

“Decision Revision” – Matthew 1:18-25

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July 27, 2014

[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.sobc.net.]

If you have a Bible, turn with me to the first chapter of the book called Matthew. In a moment we will reread the opening story of the New Testament. It’s the story of the miraculous conception of Jesus in the womb of a virgin woman named Mary. Most of the details of this text we discussed last week, so if you missed that I would refer you to the church’s website where you can find that sermon, because we won’t have time to rehash most of that. But to jog our memory, here is an overview of the content we covered or introduced last week.

The Problematic Situation (Matthew 1:18)
The Parallel Scripture (Matthew 1 || Genesis 1)
The Possible Solutions (Matthew 1:19-21)
The Predicted Sovereignty (Matthew 1:22-23)
The Prompt Submission (Matthew 1:24-25)

Then, by way of application and implication, we considered:

The Primary Significance (Learning from Jesus)

Today, we are going to add one final heading:

The Post-Script (Learning from Joseph)

Before we get to that, let’s read the Word of God. These are the most important words for you to hear this morning, so tune your minds as I read the text. Start in verse 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. (Matthew 1:18-25)

This is God’s Word...

I’ve called the lessons we learn from Joseph the “post-script” because they are not nearly as important as the lessons we learn about Jesus. The “primary significance” of this text relates to Jesus. This story, along with every other story in the Bible, is first and foremost, on some level, about Jesus or our need for Jesus or

the outworking of the cross of Jesus. He is always the center. The climax. The hope. The point. So, yes, the characters in the story are important, but they're not the main point. The point of all Scripture is Jesus.

We are sometimes far too quick to moralize the stories and seek to identify with the characters, so in this case, most sermons on this text are simply about being like Joseph or being like Mary. And, on one level that is ok, since the author himself has presented them in an honorable way because he wants us to see them in a positive light. In this case, Matthew wants us to see that Joseph is a "just" (1:19) and merciful man and that those are admirable characteristics that all God's people should embody. There are lessons we can learn from the example of Joseph (and we will today), but not at the expense of the primary significance of this story, which is what we learn about Jesus. And even the picture we have of Joseph, as we will see, points us to Jesus and the Gospel.

So, why do I emphasize that? Because I'm going to talk a lot about Joseph today, but I don't want you to get the impression that this story is first and foremost about him. It's not. It's about Jesus. So you have to keep in mind what we talked about last Sunday. You have to keep in mind the lessons this text is teaching us about Jesus and his incarnation.

We see in this story the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, who has no beginning and no end, emptying himself into humanity. God is taking on flesh in this story. He does this not at the expense of His divinity. Jesus is fully God. But Jesus is also fully human. He's the God-man. One person. His divine nature has no beginning and no end. His human nature begins in the events that are described here, but has no end. This is, arguably, the biggest miracle in the Bible.

Last time we saw how Jesus humanity gives Him the unique capacity to relate to us and sympathize with our weaknesses. But the doctrine of the incarnation has something far better to offer us than simply the fact that the Son of God "gets it." He takes on humanity so he can die in the place of sinners, which is our only hope for salvation.¹ That's why we should love the doctrine of the incarnation—it was necessary for our salvation. We celebrated these things last week when we took the Lord's Supper together.

This is the primary significance of this text. It's about Jesus. And Matthew wants us to see that Jesus completes the story that the Old Testament has been telling, which is why he quotes from Isaiah 7:14 here and why he is going to keep quoting the Old Testament throughout this book. And Matthew wants us to see that this story is not a story about our quest for God (that's every other religion). This is a story about God's quest for us. Jesus came without invitation. He came because you were loved, even though if left to your own devices you would reject him and run from God and you have done those very things. Christianity is not about you taking steps to God until you find Him. It's about God taking steps to you. The Bible is the story of God's pursuit of us. It's about God breaking in.ⁱⁱ It's about God giving us Himself.

