

# Popular Commentary of the Bible

THE NEW TESTAMENT

Volume I

The Gospel according to Saint Matthew

The Gospel according to Saint Mark

The Gospel according to Saint Luke

The Gospel according to Saint John

The Acts of the Apostles

*By*

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## FOREWORD.

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Four hundred years ago, in the fall of 1521, Dr. Martin Luther, in the seclusion of Wartburg Castle, conceived the stupendous task of translating the Bible into the vernacular of his country. Through the performance of this astounding work Luther removed the Book of Books from the library and study of the scholar and placed it where the divine Author of the Word desired it to be, in the hands of the people. Luther has made the Bible a *popular book*, studied, understood, and loved by all.

The Bible is a clear book, the clearest and simplest of all books found the world over. Its style is popular, its language that of every-day life. Its profoundest truths are expressed in terse, pithy sentences, composed of simple, home-spun words; its grandest lessons are clothed in diction that commends them to the child as well as to the sage. God has suited it to the understanding of all men because He intended it for all, as humanity's choicest gift and blessing. By its very purpose the Bible is a clear book, a popular book, the Book of books.

No one appreciated this fact more than the great Reformer of the Church. If Luther at one time voiced the wish that all books might perish, it was not because he despised books, but because he desired the Bible to be recognized and read as the profoundest, worthiest, and holiest of books. Notwithstanding, Luther, even while translating the Bible into the vernacular, published commentaries on the Bible, and continued to write commentaries until his death. In a larger sense all the writings of Luther are explications of Bible-truths.

His sermons, lectures, epistles, his confessions and polemics, are centered and grounded in the Bible. In his own judgment his manifold works possessed value only in so far as they interpreted, set forth, and impressed the sacred verities of God's Word. Luther was a disciple of Christ by the Bible, of the Bible, and for the Bible, the staunchest believer in the Bible as the only source and norm of faith. Luther wrote in order that Holy Writ might be universally read.

To this very hour the Lutheran Church, following in the footsteps of its great teacher, cherishes the lesson which Luther expounded to the world. Her motto is to this day: *Sola Scriptura*, the Bible alone. By the grace of God the Lutheran Church has remained the Bible Church. There is no duty which she urges more than that of searching the Scriptures; there is no task which she performs more devoutly and conscientiously than that of teaching the Bible; there is no distinction which she covets more than that of being faithful to the Bible; there is no principle for which she would shed her blood more willingly than for that of *Sola Scriptura*.

Four hundred years after Luther's sojourn at Wartburg Castle, in the fall of 1921, the Church of Luther in America offers to the world a new commentary on the Bible. In itself there is nothing unusual about this. Ever since Luther's time, yes, ever since the time of the apostles, hundreds of commentaries have been given to the Christian public in all lands. Within the Lutheran Church alone the range of exe-

getical literature is tremendous. Nevertheless we claim that the offer of the Lutheran Church in publishing a Bible commentary is something unusual. Dr. Kretzmann's POPULAR COMMENTARY possesses a unique distinction. It is not a scientific or critical commentary in the sense in which these terms are usually employed. It contains no detailed discussions of grammatical technicalities, of etymology, of variations in the manuscripts, and of heterodox opinions. Its aims are practical; it is a commentary for the people. Its purpose is to open to the common people the portals to the marvelous treasure-house of God's wisdom, not in order that people might admire the golden portals, but that they might adore the divine fulness of God's wisdom and truth. The POPULAR COMMENTARY is a Lutheran commentary composed in the spirit of Luther, whose one paramount desire was to have all people read and understand, believe and live the Bible. It is a commentary such as Luther would have written, had he lived in America to-day, a commentary of the Bible and for the Bible.

However, not only the spirit, but also the content of the POPULAR COMMENTARY is Lutheran to the core. Dr. Kretzmann's commentary reproduces Luther, his theology and religion, his faith and piety. During the four hundred years since Luther bequeathed to the world his popular Bible, scores of teachers have, under the name of Luther, given to the reading public hundreds of commentaries which Luther would have denounced as begotten of the devil, had he lived to see them. Rationalism and Higher Criticism have outraged the Bible also within the Lutheran Church. At this writing there is hardly a commentary even within the Lutheran Church which perfectly reproduces Luther's theology and sets forth the pure, unadulterated Lutheran doctrine. Dr. Kretzmann's commentary does not belong to this class. It offers to Lutheran Christians nothing but sound Scripture doctrine on the basis of the soundest, believing, Biblical scholarship. Because of this we claim that the POPULAR COMMENTARY

possesses unique distinction. It is a popular commentary in the truest sense of the term; a commentary for the people, and offering to the people nothing but unalloyed exposition of the Bible.

