save his people, period.

If that's all that the angel had declared, it may not be a different gospel, but Joseph certainly would have understood it in a different way. What Joseph would have thought is, praise the Lord. God is going to raise up our savior, our Messiah, our Christ to save us. And in his mind, he would be thinking to save us from our enemies, from the Romans, for those who occupied our land, our overlords. The Messiah is going to establish his earthly kingdom in Jerusalem and bring his people Israel into a glorious new age of freedom and prosperity.

That's the kind of savior that the people of Israel were waiting for. That's the Christ that they were hoping for, a political savior, one who would destroy the Romans and establish his reign over a restored people of Israel in Jerusalem, an earthly kingdom. Now that's why when we read on in Matthew, King Herod was so bent on destroying the baby Jesus. Why? Because he was called the King of the Jews. And King Herod was the King of the Jews. He didn't want the competition. And so he set out to destroy the baby Jesus.

But when you consider it, if the greatest need of Israel was that they should be saved from their enemies, from the Romans, there is no need for an incarnation. God could have easily have done that. Just as easily as he brought the people of Israel out of Egypt, he could have destroyed the Roman occupying forces and freed Israel from their bondage to the Romans. But when the angel spoke to Joseph, He proclaimed that the child would accomplish a far greater salvation than deliverance from their enemies.

He said in verse 21, you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. The greatest need that the people of Israel had then, the greatest need that you and I have now is salvation from sin, salvation from sin. And in order to bring about that deliverance, there was

no other way for God to make it happen, then for his son to come to us as man. He had to take on a human nature. He had to become true man. And the reason for that is because only a mediator who is truly and fully human can represent us before God and bear our sins.

That's one of the lessons that we learn from the book of Hebrews. The old covenant had all kinds of animal sacrifices. They sacrificed bulls and goats and lambs and so on. But there wasn't one animal sacrifice that could possibly take away the least amount of sin for a person, for a human. And that's because they do not perfectly represent us. They are not man. And so for a true mediator between God and us, we needed one who was true, true man.

Hebrews 10:4, for it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. We needed one who would share our nature. Hebrews 2:17, therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God to make propitiation for the sins of his people.

And one of the reasons that we have in Matthew and Luke, the accounts of the birth of Jesus, and even though the Bible doesn't tell us a lot about the infancy of Jesus or the childhood of Jesus, nevertheless, what it tells us is that he was a true baby boy. He was a true human. He was made like us in every respect. Apart from the fact that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, everything about the birth of Jesus was very ordinary.

After he was conceived, he grew and developed in the womb of the Virgin Mary for nine months, just like we did. Like many unborn babies, it's probably safe to assume that he probably gave Mary some morning sickness. After he was born, just like every baby who has ever been born, he cried. His umbilical cord had to be cut. He had to be nursed by his mother, just like you and me. And again, it's safe to assume this, the Bible doesn't say this explicitly, but we can assume that Joseph and Mary probably had a lot of sleepless nights after Jesus was born. He woke up every couple of hours, he was hungry, he cried.

And so Jesus was and is fully human. And that's so you and I might have a perfect savior before God. Only He could be our substitute. Only He could bear our sin and guilt before a just and righteous God and take away that condemnation that was ours. And that's what He did at the cross.

Theologians throughout church history have asked the question, would it have been possible for God to save us in any other way than through the incarnation of the Son of God? And we know

that the answer is no. And the answer is no because only in this way could God forgive sinners and bring us into his presence and uphold his perfect righteousness and holiness and justice. It was only in this way by giving us his son as man to represent us, to take away our sin. And so if Jesus is not truly human, he cannot be our savior, but praise God, he is true man and he is able to save us.

The Holiness of Jesus

So the second truth of the incarnation is the humanity of Jesus. The third truth is the holiness of Jesus. In order to save us, the Son of God had to maintain his divine holiness and righteousness. The angel tells us in verse 20, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. Of course, this is the virgin birth of Christ. Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. He was born of the Virgin Mary.

And one reason why it's profitable for us to reflect on the virgin birth of Christ is because if Jesus had not been conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, there would be no salvation for us. Really, the gospel depends upon this teaching, this truth, that Jesus was conceived not by man, but by the Spirit of God. And the reason for that is because if Jesus had been conceived by ordinary and natural means, he would have been born with the very same sin nature that you and I are born with. And therefore he would not have been able to offer himself a perfect sacrifice for us.