And, by the way, this has implications for missions, doesn't it? He is called "Jesus," we're told here in Matthew 1, because the name means "Yahweh Saves" and "he will save his people from their sins" (1:21). And He is called "Immanuel" because that means "God with us" (1:23) and that is precisely who Jesus is. In fact, at the very end of the book, Jesus again promises to be forever present with his people when He sends the disciples out to make disciples of all nations. But notice He initiates that. The disciples didn't get together and say, "man we need to get about missions. Let's go save the world. Hands in. On three. 1-2-3 JESUS!" No. They were just as self-absorbed as us. So what we see is God comes to them in the person of Jesus and says "it's about me (not you), I have authority, I'm sending you out to share my message with the world." The trajectory begins with God. As Daniel Montgomery has said:

"Mission-mindedness is not going to come from your leaders inspiring you. It begins with God. Let's look to God. He is a missionary God. It's His mission. It begins with Him and His character and the kind of God He is and the way He's pursuing us. All true mission begins when we get all

wrapped up in the person and work of Christ and find pleasure and satisfaction in who God is for us in Christ Jesus. And out of that a genuine joy will emerge for sharing this message of Jesus, to share this message that is changing us because we know that we are being sought. And we are being saved. We've got something to share."ⁱⁱⁱ

And when that dawns on us, then we get serious about mission. Missions begins and ends with God.

So this is some of what we have addressed in the previous weeks. So with those main lessons in mind, let's look at some of the extra stuff we can learn from the example of Joseph and how that too points us back to Jesus.

The Post-Script (Lessons from Joseph)

Remember, Joseph and Mary are betrothed in this story, which means they are legally bound to one another and heading for marriage. This was much more than a modern day engagement. It was so binding that it took a certificate of divorce to void and Joseph, though not yet married to Mary, can still be referred to as her husband. The relationship was probably arranged by their parents. They would not have had much contact with one another during the betrothal and they certainly would not have lived together. And until the angel appears all Joseph knows is that Mary is pregnant and that he is not the father. He knows this because he has never slept with her. That takes all the guesswork out of it.

The text says he is a "just" man (1:19) and so he wants to honor God in this situation and take serious the law. He doesn't want to act in a way that would be perceived as him condoning the sin. But he is also a compassionate man who does not want to see Mary shamed or, worse, killed as sometimes happened to women who committed adultery. Of course we know that Mary has not sinned and that, in fact, she is pregnant, according to verses 18 and 20, because of a miracle initiated by the Holy Spirit. She is a virgin and yet she is pregnant. That's a miracle. But no one would believe that. Can you imagine that conversation? "Look Joseph, I have something to tell you. I'm pregnant. I know what you're thinking, but actually it was the Holy Spirit." That's a tough pill to swallow, particularly if you were the betrothed.

So this could not have been an easy situation for Joseph. But being the kind of man he was, he decides to divorce her quietly so as to not add to the inevitable shame that Mary would experience as her pregnancy progressed. She's going to have it rough, this will almost certainly mean she will forever be poor, and it may mean that she would die, but he chooses not to add to that and thereby spare her (he hopes) from an even worse fate. It seemed like the best solution possible, given the facts he had. He's thinking about her. This really is a compassionate move and not one that most men would have made.

Therefore, God intervenes by sending an angel to let Joseph in on the truth and give him some instructions. Then we see the character of Joseph on display yet again in his prompt submission. Look again at 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."* Without hesitation, apparently, Joseph believed and is obedient.

By the way, "knew her not" is an ancient euphemism for "he didn't sleep with her"... which is a modern euphemism for there was no sex happening. But notice the clause he adds to that, "until she had given birth to Jesus..." Commercial: There is a common Roman Catholic teaching concerning the perpetual virginity of Mary. Have you heard of this? Basically it claims that Mary remained a virgin her whole life, not just until Jesus was born. This is a theological deduction and not a biblical teaching (probably based on the tendency to elevate the life of celibacy in that tradition).^{iv} You may be surprised to know that Martin Luther and John Calvin also held this belief. But they were all wrong and here Matthew seems to suggest as much. She remained a virgin (what does it say?) "until she had given birth to a son..." The implication

is that after Jesus is born, Joseph enjoyed normal conjugal relations with his wife. (In fact, you could argue that as a married couple it would have been sinful not to.^v) Which would explain why the New Testament mentions brothers and sisters of Jesus (or, rather, half-brothers and -sisters)^{vi} and why there are a couple of New Testament books written by two of His half-brothers. (end of commercial). Back to Joseph.