While Dr. Kretzmann's POPULAR COMMENTARY is a popular commentary, it is at the same time a learned commentary. Since it is to serve not only Christian fathers and mothers in their homes, but also teachers in Christian day-schools and Sunday-schools, and pastors in the preparation of their instructions and addresses, every means has been utilized to render all explanations scientifically correct and reliable. The exposition is entirely from the Greek and Hebrew text; the chief peculiarities of language and grammar are carefully noted, and the latest lexicographical researches have been freely consulted. In many instances a literal rendering into English or an exact transcription of the original text brings out the grammatical construction and the force of the original. The interpretation is based upon the original text, as the best manuscripts offer it, and wherever two readings are equally attested, they both receive consideration in order that full justice might be done to the words of the text. Besides this, the commentary contains other commendable features. Care has been taken to explain all historical references and to supplement them from profane history, while all geographical and archeological references receive proper attention, objections on the part of Higher Criticism being briefly, but ably confuted. In the *excursus*, which are found at the end of many chapters, doctrinal, ethical, and social questions are thoroughly discussed, and the many footnotes offer references for further study, while the bibliographical indications may serve for advanced work. In short, nothing has been omitted that might make the POPULAR COMMENTARY valuable as a reliable and exhaustive work of reference. And all this vast and varied material is offered to the reader in the most lucid form possible. The discourse is connected, and the Bible-text is interwoven with the com-

mentary proper, thus offering a chain of continuous paragraphs, full of sparkling, precious thoughts, expressed in idiomatic and elegant English. At no place is the reader awed by a display of erudition; yet the professionally trained reader will promptly recognize the scholarliness of the running comment, and feel that what is offered him is sound truth based upon painstaking research and true scholarship.

The publishers have done well in engaging the services of Dr. Kretzmann, who came into the work with a splendid preparatory training, and whose faith and piety manifest themselves by his humble submission to God's holy Word and his outspoken recognition of the invaluable services of Luther, Stoeckhardt, and the great orthodox leaders of the Lutheran Church. As a

Christian and a scholar Dr. Kretzmann has performed the task entrusted to him with unswerving fidelity and in the spirit of the great Reformer, who in all his teaching sought to teach nothing but the Bible.

May, therefore, the blessings of God rest upon the POPULAR COMMENTARY as it goes forth to herald the Word of Life, and may it help many toward gaining a better understanding of the Holy Scriptures as they bask in the light of divine wisdom! If it will lead but a single soul into the Bible, and through the Bible to Christ, and through Christ to the glorious inheritance which awaits the saints in heaven, both the author and the publishers regard themselves as abundantly recompensed for their efforts on behalf of a deeper and more intense study of the Book of Books.

St. Louis, Mo., November 9, 1921.

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER.

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# THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SAINT MATTHEW.

## INTRODUCTION.

The apostle and evangelist Matthew, the author of the first synoptic Gospel, had been a publican, bearing the name of Levi, the son of Alphaeus, in or near the city of Capernaum, before his conversion, Matt. 10, 3. He was sitting at the receipt of custom when Jesus called him, Matt. 9, 9; Mark 2, 14, 15; Luke 5, 27—29. There can be no doubt as to the identity of the former publican Levi and the later apostle Matthew, from a comparison of the parallel passages as well as from the established custom of the Jews to adopt a new name upon the occasion of some important happening in their lives. Cp. Acts 4, 36; 12, 12; 13, 9. It is evident throughout the Gospel that the author was a Jewish Christian of Palestine, whose familiarity with the Roman method of tax collection indicates an intimate knowledge of the publican's work. Within the circle of the apostles, Matthew was never conspicuous. His was the quiet, unostentatious content of the disciple happy in the companionship of his Lord. Of his activity after the ascension of Christ only so much is recorded that he was engaged as missionary among the Jews of Palestine. Tradition has it that he spent the last years of his life in proclaiming the Gospel in Ethiopia and other heathen countries and died at an advanced age.

The purpose of the Gospel according to Matthew is indicated in almost every section of the book. He wrote for his fellow-countrymen, not, indeed, in the Hebrew or Aramaic language, as some have thought,<sup>1)</sup> but in Greek, the common language of the Orient in those days. His object was to show the glorious culmination of Old Testament type and prophecy, to prove that Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Rod out of the stem of Jesse, is the promised Messiah, that His entire life, passion, death, and resurrection is the fulfilment of the Old Covenant. The genealogical table establishing the claim that Jesus is the Son of David, the continual reference to the Old Testament, the frequent repetition of the phrase "That it might be fulfilled," furnish abundant evidence for this. It is the

principal fact which the author wishes to impress upon his hearers.

So far as the date of the Gospel is concerned, it appears from chapter 27, 8; 28, 15 that it was written some time after the events there recorded. It seems evident, also, that it was composed before the final destruction of Jerusalem, since the author, in that event, would undoubtedly have referred to the fulfilment of Christ's prophecy concerning the fate of that city. Ancient reports have it that Matthew's Gospel was the first to be written, and the date 60 A. D. has been suggested with some degree of plausibility. The fact that the later extensive missionary labors of Matthew precluded the leisure required for literary work makes it probable that he wrote while still living in Palestine and composed the Gospel at Jerusalem.

