

P Levy Carol Service 241224c

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Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] I want to speak to you from Matthew's Gospel. I don't know if you've ever read a Gospel. You don't even know what a Gospel is. It is an account of the life of Jesus Christ. There's four of them. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And we've got copies over here. We'd love you to take one away. And I've tried to read through Matthew's Gospel this week. It's 78 pages. It takes about an hour. Maybe a little bit more depending on how quick a reader you are. But I wonder whether you've ever read a Gospel. And one of the interesting things, as I read through Matthew's Gospel, which I've done quite a bit of work in over the past year, the start of Matthew's Gospel, it speaks about the birth of Jesus Christ. And Matthew really only has one thing to say. He has one thing to say. His only point really is this. That the Lord Jesus is a supernatural child. The child in the manger is a supernatural child.

Now you might not agree with that. But that is, undisputably, the message of the Gospel. That he's a unique child. He's a child long promised. That's why we have these readings tonight that have gone through parts of the Bible. That Jesus is a child who was promised, right the way through the Old Testament. He is a child with a worldwide universal mission.

And that he's a divine child. All these things are sure. And the evidence that Matthew brings forward for these tremendous claims is the evidence of the virgin birth. The virgin birth is often apologised for by church leaders. And even maybe people who call themselves Christians when you've been in churches like that. But Matthew is not embarrassed in the least.

And at every point that he makes in the few verses that he gives us, nearly every verse is about the virgin birth. It talks about the horror of Joseph when he finds out that his fiancée is with child before they've slept together. It talks about Joseph's resolve to divorce her quietly. It talks about the extraordinary message of reassurance that Joseph received from an angel that all was well. And that the child had actually come from God. It's about the steady obedience of the silent Joseph we never hear speak. It's about the consummation of the marriage between Joseph and Mary after the birth of the child. And there's the naming of this child with the strange name Jesus which means deliverer or saviour or rescuer. And it always seems odd to me that there are people who live 2,000 years after the event today who are quite sure that that event was not true. Whereas Matthew and Luke who were there at the time, who were the eye-witnesses, who lived close to the event, who wrote near the time when people would have known Jesus, they are quite sure that it was true. Strange isn't it? We live so long afterwards and we throw doubt on something on which those at the time were quite certain. Those who knew Jesus face to face and at first hand experience and witnesses to turn to. And I think and I hope it's not too bold to say that actually I'm going to argue that the very of birth is common sense. It suggests, doesn't it, to us that Jesus is different. That he is very God of very God. He's light of light.

He's begotten and not made. He's of one substance with the Father. All those tremendous phrases that are found in the Nicene Creed. That Christians have confessed for generations and centuries after century. If he is indeed very God of very God lying in the manger. If he is really God lying in the manger. Then I think it's no surprise. It's no surprise to me. I don't think it should be a surprise to you as well. If his entrance into the world and his exit from the world are startling to be unique.

[4 : 37] Would you expect the entrance of the God-man to be normal? Would you expect him to enter into this world like any normal, ordinary human being? Would you expect him to leave this world like that? A normal human being being turned into ashes? No, he enters in a supernatural way. And he leaves the tomb, doesn't he, by a mighty resurrection according to the Gospel writers. As I tried to ask myself this week, why is it that so many sincere church leaders and writers and journalists have soft paddled the supernatural parts of the Christmas story?

Why is it that they're embarrassed about a virgin birth? When Christmas comes around and we read and we sing around about the virgin birth, but actually there are many people who call themselves Christians who are slightly embarrassed by it.

And I'm sure they're sincere, but I'm also sure they're mistaken. I believe the reason why lots of these people are deeply embarrassed and they've soft paddled the miraculous and the supernatural in this Christmas story is because they want to make it easier for you to believe.

They want to make it easier for you to believe. And so what has happened, isn't it, is miracle after miracle. It's kind of jettisoned. Because they say they can no longer be defended.

And they talk about the moral values of Christianity. But actually are silent on the miraculous. That God has come in the person of his son, Jesus Christ.

[6 : 26] But what's happened in that experiment? Well in 150 years, the church has lost its grip on the real Christ, hasn't it? Long years of decline have started because of that policy.

Archbishop William Temple wrote this. He said, the only Jesus for whom there is any evidence is a supernatural figure making stupendous claims. Let me read that to you again. It's a striking sentence, isn't it?