Now, none of us have been in the situation that Joseph was in. But we all have been, or may even currently be in, situations that require very difficult choices. I think we can learn something from the priorities of Joseph. His initial solution, flowed out of his character and priorities. On the one hand, he was righteous and, therefore, interested in preserving his righteous reputation with God. (and notice how I said “with God”) because for him to deal with the matter quietly will likely mean his own reputation will take a hit. But his righteous character leads him to act in a way that seeks first doing right in God’s eyes, pursuing the glory of God, and not the glory of his own reputation.

And on the other hand, he was compassionate and, therefore, desires to act graciously towards Mary, not exposing her to public shame, despite what appeared to Joseph to indicate infidelity. He’s more concerned about the good of her reputation than he is the good his own reputation before men. His solution, therefore, was a good one, in light of the information he had, because it balanced well these priorities. He sought to glorify God and love Mary.

And notice that verse 19 puts this unwillingness to put her to shame along side the fact that he was a “just” or “righteous” man (depending on your English translation). Do you get what that is saying? It means that a righteous person doesn’t have to condemn others to be righteous himself. It’s one thing to subscribe to a biblically defined morality, it’s another thing to come off as mean-spirited and unloving person who hates sinners and seems to have forgotten that we are sinners too. Joseph was convinced that a heinous sin has occurred—against both him and God—yet he still pursues the course of mercy, and forgiveness, and protection on behalf of the alleged guilty one. That is a good example for us. His decision reflects a love for both God and people (in this case Mary), which is really the intention of the entire law of God.

Now, let’s take those priorities and lay them over our lives. Most if not all of us in this room have been thinking very hard lately on some decision that seems “huge” to our current situation. You’ve been weighing the options, considering the outcomes, struggling to make a decision. I wonder if, in our decision-making, we betray the same priorities of Joseph. I wonder if in all of our plotting and scheming we have ever paused to ask what decision is going to make the most of the glory of God and be good for those around us. My suspicion is, because of our sinfulness, we have a tendency to think about what’s best for our own glory and reputation. Be honest (I know this is church an all and we have been conditioned to come in and pretend that we got it all together, but) what has been the driving force of your decision-making? The glory of God? The name and reputation of Jesus? OR is it what’s best for your own glory? Your own preferences? Your own reputation? Your own whatever?

There are a couple interesting verses in John 12, that say, “...many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; FOR [i.e., this is the reason:] they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God...” (John 12:42-43)

I wonder, church, how many of us, in our decision-making, reflect the righteous character of Joseph, seeking first the glory of God and the good of people, even at the expense of our own reputation? And I wonder how many of us, in our decision-making, in the words of John 12, “love the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God...” Has the glory of God, even factored into your decision-making? Chances are, if your decisions are motivated by what is in your best interest, then it hasn’t. If we are thinking about what is in our best interest at the expense of what is in the best interests of others, or the church, then chances are, you’re more of a John 12 decision-maker than you are a Joseph. Let that verse

weigh heavy on you this week, “do we love the glory that comes from men, more than the glory that comes from God”?

Do you want another litmus test to answer that question? Probably not, but I’m going to give you one because that is what you pay me for. What do you do when you are confronted with the Word of God? Do you dismiss it? Or do you apply it, even it is cost you much, or requires you to swallow your pride, or submit to and serve others, or be subjected to financial loss, etc...?

What did Joseph do? He did the best he could with the information he had, he acted out his godly priorities, but when he was confronted by the Word of God that revealed that he was wrong and making a mistake, what did he do? He submitted. And he did it immediately. I wish I could claim that as my story, but I often don’t. Or if I do, it’s not immediate. Why? Because I love my own glory too much.

So, we can learn from Joseph, especially with reference our decision-making. Are we, like him, motivated by righteousness, seeking the glory of God and not men, seeking the good of others and his people (the church), and promptly submitting to the correction and instruction of the Word of God when it confronts us?

As we wind down, let me just point out a couple of ways Joseph points us to the Gospel. There is a sense in which he reminds us of us and a sense in which he reminds us of Jesus. Let me explain...

