

In Matthew 1, Joseph discovers that Mary will have a son. From the very beginning, before Jesus' birth, God expects Joseph to put his eternal life in the hands of that unborn baby.

In reality, God expects the same thing from all of us. Now, we have the advantage of looking back on Jesus as a baby. We have already seen Him as a sinless adult, who bore our sins in His death and was resurrected. Nonetheless, if we want to know God, we must put our lives in Jesus' hands.

Christmas is a time we set aside to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Jesus was not an ordinary baby. As we read last week in [Phil 2:6-11](#), Jesus is the eternal God who became a human without sacrificing His deity. Last week, we read about who the baby was; this week, we will read about why the baby was born.

*Why did the eternal God choose to be born as a human baby?* [Matt 1:18-25](#) explains that **Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit so sinful people could know God.**

[Matthew 1:18-25](#) “18 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. 19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. 20 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. 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 23 “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). 24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, 25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.”

Jesus' birth was not an ordinary birth. This passage describes the miraculous **nature** of Jesus' birth and the miraculous **purpose** of Jesus' birth. **Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit so sinful people could know God.**

## Conceived of the Holy Spirit

*What was miraculous about Jesus' birth?* Jesus' conception caused speculation and ridicule for Joseph and Mary and later for Jesus. His birth was scandalous. However, Scripture teaches that **Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit**.

[Matthew 1:18-20](#) “18 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. 19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. 20 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.”

### Virgin Birth

*What was Joseph and Mary's relationship at Jesus' conception?* [Matthew 1:18](#) “... When his mother Mary had been **betrothed** to Joseph, **before they came together** she was found to be with child ...”

**Betrothal** in this time described the period between engagement and marriage. The woman lived with her father (usually for about a year) and she remained a virgin. Betrothal, like marriage, was **legally binding**; that is, they were officially bound to one another and separation would be considered divorce. Thus, any unfaithfulness was considered **adultery**. [Deut 22:23-24](#) describes the OT punishment for adultery for a betrothed woman, which was the same as for a married woman. So, Joseph and Mary were bound to one another (as a married couple), yet they did not yet live together ([Matt 1:18](#)) and Mary was still a virgin ([Matt 1:23](#)).

### Joseph's response

You can see then why Mary's pregnancy would be scandalous. *How did Joseph respond to news of Mary's pregnancy?* [Matthew 1:19](#) “19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, **resolved to divorce her quietly**.”

Joseph's response was both **just** and **compassionate**. He was biblically justified to **divorce** Mary if she had been unfaithful ([Deut 24:1](#)). Jesus points out in [Matt 19:3-9](#) that the Bible does not encourage divorce, even in unfaithfulness, but

Scripture allowed it. In fact, adultery, even during betrothal, was so detestable that it was worthy of the death penalty ([Deut 22:23-24](#)). Nonetheless, Joseph chose to divorce her **secretly**, instead of subjecting her to shame and possible death (cf. [John 7:53-8:11](#)).

## Holy Spirit

So, Joseph and Mary were betrothed, but unmarried. *How was Jesus conceived if Mary was still a virgin?* [Matthew 1:18](#) "... she was found to be with child from the **Holy Spirit**." [Matthew 1:20](#) "20 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**."

Jesus' conception was a supernatural event; He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. *Why was it necessary for Jesus to be born of the Holy Spirit?* First, this shows that Jesus was **not an ordinary man**. Jesus' supernatural birth highlights His deity and humanity. [Luke 1:35](#) "35 And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God." **Jesus was the Son of God, truly God and truly human.**

Second, this points to a comparison between **Jesus and Adam** ([1 Cor 15:45](#)). Both were given life by the Holy Spirit, not natural birth. [Romans 5:14](#) explains that Adam was a typological prefigure of Jesus. [1 Corinthians 15:45](#) refers to Jesus as the "last Adam." God brought about humanity, created in His image, through Adam. In Christ, God brings about a new creation of people, those who are born again through faith in Jesus ([1 Cor 15:49](#); [Rom 8:29](#)).

## Summary

Throughout history, people have tried to explain the complicated nature of Jesus' deity and humanity. **Arius** denied Jesus' deity, claiming that He was created by God. This doctrine continues today in the Jehovah's Witnesses. **Theodotus** claimed that Jesus was born as a man and later adopted as deity. The **Docetists** claimed that Jesus was not actually human, because the physical world is innately evil. Instead, Jesus only appeared to be human.

In reality, Scripture teaches that Jesus is truly God and truly human. He was born in a miraculous way, demonstrating His unique identity. **Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit.**

## He will save from sin

*For what purpose was Jesus born?* Not only was Jesus' birth supernatural; He was also born for a **supernatural mission. Jesus was born so sinful people could know God.** [Matthew 1:21-25](#) “21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 23 “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). 24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, 25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.”

### Jesus

Joseph was instructed to name the baby Jesus ([Matt 1:21](#)) to reflect the purpose of His birth. *What does it mean to save from sin?* [Matthew 1:21](#) “... you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”” **Sin has separated you from God.** God created us in His image and in [Gen 2:17](#) warned that the consequence of sin would be death (because we are separated from the one who gives us life). Adam rejected God and God's will; each of us have rejected God and His will ([Rom 3:23](#)). Therefore, we are all separated from God and face eternal condemnation because we are guilty and God is just.