And so his conception had to be by the Spirit of God that he might be perfectly sinless and holy from birth. And of course he remained so throughout his life. Charles Spurgeon said, he is born of a woman that he might be human, but not by man that he might not be sinful. When the Israelites, they celebrated the Passover every year, the lamb that they offered to God, it couldn't be one who had defects or who was injured in some way, but it had to be a perfect specimen, a lamb that was without spot, without blemish, only such a lamb could take away, sacramentally, could take away the sins of the people.

As you know, in the Old Testament, Joshua was a type of Christ. Joshua is the same name as Jesus. They share the same name. It's not a coincidence because just as Joshua led the Israelites into the promised land, so Jesus, the new Joshua, the greater Joshua, by his death and resurrection, he would lead his people into the promised land of eternal life and heavenly glory.

But did you know that there is another Joshua in the Old Testament who was also a type of Christ? And that is the Joshua that we read about in the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. When the Israelites returned from exile in Babylon back into the promised land, the high priest at that time was a man named Joshua, the son of Jehozadak. And so Jesus is both a Joshua who leads us as a conqueror to bring us into our promised land, but he is also a Joshua who is our great high priest.

And as our great high priest, he offered up a perfect sacrifice himself. Holy, sinless, pure, a sacrifice that alone could take away our sin and guilt. And so it's fitting that Jesus should be called Jesus, the Lord of salvation. And because he was holy from the moment of conception, because he was sinless and righteous throughout his life, perfectly without sin, he is our perfect savior. And if you belong to Jesus Christ by faith, you have a savior who has delivered you from all the ways in which sin has brought destruction and misery and condemnation to us.

When the angel says he will save his people from their sins, that means that he will save his people from every aspect of sin, from every way in which sin has destroyed us and has robbed us of life. Now J.C. Ryle puts it this way, he says, he saves us from the guilt of sin by washing us with his own atoning blood. And so we are justified in Christ. We are declared righteousness for the sake of Christ. He saves us from the dominion of sin by putting in our hearts the sanctifying spirit. We are saved from the power of sin. He saves us from the presence of sin when he takes us out of this world to rest with him. And he will save us from all the consequences of sin when he shall give us a glorious body at the last day.

And this is why the good news of the gospel is such good news, because we have a Savior who has come into our world to save us from all sin, to save us from all the consequences of sin, to save us from every way which sin has robbed us of that life that God created us to have forever with Him. Another way to put it is that in Jesus Christ, God has met our deepest and most desperate need as sinners. This is what we need most of all, to be saved from sin.

When Adam and Eve made that fateful decision, or that fatal decision, in the garden, take of the fruit and eat, when the Lord had told them not to, when they disobeyed God, did they have any inkling, did they have any idea of the magnitude of what they had done, of the misery that they had just brought upon themselves and the entire human race that would come from them. Every war, every act of violence, every selfish deed, every hatred of the hearts, every sickness, every

death, everything in this life that is the source of human suffering and misery in this world is because of sin.

That is why the world is the way that it is, because sin entered into the human race. And now we live in a world that is always under the shadow of death. And not only that, but what's more, the life to come apart from grace is only the prospect of an eternity, an eternity spent under the wrath of God again because of sin. And it's not because of his sin or her sin or their sin that we need to tell ourselves it's because of my sin, because of my sin. I too have sinned against God. I too am part of the problem.

And so the world that came to be after our fall into sin is a world in need of salvation. We need a certain kind of savior. We don't need a savior who is a political leader to bring us prosperity or peace. We don't need a savior who is a scientist to cure all our diseases. We don't need a savior who is a guru to teach us how to live happy and prosperous lives. We need a savior who is a mediator, who can stand between us and a holy, a righteous God who is uncompromising and is justice. One who is both God and man, who can take our sin and guilt that we might be forgiven.

And that's exactly what God has given us in his son, Jesus Christ. And for that reason, there has never been any gift that was given that is as great as the gift that God has given to us and his son. And that gift came to us that night in Bethlehem when the baby Jesus was born to Mary. Let's pray.