Joseph Reminds Us of Us (The Cost of Jesus Coming into Your Life)

On one level, Joseph reminds us of us because he is finite and he doesn’t know all the facts. We can relate. And there will be times when we come up with a plan, we feel like its coming from a desire to please God and love others, but God closes the door to prevent us from moving on it. That can be discouraging, but when it happens it’s because there information that we are not taking into account. God sees something we don’t. We need to trust Him and revise our plans (even the ones that seem so good) as He makes his plan clear so that our plans conform to His.

On another level, we can relate to Joseph because he was afraid when Jesus was on the brink of coming into his life. And in that moment, Joseph is at the verge of sweeping Jesus out of his life. Joseph seems to have something that Mary doesn’t have and that’s a choice on whether or not Jesus is going to be a part of his life. Here’s the choice: he can welcome this Christ child into his life and into his home and embrace the difficulties and the shame that this choice would bring (particularly in a small town where every one would have assumed the worst about Joseph and Mary) OR he can have a much simpler and less controversial life apart from Mary and the child. But he can’t have both.

And, listen, when the angel confronts Joseph, he doesn’t suggest that his problem is simply that he’s trying to do the right thing but he’s making the wrong decision. The angel suggests that problem is fear. Joseph doesn’t realize it. But on some level he is being driven by fear. Look at verse 20, “*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...’*” So it’s not, “hey there, don’t be afraid because I’m an angel and that is terrifying.” It’s “don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife.” So that suggests that fear was driving Joseph’s decision to some extent. What we are not told is what he was afraid of. For example, was he afraid to follow through in marriage to Mary because he thought it would displease God. Or was he afraid to marry her because it would mean he would be entering into her disgrace and that is going to cost him a lot socially and economically in the world. We’re not told. It simply suggests that he was afraid to marry her and by extension allow Jesus into his life. Therefore, if he was going to take Jesus into his life it was going to take courage.

Friends, the same is true for all Christians. God needs to give us courage to receive Jesus into our lives. It takes courage. It takes courage precisely because Jesus is not something that can just be added to your life with disrupting it. No, He's not an add-on. If He's going to be in your life, it's going to cost you something. Not in the sense of earning or bartering or buying your salvation. No, salvation is a free gift that Jesus alone has earned and can offer. But saying yes to that offer, means saying no to other things. And in that sense having Jesus in your life costs you. This is why Jesus at various points during his ministry had people consider what following Him might cost them (see Luke 14:25-33).

We need God to give us courage to accept a few things.^{vii} First, that...

Jesus Coming into Your Life Will Cost You Your Self-Sufficiency

[Illustration about Children Learning to Exhaust Their Self-Sufficiency]

Joseph is told to name the child "Jesus" because, as we have seen, that name points to the fact that "He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). And that points to the fact that we needed saving. And Joseph did too. The angel is announcing to Joseph his own Savior too.

Jesus came not because people simply needed an example to follow, or a leg up, or a little help. No, He came because we needed a Savior. We needed to be rescued. Sinners, like us, have nothing to contribute to their salvation except sin. And until we get that we will never experience the salvation that Jesus offers. We have to come to a point where we acknowledge that our sin has separated us from God. We are broken. We are spiritually dead in our sin. We are moral failures. We don't love God with all our heart, soul, mind, or strength. We are guilty. We need to repent and we don't. We need someone else to save us. We are heading for an eternity without God apart from Christ's work.

If you can't acknowledge those facts, then you are still banking on your self-sufficiency. You are still trying to save yourself in some way, maybe through your own efforts or religious activity. And it's not working and it never will. You have to admit your insufficiency, before you will ever turn to Jesus for salvation. Period. You have to reach the end of the rope of your self-sufficiency. And that takes courage. And that's why most people don't like a Gospel of grace. They're cowards. Grace scares them. They would rather trust themselves than trust completely and totally in the work of Christ. But if Jesus is going to come into your life, it's going to cost you that self-sufficiency.

Second...