The authenticity of our Gospel cannot be called into question. Historical and textual considerations consistently uphold not only Matthew's authorship, but also the fact that this book is a part of the sacred canon and belongs to the inspired writings of the Bible. We may rest assured that we have to-day the Gospel as written by Matthew, one of the apostles of the Lord, in the same form in which he penned it by inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

The contents of the Gospel may be briefly summarized as follows. Matthew presents, first of all, a brief narrative of the nativity and the earliest childhood of Jesus. Then comes an account of the ministry of the Lord, which was ushered in with His baptism by John. The evangelist devotes the greater part of his Gospel to the work of the Savior in Galilee, in the course of which He also trained His disciples for the work of preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, but which finally brought upon Him the increasing hatred of the Jews, and especially of their leaders. In the second part of the Gospel there is a detailed account of the Savior's last journey to Jerusalem, of His last sermons and miracles, of His sufferings, death, and resurrection. The Gospel closes with the great missionary command of the Lord and His comforting assurance: "Behold, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world!"

1) See Schaller, *Book of Books*, § 180.

## CHAPTER 1.

## The Legal Genealogical Table of Christ.

Matt. 1, 1—17.

V. 1. The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. This is the title, or caption, which Matthew places at the head of his book. The entire Gospel is a book of the generation of Jesus Christ in the sense which the Jews usually attached to the expression in similar connections, meaning an account of the chief events in a person's life, more or less briefly related, Gen. 5, 1; 6, 9; 37, 2; 2, 4; Num. 3, 1. The evangelist offers a history of the birth, acts, suffering, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. But the first verses are a genealogy in the most restricted sense of the term, as presenting a table of Christ's legal forefathers through His foster-father Joseph, rightful heir of the kingdom, the thought most interesting to Jewish Christians. Matthew calls Jesus the Son of David, the king of the Golden Age of the Jewish people, to whose family the promise of the Savior was at last restricted, 2 Sam. 7, 12, 13; Ps. 89, 3, 4; 132, 11; Is. 11, 1; Jer. 23, 5. Christ was prophesied under the very name of "David," Ezek. 34, 23, 24; 37, 24, 25. "Son of David" was the official title which the Jews applied to the expected Messiah, Matt. 9, 27; 12, 23; 21, 9; under this designation they had been led, by prophetic authority, to expect Him. But it would also arouse the attention and hold the interest of Christians of Jewish descent to know that the Christ whom Matthew proclaimed was the son of Abraham, for they knew that the father of their race had received the promise of the Lord: "In thee and thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed," Gen. 12, 3; 18, 18; 22, 18. "For this reason he refers only to those two fathers, Abraham and David, since to these two alone the promise of Christ was made in these people. Therefore Matthew emphasizes the promises to Abraham and David, because he has a definite intention with regard to this nation, in order that he might influence them, as heirs of the promise, in a charming manner, to accept the Christ prophesied to them and to believe that this man was Jesus whom they had crucified." 2)

The evangelist now offers the genealogy proper: V. 2. Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren; v. 3. and Judas begat Phares and Zara of Tamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram; v. 4. and Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon; v. 5. and Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse; v. 6. and Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the

wife of Urias; v. 7. and Solomon begat Roboam; and Roboam begat Abia; and Abia begat Asa; v. 8. and Asa begat Josaphat; and Josaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Ozias; v. 9. and Ozias begat Joatham; and Joatham begat Achaz; and Achaz begat Ezekias; v. 10. and Ezekias begat Manasses; and Manasses begat Amon; and Amon begat Josias; v. 11. and Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon; v. 12. and after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel; and Salathiel begat Zorobabel; v. 13. and Zorobabel begat Abiud; and Abiud begat Eliakim; and Eliakim begat Azor; v. 14. and Azor begat Sadoc; and Sadoc begat Achim; and Achim begat Eliud; v. 15. and Eliud begat Eleazar; and Eleazar begat Matthan; and Matthan begat Jacob; v. 16. and Jacob begat Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. In three sections of fourteen members each the progenitors of Joseph are tabulated, reaching back to Abraham, the father of the faithful. No person ever born into this world could boast, in a direct line, a more elevated or illustrious ancestry than Jesus Christ. The kingly, the priestly, the prophetic offices were represented in this list in all their glory and splendor. "The holy Matthew writes his Gospel in a most masterly manner and makes three distinctions of the fathers of whom Christ sprang forth, fourteen patriarchs, fourteen kings, and fourteen princes. . . . There are three times fourteen persons, as Matthew himself names them; from Abraham to David, both included, are fourteen persons or members; from David to the Babylonian captivity, again fourteen members; . . . and from the Babylonian captivity to Christ there are also fourteen members." 3)

A careful comparison of the list as here given and the account found in the Old Testament, 2 Chron. 22—26, shows a slight discrepancy, since Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah followed after Joram, before Uzziah. The explanation for this difficulty is found in the fact that Matthew took up the genealogies just as he found them in the public Jewish repositories, which, though in the main parts correct, were yet deficient in some respects. But the omission of the three kings was of no consequence to the evangelist's argument, which was to show the legal descent of Joseph, the foster-father of Jesus, and therefore of Jesus Himself, in an uninterrupted line from David, and consequently from Abraham. "What need is there of many words? Matthew himself shows sufficiently that he did not want to enumerate the generations with Jewish strictness, and so excite doubtfulness. For almost after the manner of a Jew he

2) Luther, St. Louis Edition, 7, 6.

