Bible Study twenty-three twenty-one

Wednesday December 15, 2021

The Nativity Stories

Only two of the four Gospels relate stories of the Nativity of Jesus. They are Matthew and Luke. You might well ask the question: “Why do the Gospels of Mark and John not include the birth of Christ?”

One reason is that the Gospels are not biographies; they are not the life story of Jesus. Each of the Gospels are written for a different reason and for a different audience.

Matthew’s Gospel begins with a genealogy. It begins with saying that it is ‘the genealogy of Jesus Christ the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.’ Immediately, the reader knows that this is a Gospel written by a Jews and written for Jews. Abraham and David are two of the most important figures in Jewish history. Abraham the father of the nation and David the great and heroic King.

What is Matthew saying? He is saying that Jesus is the Messiah the promised one of God, in the direct line from David and Abraham. 14 generations from Abraham to David; 14 from David to the great exile; and 14 from the exile to the Christ.

Of course, as neat as the Math might look, it is no way accurate. Abraham lived around the year 2300BC and David in the 11th century. The Hebrews were probably slaves in Egypt for 400 years and more than likely a nomadic people after that for a good three hundred. There is something else. The Gospels will profess that ‘Jesus was born of a virgin’ as predicted by the prophet Isaiah, yet the line of Christ’s genealogy is traced to Joseph.

Matthew restates this in in ch. 1 verse 18. “Mary conceived through the Holy Spirit. In verse 20 Joseph has a dream in which an Angel appears to him and speaks to him the same message and orders him to name the child Jesus. Dreams played an important part in prophecy and Angels too had a significance as messengers of God.

1: 23f “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’ “

Matthew’s story misses out on the journey to Bethlehem and also the visitation of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth. Instead it goes straight to the visit of the Magi in Bethlehem. They came ‘from the east.’ A reference to the idea that ‘all wisdom came from the east.’--- Notice the ‘star’ which always denotes some kind of special event.

Into the drama Matthew introduces the evil Herod, the puppet king over Judea, placed on the throne by the Romans. In Matthew Jesus is not born in a stable but in a house. Mtt 2:11.

They display gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. The gifts are deliberate by Matthew and are high on symbolism. Gold the gift for a king; Frankincense the gift for a priest; and Myrrh that denotes both consecration and a burial.

The Flight into Egypt recorded in ch. 2:13, demonstrates how important the story of Joseph and the story of Egypt is in the history of Israel. Notice that Matthew continually quotes from the prophets. His message is that Jesus the Christ is the fulfillment of the prophecies of old. Mtt: 2:18f.

Again, Joseph is told in a dream of the death of Herod and told to return with Mary and the child to Nazareth. “He will be called a Nazarene.”

The Birth Narrative, in Matthew, lasts only two chapters and moves in chapter three to talk about John the Baptist.

Read Chapter 1 & 2 of Matthew’s Gospel