Jesus Coming into Your Life Will Cost You Your Reputation

Joseph essentially has three options. As far as his reputation is concerned, the best thing he could have done was a very public divorce in which Mary would be shamed for her alleged unfaithfulness and Joseph vindicated in the eyes of the general public. The second option was Joseph initial decision. He can divorce her quietly to spare her some of the shame, but in the process his reputation is going to take a hit because in a small town and a honor/shame culture some people will read between the lines and come to their own conclusions about Joseph. It's unlikely he would get out with a undamaged reputation. But, for Mary's sake, he was willing to accept that. The third option, the one Joseph ultimately chose with a little encouragement from the angel, was to go through with his marriage plans with Mary and adopt Jesus as his own child. This will mean the biggest hit to Joseph's reputation.

People would do the math and conclude that either Mary was unfaithful and Joseph didn't seem to mind or Joseph and Mary were together sexually before marriage. And there is really no way for Joseph to explain

the truth. He can't say, "now listen guys, I can explain. It was the Holy Spirit." People won't understand the truth. So for him to go through with it and bring Jesus into his life cost him his reputation.

In a way, on a much smaller level, that's true for us Christians. The world doesn't understand the Gospel. It doesn't fit the grid. Even if non-Christians believe in a God, they assume that only the very good people would get to Him. So when Christians claim that they will be with God, it's sound arrogant to the world because they don't understand the truth.

The world didn't receive Jesus once they realized He didn't fit the grid. And if they didn't receive Jesus, then why would they accept those who are following Jesus. Joseph experienced disdain from the world. He was marginalized. His reputation was ruined. And this will be true for Christians, though to a much lesser extent in most cases. If you're walking with Jesus, not everyone is going to like you anymore. They're not going to understand your lifestyle. They may not honor you because they do not honor Christ. You may not get the promotion at work if Jesus has full reign in your life. You may not be voted most popular in school if Jesus is who you're living for. You may have people slander you, because they don't understand Jesus or because they hate Him and you by extension. Our pretty reputations in the eyes of the world may suffer. But Jesus is worth it. Are we willing to incur the disdain of the world, if it means hearing the Lord says, "well done good and faithful servant"? Are we willing to have our reputations dragged in the same dirt as Jesus? It will take courage, a God given courage. But having Jesus in our lives may cost us our reputations and will force us to trust in God and His timing for our vindication. Just like Joseph. Are you willing to trust Jesus when he says you are "blessed when other revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you on my account"? Are we willing to "rejoice and be glad, for great is our reward in heaven..." (Matthew 5:11-12).

And third...

Jesus Coming into Your Life Will Cost You Your Self-Determination

It's a big deal for a father to name a son, especially in the first century. But Joseph is told that he doesn't get to choose the name. God has chosen a name. And Joseph obediently names the child "Jesus." He doesn't get to determine that. God does. Naming was a sign of authority, and ultimately all authority would be given to Jesus, including authority over Joseph.

Jesus came as Savior and Lord. We cannot have Him as Savior without having Him as our Lord. And we cannot truly have Him as our Lord with conditions. In a book called *Mere Christianity*, by C. S. Lewis, there is a chapter called "Counting the Cost." And Lewis gives this illustration of how we are quite comfortable with Jesus coming into our lives and cleaning out a few gutters, but we soon discover that Jesus has more in mind than that.

"Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make any sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of - throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself."^{viii}

Jesus doesn't come into our lives to make little changes. He's coming into our lives to change everything. We don't get to choose what He can touch. If we want Him in our life, we have to give up our right to self-determination. That is what it means for Jesus to be our Lord. What he says goes.

So in these ways, I think Joseph reminds us of what it means for us when Jesus comes into our lives. But, as we close, let me also mention that...

Joseph Reminds Us of Jesus (Willing to Take On the Shame of Another)

Now, he's an imperfect reflection. But in one sense, what he does is very Christlike. Here's what I mean. Mary's life was inevitably changed. She had no choice in the matter. She was pregnant. Like it or not this child was going to change her life. Her weakness was inevitable and unavoidable.

Joseph on the other hand could have escaped the situation. He could have left her in her disgrace. For Joseph there is a choice, something voluntary. "Joseph voluntarily identified with Mary so that her weakness and her disgrace became his."^{ix} If he had not, she could have died from either being pelted with rocks in accordance with the law or from a life of starvation that an unwed mother would have constantly been on the verge of in the first century. The only way for her to be spared that, was for Joseph to join her in her disgrace. Joseph had to lay down his life, in other words.