3) Luther, 11, 2344.

makes three times fourteen members of fathers, kings, and princes, but with deliberate knowledge he omits three members of the second section, as though he would say: The genealogical tables are indeed not to be despised, but herein lies the chief thing that Christ is promised through the generations of Abraham and David." 4)

Another difficulty is in verse 11, where Josias is named as the father of Jechonias, whereas he was the grandfather, 1 Chron. 3, 14—16. The solution is found either by reference to the explanation above, showing that Matthew made use of a deliberate contraction, since the Jews were in the habit of extending the appellation "father" also to the grandparent; or we may adopt the marginal reading, which is based upon some Greek manuscripts: "Josias begat Jakim, and Jakim begat Jechonias." This would also yield the fourteenth member of this section, unless we include Jesus in this group. In a similar manner, though Jechonias had no brethren mentioned in Scriptures, his father had, and it is by no means unusual to find more remote relatives spoken of in this manner, Gen. 28, 13; 31, 42; 14, 14; 24, 27; 29, 15. "It is not to be supposed that the evangelist was at all concerned to make sure that no link in the line was omitted. His one concern would be to make sure that no name appeared that did not belong to the line." 5)

Another significant fact: Only four women are mentioned in the tables, and of these two were originally members of Gentile nations, Rachab and Ruth, and two were adulteresses, Thamar and Bathsheba. Note, also, that the last is not mentioned by name, the reference being both delicate and reproachful. "Of the kings and princes which Matthew enumerates, there were a few very bad knaves, as we read in the Book of Kings; yet God permits them to be entered as though they were so worthy that He should have wanted to be born of them. He also has no pious woman described: the four women that are mentioned here were all considered knaves and impious by the people, and regarded as evil women, as Thamar, who with Judas, her husband's father, begat Phares and Zara, as is written Gen. 38, 18; Rachab is called a knave or harlot, Josh. 2, 1; Ruth was a Gentile woman, Ruth 1, 4: though she was pious in honor, since one reads nothing evil of her, yet because she was a heathen, she was despised as a dog by the Jews and regarded as unworthy before the world; Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, was an adulteress before David took her in marriage and begat Solomon with her, 2 Sam. 11, 4. All of which, beyond doubt, is enumerated for the reason that we should see how God desired to present to all sinners a mirror that Christ was sent to sinners and wanted to be born of sinners; yea, the greater the sinners, the greater the refuge they should have with the

merciful God, Priest, and King, who is our Brother, in whom, and in none other besides, we may fulfil the Law and receive God's grace. For this He came from heaven and desires no more from us but only this, that we let Him be our God, Priest, and King. Then all shall be right and plain; through Him alone we become children of God and heirs of heaven." 6)

The table of Matthew ends with the words, v. 16 a: *And Jacob begat Joseph, the husband of Mary.* This fact, and the further circumstance that Luke, chapter 3, has an altogether different list of ancestors of Jesus, must be considered proof positive that we have in Matthew the genealogy of Joseph, the foster-father of Jesus. The aim of the evangelist therefore undoubtedly was to set forth Jesus as the legal son of Joseph, Mary's husband, at His birth, and as such the proper heir of David's throne. Joseph was, before the law, father of Jesus. All his rights and privileges, by reason of his birth and ancestry, were by law transferred to his son. As long as he lived, Joseph continued in his rôle as the legal paternal ancestor of Jesus, Matt. 13, 35; John 6, 42. In this way the name and position of Jesus, especially during His ministry, were put above reproach, Deut. 23, 2, and His claim as to being the heir of David's line was placed on a sound basis, even in the eyes of the sticklers for legal form.

Note the careful phraseology used by Matthew in this sentence, v. 16 b: *Mary, of whom was born Jesus.* Not from them both, as natural parents, after the usual manner of procreation, was the Savior begotten, but of Mary only, thus placing the event which Matthew is about to relate entirely outside of the course of nature, beyond the plane of human understanding. Jesus is her son's name, after the great work which He came into the world to perform, the salvation of mankind. And He is called the Christ, which has precisely the same meaning as the Hebrew Messiah: the Anointed of God. It was His official title according to His threefold office, as the legitimate descendant of David, which the genealogy showed Him to be. He alone is rightly, above all His fellows after the flesh, called the Christ; He is King of kings and Lord of lords: the great King, who governs the entire universe with His almighty power and reigns in the hearts of His followers with His benign mercy; He is the Prophet greater than Moses, with a message of truth and love and grace divine for all men; He is the great High Priest, who in His own body and by the shedding of His holy, precious blood made full atonement for the sins of the entire world.