The only Jesus for whom there is any evidence is a supernatural figure making stupendous claims. And that is the Jesus we believe in here in this church.

Because we believe that the evidence that Matthew and Mark and Luke and John present to us is that of a supernatural child. And through that child you can know God.

So let me give you two final comments before we sing again when I sit down. Because as we look at that child in the manger we have to say this we have to say that no one ever stopped at the cot of the infant Jesus and said doesn't he look just like his dad?

[7 : 41] Nobody said today like we say to a newborn baby nobody says we should go to his father's nose because dad's eyes You know what it's like when you see a new baby you're desperate to say something positive But on the certain evidence of the New Testament no one says to the infant Jesus in his cot you don't look just like your dad It's the mirror image of his father Because he was not like Joseph Because Joseph was not his father But what was so amazing is that later on in his life when this child had become a full grown teacher he kept saying in different ways and in all sorts of places for those who care to listen I'm just like my father you know I'm just like my father in heaven Well one of his friends Philip comes to him and says Lord please show us the father And the extraordinary reply that Philip receives is Philip if you've seen me you've seen the father Yes

No one saw the likeness of Joseph in the infant Jesus But ever since for 2,000 years the universal church has seen the likeness of God in the face of Jesus Christ So that as we rediscover Jesus we discover his father too That's my first comment Secondly lots of people at that time I knew I'm guessing because we're not told but I think I must be right lots of people peeped into that cot and this manger and they heard about this strange name what's his name his name is what Jesus this strange name that the baby's been given at the command of the angel this name of deliverer or rescuer or saviour and as they peeped into the cot and they said to his mother is this really the deliverer that God has raised up to save us from the Roman oppressors our hated occupiers is this the deliverer that our nation has been praying for for so long is this the freedom fighter who's going to fix my life and the answer from Mary this very faithful woman the answer is no he is not Jesus the freedom fighter he doesn't come to save people from their grim present problems but he is Jesus the divine deliverer who has come to save his people indeed all that will come to him from a far far worse plight than being occupied by a foreign power like the Romans from the plight of eternal death very famous word isn't it for you shall call his name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins I hope you understand that phrase what it doesn't mean it doesn't mean that Christians are sinless in fact stay around you every about 20 minutes and you'll find that out it means that we are saved from the judgment that would be otherwise on our lives and from our sins and if you will forgive the crudity of my language he came to save us from hell I've done a lot of work in Matthew's gospel I'm actually preaching through it on a Sunday morning and I found myself thinking about eternal death and hell to try to imagine the awfulness of such a fate and such a future

I watched a clip this week of Les Mis with Jean Valjean you know the story it's a brilliant story so if you've got me to see the musical go see it Jean Valjean is in prison for 19 years for stealing a loaf of bread and yet in that prison Jean Valjean never lost hope he had hope he was never without hope that he would escape and he did escape but when the Bible teaches us about eternal death it

says that to die unforgiven but to die without Christ to die having paid no attention to the offer of salvation that God has brought into this world at Christmas is to die not only without God but without hope and for me and probably for you if you're willing to think about it that is an unimaginable thing to have no hope for the future to know that there is no escape and no return and no end but that faith need not be ours because the Christmas story is about love isn't it the Christmas story is about love finding a way about divine love finding the way it is God the Father saying my son

I want you to go to earth and I want you to share human life I want you to be perfectly obedient to me in a world that is disobedient and I want you to offer yourself as a pure and blemished sacrifice for the sins of my people you see the glory of Christmas is that love found a way for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes on him will not perish but have eternal life yes love did find a way and I can't imagine anything more foolish or wicked than to turn away from the solution that God gave let me ask you to do three things let me ask you firstly take one of these gospels there's a Luke's gospel or a Matthew's gospel if you've never read it what's the harm in reading it read it ask the Lord if you're there if it's true show me and read it and see if you live locally we'd love to welcome you back we'd love to welcome you back come let's hear the Bible explain maybe lots of us tonight it's completely new and foreign or go to a church which teaches the Bible and we'll show you the truth and thirdly you can pray

[14 : 03] I don't know your life I don't know your problems I don't know your concerns and say whether you don't know mine but tonight you can cry to God and he will hear you we're going to step apart