So when you think of Joseph, think of Jesus. Because that is what He has done for us on a large scale. Our weakness was inevitable, our shame unshakable. But Jesus voluntarily came to us and took on our humanity that we might be delivered from the cost of our sinful condition. That's the kind of God we serve. A God with Us. Immanuel. One who was not ashamed to identify with us that He might lift us up.

It takes courage to receive Jesus into your life. But God grants the courage. Turn from your sins and turn to Jesus and live.

Let's pray...

ⁱ Bruce Ware writes, "To obey to the point of death requires the ability to die, and for this, Jesus had to be human. To be placed on a cross required that he be in a human body, and so again, this obedience required that he be fully human." Bruce Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus: Theological Reflections on the Humanity of Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 26.

ⁱⁱ In *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer writes, "We see now what it meant for the Son of God to empty Himself and become poor. It meant a laying aside of glory (the real kenosis); a voluntary restraint of power; an acceptance of hardship, isolation, ill-treatment, malice, and misunderstanding; finally, a death that involved such agony—spiritual, even more than physical—that His mind nearly broke under the prospect of it. (See Luke 12:50, and the Gethsemane story.) It meant love to the uttermost for

unlovely men, who ‘through his poverty, might become rich.’ The Christmas message is that there is hope for a ruined humanity—hope of pardon, hope of peace with God, hope of glory—because at the Father’s will Jesus Christ became poor, and was born in a stable so that thirty years later He might hang on the cross. It is the most wonderful message that the world has ever heard, or will hear.”

ⁱⁱⁱ From a sermon by Daniel Montgomery called “The Birth of Jesus,” preached at Sojourn Community Church on July 25, 2005.

^{iv} Other examples of this would be the “Immaculate Conception” and the “Bodily Assumption” of Mary. The “Immaculate Conception” does not refer to the conception of Jesus in Mary’s womb, but to the conception of Mary in her mother’s womb. It seems to have developed as an explanation for how Mary could have been born without the stain of original sin so as to not pass that sinful nature on to Jesus. In 1854, Pope Pius IX pronounced declared this to be an infallible doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, though the view had been held in several circles many years before this. The Catechism of the Catholic Church adds, “Mary benefitted first of all and uniquely from Christ’s victory over sin: she was preserved from all stain of original sin and by a special grace of God committed no sin of any kind during her whole earthly life.” Of course, there is no biblical evidence for this and it is certainly wrong (if Mary was sinless, then why would she need God to save her? Cf. Luke 1:46-47). But since it was believed, there had to be an explanation of why Mary would have been subjected to death if she had not sinned. For this reason, it seems to me, the “Bodily Assumption” dogma emerges to explain away that tension, by claiming that she never did not die but was instead taken into glory at the end of her life on earth. This was declared by Pope Pius XII to be an infallible doctrine on November 1, 1950. But, again, there is no biblical support for such a belief. An easier explanation is that Mary needed a Savior every bit as much as we did and that she did in fact die and entered into glory, not because she had never sinned but because Jesus had forgiven her sins on the basis of his work on the cross and in His resurrection. The virgin birth is not the explanation for the sinlessness of Jesus, but rather the explanation for the incarnation. Furthermore, as Michael Andrus points out, “why stop at Mary? If a sinless Jesus requires a sinless Mary, how can you have a sinless Mary unless her parents were also sinless. And if you keep backing up, pretty soon you will have a sinless Adam and Eve and the whole doctrine of Original Sin goes out the window” (from a sermon called “Holy Mary, Mother of God?” preached on December 10, 2006). In other words, the belief in the “Immaculate Conception” of Mary doesn’t solve the dilemma of why Jesus did not inherit Original Sin, it just pushes the dilemma back a generation. Furthermore, the problem only exists because of several flawed premises.

^v Cg. 1 Corinthians 7.

^{vi} See Matthew 13:54ff.; John 7:5; Acts 1:14.

^{vii} I’ve organized and arranged the thoughts differently, but Timothy Keller makes the same basic points in a sermon called “The Courage of Christmas,” preached to Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City on December 21, 1997.

^{viii} C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 205.

^{ix} Keller, “The Courage of Christmas.”