Such is Matthew's introduction to his Gospel. And in concluding this genealogy, which immediately places Jesus the Christ into the center before the minds and hearts of his readers, he gives a brief summary according to the

4) Luther, 7, 7.

5) *Expositor's Greek Testament*, 1, 63.

6) Luther, 11, 2346.

divisions of Jewish history: V. 17. So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations. The three periods represent, respectively, the three forms of government which the Jews had: theocracy, monarchy, hierarchy, with judges, kings, and priests at their head. But, incidentally, the same division sums up Israel's fortunes. First came the age of slow and steady growth, with all the manifestations of the first love's zeal and fervor toward God, culminating in the reign of David. Then came the period of slow decline and gradual disintegration, ushered in with the luxurious reign of Solomon and characterized by the continuous and losing conflict with idolatry. And lastly came the period of a restored Church with internal ruin, of a dead orthodoxy, of an insipid ritualism. If any fact stands out clearly from this contrast, it is this, that redemption was most sorely and urgently needed.

**The Annunciation to Joseph and the Birth of Jesus. Matt. 1, 18—25.**

V. 18a. Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise, the evangelist writes. The reference is not so much to the actual process of generation, but expresses the general idea of origin. It was in this way that the Messiah assumed human nature, took upon Himself the form of our sinful flesh. As the Son of God He had no beginning, but is in the bosom of the Father from eternity, John 1, 18. As a human being He had a beginning, and this origin the evangelist relates: V. 18b. When as His mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Mary had entered into a betrothal, into a contract of espousal, with Joseph. She had agreed to a marriage, she had pledged her word to Joseph, just as he was bound to her by his promise of betrothment. While Mary was in this relation to Joseph, and after she had given him her pledge as his promised bride, she still lived at her own or at her father's house. As a rule, some time elapsed before a betrothed virgin was formally given in marriage and taken to her husband's house, Deut. 20, 7; Judg. 14, 7. 8; 15, 1. 2. During this time, cohabitation did not take place, though the marriage contract was legal and binding. And it was then, before the celebration of the nuptials, that Mary was found with child. Her situation was not only delicate, but the most distressing and humiliating which could fall to the lot of a pure maiden. Knowing herself to be innocent of even the slightest transgression in deed, and fully convinced of the fact that her condition was due only to the supernatural working of the Holy Ghost, she nevertheless could expect no one to believe her defense, should she attempt one.

"Nothing but the fullest consciousness of her own integrity and the strongest confidence in God could have supported her in such circumstances, where her reputation, her honor, and her life were at stake." 7)

At this critical juncture, Joseph proved himself all that a true Christian should be: V. 19. Then Joseph, her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. Unable to believe her innocent, which in the face of the evidence must have been beyond the average man's strength, he nevertheless found a way out of the difficult dilemma. As the betrothed husband he had the husband's rights and responsibilities. And he was a just man, righteous, a respecter of the Law, which was especially strict and uncompromising on the subject of infidelity in the woman, Deut. 22, 22—24. Yet he did not wish to expose Mary publicly and thus heap ignominy and shame upon her, for she was the woman to whom he had given the love of a husband. His humanness and benevolence, his affection, were put to a severe test. But the result of his weighing the matter was that he did not choose strict measures, resolving rather upon a quiet cancellation of the bond of betrothal, without assigning a cause, in order that her life might be saved. Justice was tempered by mercy.

It was here that God interfered in behalf of the mother of His Son, according to His humanity: V. 20. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying: Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary, thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. Joseph's mind was still busily engaged with the perplexing problem; he was wrestling with painful, distressing, distracting thoughts, and even his kind expedient may have seemed harsh to him. But, behold! — a vivid introduction of the angelic appearance to emphasize the intervention of God. In a dream the vision came to Joseph to save him and his betrothed from an act which would result in disastrous consequences. The appearance of an angel in a dream was one of the methods which God used to make known His will, or to reveal the future in special cases. The angel addresses Joseph, "Thou son of David," not to awaken the heroic mood, as has been suggested, but to emphasize the thought of the legal acknowledgment and adoption of the child. He should not fear to take home, publicly to accept, Mary as his wife. This simple acceptance of the angel's words meant for Joseph an act of faith similar to those performed by the great heroes of the Old Testament, to believe the Lord absolutely, in spite of all the evidences of the senses. This public recognition would save the honor of Mary and also that of her child. For instead of being the fruit of adulterous and licentious inter-

7) Clarke, *Commentary*, 5, 39.

course, the product of a most unholy cohabitation, the child which was to be born of her was of the Holy Ghost, begotten by deliberate intervention of God, against the course of nature.