*So, how can you free from that guilt and condemnation?* No one can undo their guilt or the just condemnation against them. After all, my good deeds do not atone for my wrong deeds; my wrong deeds still remain. [Exodus 34:6-7](#) explains that God is just, but He is also gracious and merciful. That is, God does what is right; therefore, He condemns the guilty. He also shows us grace and mercy, giving us an opportunity for forgiveness of our sin-guilt.

When [Matt 1:21](#) says that Jesus was born to “save His people from their sins,” this describes God's plan for demonstrating His grace and mercy to us through Jesus. Unlike us, Jesus was completely sinless ([Heb 4:15](#); [1 Pet 2:22](#); [1 John 3:5](#)). Yet Jesus died to bear the guilt of sin in His death for all who have faith in Him. Jesus' death does not atone for those who reject Him; there is no other way of

salvation from sin ([John 14:6](#); [Acts 4:12](#)). [Heb 2:14-18](#) explains that **Jesus was born so that he might die to atone for our sins and save us from eternal death.**

### Immanuel

Jesus' birth fulfilled OT prophecy in [Isa 7:14](#) that the Messiah would be born to a virgin mother. [Matthew 1:22-23](#) "22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us)."

*What does it mean that Jesus would be called Immanuel?* First, this does not mean that Jesus would have two names. Jesus was the name that He was given. Immanuel was a description of who He was, not a separate name.

Second, this prophecy indicates a purpose of Jesus' birth. Jesus was born so that we might know and dwell with God. [Matt 1:23](#) gives us the translation of the Hebrew phrase in [Isa 7:14](#), Immanuel (עִמָּנוּ אֵל), which means "God with us."

**Jesus was born so that we might be with God.**

[John 1:1-3](#) explains that Jesus is the eternal God who made the world and everything in it (cf. [John 1:10](#)). We were created for a relationship with God, yet we are separated from God because of our sin. At Jesus' birth, God walked among His creation and His people (cf. [John 1:10](#), [14](#)). **Jesus was born so that you might know God.**

### Joseph's response

*How should we respond to the story of Jesus' birth?* We cannot rightly view Jesus' birth as merely the birth of another baby. After all, He was born of the **Holy Spirit**. He was born to **save** His people from sin. He was born so we could **know God**. Joseph is a short but good example of how we should respond to Jesus' birth. **Joseph believed the message about Jesus and obeyed God.** [Matthew 1:24-25](#) "24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, 25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus."

Joseph obeyed God's command to **take Mary as His wife** ([Matt 1:24](#)). Although He intended to divorce her, he believed God's word and obeyed God's word.

Although this situation would probably lead to lifelong ridicule, he believed God's word and obeyed God's word and took Mary as his wife.

Joseph obeyed God's command to **name the baby, Jesus** ([Matt 1:25](#)). Remember, Jesus' name reflected His purpose. I suspect that Joseph did not fully understand everything about Jesus' life and death for sins. However, he believed God's word that Jesus would save His people from their sins. By naming the baby Jesus, he shows his faith in God's promise of salvation through this unborn baby.

The right response to Jesus' birth is much like what we see with Joseph. God has revealed throughout all of Scripture His plan to save people from sins through Jesus. The right response, therefore, to the message of Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection is **faith in Him**. Faith is more than a mere profession of belief; faith is belief that produces a love for God and devotion to Him. [John 3:16-18](#) explains that the purpose of Jesus' birth was so that we might be saved from sins and have eternal life. [John 3:16](#) states that anyone who has faith in Jesus will have eternal life. [John 3:18](#) states that anyone who does not have faith in Jesus remains in eternal condemnation.

### Summary

Muslims and Jews view Jesus quite differently than Christians. **Muslims** present Jesus as a prophet and as Messiah who pointed people to God (Allah), but He was not God and He did not die to atone for sins. **Jews** present Jesus as a false prophet and a false Messiah. They claim He did not point people to God. He was a failed revolutionary.

All that we read about in the NT, whether from Jesus' Himself or from His apostles, states explicitly that Jesus is the **eternal God and that He was born and died to atone for sin**. He was not a prophet or teacher that encouraged people to obey God. He was **the eternal God who reconciled people into a relationship with God**.

J. I. Packer wrote, "a little knowledge of God is worth more than a great deal of knowledge about Him." That is, we are not meant to know God merely intellectually. We are meant to know God relationally. Jesus told people to believe in Him so they could know God. **Jesus was born so sinful people could know God**.

## Conclusion

*Why did the eternal God choose to be born as a human baby?*

A few years ago, I heard **Ben Shapiro** explain in an interview the Jewish perspective of a Messiah. He explained that the Jewish expectation is a **political Messiah**. That a man will arise one day that will establish **peace in Israel**. He explicitly denied the deity of a Messiah. He will be an **ordinary man** who lives an ordinary life and dies an ordinary death. Defending the ordinary nature of the Messiah, Shapiro said, “In the Jewish view ... any Jew can be the Messiah.”

Shapiro’s view is a great summary of the view of the world into which Jesus was born. Jesus was born as a Jewish man in a society that anticipated a **political Messiah**. He would be an ordinary man, born to establish peace in Israel, to save Israel from their **political opponents**.

Scripture gives us a much different picture of the Messiah. He was not an ordinary man. He was born of the Holy Spirit. That is, He is the eternal God who became a human; He was both God and man. He was not born to save Israel from their opponents. He was born to save sinners from sin. He was not born to establish peace in Israel. He was born to give us peace with God.

[Matt 1:18-25](#) explains that **Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit so sinful people could know God**.