The climax of the angel's message: V. 21. **And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name JESUS; for He shall save His people from their sins.** It was thus ordained in God's counsel: She will give birth to a son, she is to become a mother, not only by supernatural interposition, not merely by God's giving new life to organs that were past the age of bearing, as was true in the case of Sarah and Elizabeth, Gen. 18, 10—14; Luke 1, 7, 13, 18, but by a miraculous suspension of the usual process of nature, according to which men are born of the will of the flesh and of the will of man, both sexes being active. And this son of Mary he, Joseph, was to call Jesus. This is a command in the form of a prediction. By giving to the child His name, Joseph would publicly recognize and formally adopt Him as his legal son. Jesus is to be the child's name, not indeed as a mere appellation to distinguish Him from other people, as in the case of the Hebrew synonym Joshua, Num. 13, 17; Zech. 3, 1, but as an expression of the very essence of the divine personality, through which the salvation of men would be gained. For the angel explains the name: He shall save His people from their sins. That, in a sentence, is the end and object of His coming, that alone is His errand and mission: He, and no other, He alone, and He completely, saves. He brings full pardon, free salvation, complete deliverance, not only from the pollution and power, but also from the guilt of sin. To His people He brings this priceless boon, not merely to the members of His nation according to the flesh, to the Jewish people, but to all that are in need of a Savior, Matt. 18, 11. This is the Gospel-message, not that Jesus makes allowances for sin, but that He has made atonement for it; not that He tolerates sin, but that He destroys it.

Matthew now adds an explanatory note to show the fulfilment of the Old Testament types and prophecies in the person and work of Christ: V. 22. **Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, v. 23. Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son; and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.** It was not an incident that just happened that way which the evangelist records, but an occurrence definitely decided upon and fully planned by the Lord centuries before. For it was He that spoke the prophecy through Isaiah, chapter 7, 14. The words as written by the prophet referred to a sign or miracle which the Lord promised King Ahaz in order to assure him that the counsels of the enemies of Israel should not stand, but that the latter should finally be utterly discomfited. In giving this sign, the

Lord had in mind the spiritual Israel and its enemies, the deliverance being the redemption wrought by the Messiah. Before the eternal God, the space of seven hundred years is as a watch in the night. This sign was now to be given and the prophecy fulfilled. The virgin, not any virgin, but the one designated and chosen by God, being with child, was now about to bear a son. And they, not only His parents, but men and people that would know Him, especially those that would accept His salvation, would call His name Emmanuel: God with us. In the son of Mary these words were fulfilled, her son is God Himself; in His person the strong God, the almighty Lord, is with us, not according to His condemning justice, but according to His loving-kindness and tender mercies, Is. 9, 6; John 1, 1, 14; 1 Tim. 3, 16.

The result of the angelic vision: V. 24. **Then Joseph, being raised from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife. As soon as he awoke from sleep, he was immediately, energetically active and set about to act upon the divine instructions.** He took Mary home as his wife, he celebrated the betrothal with all customary Jewish ceremonies. She who was his wife by betrothal now was given this position in the eyes of the whole world. But the marriage was not consummated at that time: V. 25. **And knew her not till she had brought forth her first-born son: and he called His name Jesus.** Joseph did not enter into the natural relations of marriage with Mary until her son, the promised Messiah, had been born. It is a moot question whether Mary and Joseph ever lived together in the usual matrimonial intercourse and begot children. The Roman Catholic theologians and a great many Protestant commentators argue with much spirit that the first-born son of Mary was her only son. Some have held with one of the early Church Fathers that the "brethren" of Jesus mentioned in various passages, Matt. 12, 46; 13, 55; Mark 3, 31; Luke 8, 19; John 2, 12; 7, 5; Acts 1, 14; Gal. 1, 19, were the cousins of the Lord, the sons of Alphaeus, Joseph's brother, and of Mary, the wife of Alphaeus, the sister-in-law (not sister) of the mother of the Lord. Others have held that they were the stepbrothers of Jesus, by a former marriage of Joseph. As a matter of fact, the question is of little import and can have no doctrinal significance. It is not for historical, exegetical, or dogmatic reasons, but only for motives of reverence that men have been prompted to insist upon the alleged fact of Mary's perpetual virginity.<sup>8)</sup>

The evangelist concludes the narrative by stating that he, Joseph, called the name of Mary's son Jesus, thus following the divine command, assuming the legal paternity of the child, and incidentally expressing his hopeful belief in the Savior of mankind.

8) See Schaller, *Book of Books*, § 276.

**Summary.** *Jesus Christ, the son and legal heir of David, beyond whom His genealogy can be traced to Abraham, the father of the faithful of all times, was conceived and born of*

*Mary, the virgin mother, after Joseph, His foster-father, had been instructed through a wonderful angelic vision as to God's interposition.*

### THE VIRGIN BIRTH.

For about eighteen centuries after the ascension of Christ and the founding of the Christian Church the fact of the virgin birth was not called into question and the comforting doctrines drawn therefrom were universally accepted. Throughout the Christian Church the words of the Apostolic Creed: "Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary," were confessed and believed. But the era of rationalism, of believing only what reason admitted to be true, ushered in a new conception of Bible criticism, and this played havoc with our doctrine. One critic attacked the idea of a supernatural origin of Jesus and tried to find a natural explanation of the event. Another declared that Joseph was the father of Jesus. A third calmly treated the stories of Christ's nativity as myths. In this manner, the entire Bible account was soon discredited, both the fact of the virgin birth and the doctrine of the necessity of the sinless birth of the Savior being denied. It is stated that the modern world cannot believe in, and therefore has no place for, miracles. This standpoint evidently overthrows the entire Bible and the history of the Church, both of which are replete with miracles. Some have maintained that the virgin birth has no doctrinal significance anyway, not the physical basis of Christ's existence, but the moral and spiritual character of His personality being involved in redemption. But such statements reveal the fact that they are very well aware of the vital connection between the doctrine of the virgin birth and faith in the divinity of Christ. A third class of critics favors the mythological explanation, declaring that legends and myths have ever sprung up in connection with the development of all religions. Unfortunately the critics themselves disagree, some of them assuming a Hebrew, others a Greek, others an Indian origin of the story. Besides, their examples are poorly chosen, a divine paternity by carnal intercourse being assumed in the majority of cases. And a recent writer has shown all these theories to be untenable and not analogous, besides referring to the fact that the heathen myths in connection with such stories are of an incredibly vile and immoral character, while nothing can equal the simple, chaste, convincing language of the Bible narrative. The final argument of the critics that historical and textual criticism has proved consecutive editing of New Testament stories and the presence of material foreign to essential Gospel sources, reveals the intention they are anxious to put into execution, namely, to destroy the faith of Christians in the truthfulness of the Bible story.

Let us, in combating these attacks, rely upon the weapon which Christ Himself indicated to us, namely: "It is written." It is plainly written, Is. 7, 14, that the Messiah should be born of a virgin, for the Hebrew word there used, both according to its etymology and according to usage, designates not merely a "woman of marriageable age," but a virgin, a maiden that has not known man. Dr. Stoeckhardt has

proved this meaning even in the passage Prov. 30, 18—20.<sup>9)</sup> The virgin birth is most decidedly taught in the passage above, Matt. 1, 20—25, as well as in Luke 1, 34. 35. It agrees, moreover, with the prophecy, Gen. 3, 15, where the Seed of the Woman alone is named as the crusher of the Serpent's head. It finds its final confirmation in the fact that St. Paul refers to it in the most self-evident way, when he speaks of the Son of God as having been made of a woman, Gal. 4, 4.

In the light of these plain passages we have every reason to say: "Therefore these learned men and critics are the falsifiers, visionaries, and writers of legends, not the apostles and evangelists. Their historico-critical research is plain fraud. From the view-point of their unbelief, indeed, they cannot do otherwise. Theirs is the experience of the Jews: With seeing eyes they see nothing, and with hearing ears they hear nothing, and they have their reward. The devil thanks them for it."<sup>10)</sup>

We shall retain the doctrine of the virgin birth as a necessary part of our faith. We believe that it is essential for a full appreciation of the supernatural, the divine character of the Savior. "In order to constitute a divine-human personality, the divine Being had to enter into the procreative depths of humanity and select and assume a human nature of His formation and purifying, and unite Himself personally with it. It must be bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, soul of our soul, in order to be organically connected with the human race; but it must be our nature lifted out of itself, separated, purified, transmuted — a human nature that, strangely and mysteriously enough, could be 'tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin.'<sup>11)</sup> Christ "indeed is become a real, true, natural man, but not conceived and born in sins, as other children of Adam. For that reason His mother had to be a virgin whom no man had touched, in order that He might not be conceived and born under the curse, but without sin, and the devil might have no right or power over Him. . . . Such mercy we celebrate to-day in order to thank God that He purified our unclean, unholy conception and birth through His holy conception and birth, took the curse from us, and brought the blessing upon us. We by nature have a filthy, sinful conception and birth, but Christ has a pure, holy conception and birth, and through His holy conception and birth our unclean nature, flesh, and blood are blessed and sanctified."<sup>12)</sup> The fact of the sinless humanity of Christ, guaranteed to us by the virgin birth, made His being placed under the Law, His perfect fulfilment of the Law, and thus His entire work of redemption possible.

9) *Der Prophet Jesaias. Die ersten zweielf Kapitel*, 84. Clarke, *Commentary*, 5, 40.

10) *Synodalbericht*, Mo. Syn., Mich. Dist., 1904, 29.

11) Keyser, *The Rational Test*, 97, 98.

12) Luther, 13, 2676. 2679. Cp. Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik*, 2, 76. 77.

## THE OBLIGATION OF A RIGHTFUL BETROTHAL.

In view of the fact that the modern conception of the marriage-tie is rapidly sinking to the level of the heathen idea in its most immoral manifestations, and that playing with the sanctity of the marriage-bond has become the order of the day, it is necessary to emphasize the Scriptural view of the obligation of a valid betrothal, as indicated in the text above, vv. 18—20. To maintain that passages of this kind have historical value only, that they therefore concern the Jews alone, and that their commands are not binding upon the Christians of to-day, is inconsistent with the demand which properly makes the Bible the rule of life as well as the norm of doctrine.

A rightful betrothal is entered upon when one man and one woman, being of marriageable age and not hindered by Scriptural or legal impediments, with the express or implied consent of their parents or guardians, and by their own free mutual consent, promise to be and remain to each other husband and wife in a lifelong union. That is the Scriptural view of a valid betrothal. And such a betrothal, without considering the Jewish police and church regulations, is, according to the Bible, tantamount to a marriage, so far as the insolubility of the marriage tie is concerned. When Lot was urged to make haste out of the doomed city of Sodom, he was sent by the angels to speak to his "sons-in-law that would marry his daughters," who were betrothed to them and intended to consummate the marriage later, Gen. 19, 14. When Jacob, with the will and consent of the parents on either side, Gen. 28, 2; 29, 18, 19, was betrothed to Rachel, the daughter of Laban, he spoke of her as his "wife" before the nuptials had been celebrated, Gen. 29, 21. Both of these events took place before the Jewish church law was in existence. A similar case is that recorded in our passage. When Mary was "espoused to Joseph, before they came together," Joseph is called her "husband," and she is called his "wife." And in Luke 2, 5 Mary is called Joseph's "espoused wife." Cp. Luke 1, 27; Deut. 22, 22—29; 28, 30; Hos. 4, 13.

In addition to these clear and unmistakable passages we have another reason for considering a rightful betrothal tantamount to marriage, and that is by analogy from the parts of Holy Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testaments, in which the union of Christ and His Church is spoken of. We find throughout these passages that the terms "espoused" or "bride" (the equivalent, in the original text, of the German "Braut," a betrothed woman) and "wife" are used as synonyms and altogether indiscrimi-

nately. The great "mystery" concerning Christ and His Church, Eph. 5, 32, would lose its meaning if betrothal and marriage, as spoken of in the Word of God, were not identical. "For thy Maker is thy husband; the Lord of Hosts is His name," Is. 54, 5. "Thou shalt no more be termed forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed desolate; but thou shalt be called Hephzibah and thy land Beulah; for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married. For as a young man marieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee; and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee," Is. 62, 4, 5. "I will betroth thee unto Me forever; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies," Hos. 2, 19. "Come with Me from Lebanon, My spouse," Song of Solomon 4, 8—12. "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom," John 3, 29. "And I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. . . . Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife," Rev. 21, 2, 9. Compare with these passages also the following: "The marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready," Rev. 19, 7. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church," Eph. 5, 25, and the many statements in which lack of loyalty and faithfulness in the people of Israel is compared to adultery. A passage which is especially clear is 2 Cor. 11, 2.

In view of these facts there is but one conclusion: "A valid betrothal, the lawful and unconditional mutual consent of a marriageable man and a marriageable woman to be husband and wife, makes the parties to such compact essentially husband and wife before God. . . . The rescission of lawful espousals or valid betrothal is unlawful desertion from the marriage-bond as truly as after the consummation of marriage." 13) "Apart from the doctrine of Scriptures regarding the obligation of the betrothal, if we only look at the engagement as we have it to-day and judge according to reason, that is, according to the natural moral understanding, we must consider the engagement as we have it to-day, with respect to its obligation, as tantamount to the consummated marriage." 14)

13) *Theol. Quart.*, 2, 350; 3, 408.

14) *Lehre und Wehre*, 1915, 242. Cp. Jahn, *Von der Verlobung*, 43; Luther, 10, 655; Kretzmann, *Keuschheit und Zucht*, 76, 77; *Theol. Quart.*, 20, 136—143.

## CHAPTER 2.

## The Wise Men from the East.

Matt. 2, 1—12.

V. 1a. Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king. The transition which the evangelist employs fitly connects the narrative of the circumstances surrounding the birth of the Savior with the story of the adoration of the Magi. It is an

account of the "reception given by the world to the new-born Messianic king. Homage from afar, hostility at home; foreshadowing the fortunes of the new faith: acceptance by the Gentiles, rejection by the Jews." 15) While Matthew does not fix the time of the nativity so exactly as Luke, chapter 2, 1, 2, he nevertheless

15) *Expositor's Greek Testament*, 1, 69.