

Matthew -- Part 2

- 1. What can we learn from Christ's birth?** First of all, Jesus' birth is in accordance with Old Testament prophecy. It was foretold in Micah that He would be born in Bethlehem (quoted by the scribes in response to Herod as recorded in Matthew 2:4-6). Isaiah had prophesied that He would be born of a virgin; this is in line with the angel's communication with Joseph as explained in Matthew 1:20-23. We also recognize that Jesus is the Savior of the world -- this is the driving point of the angel's charge to Joseph to "call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins." One other thought comes through in the prophecy of Isaiah concerning the virgin birth -- His name would be called Immanuel, meaning "God with us." Jesus' birth marked the incarnation of the Eternal God.
- 2. What do we learn from John the Immerser's ministry?** John's role as a forerunner of the Messiah was also foretold in the book of Isaiah. He was a voice crying in the wilderness, making ready the way of the Lord. He was the one who would lower the mountains and fill in the valleys, preparing the hearts of the people for the Christ. John was a spiritual revolutionary who brought a powerful message of repentance, challenging the people to get their minds and hearts right for the kingdom of heaven. John had no fear of calling out the religious establishment who were, in his words, a "brood of vipers." He didn't like the political games that the Pharisees and Sadducees played, and he wasn't willing to be a part of their club. John wasn't a reed shaken by the wind, bending in accordance with the latest political whim. He wasn't dressed in soft clothing, having the backing of the king or others in positions of power. As a matter of fact, he was executed for calling out King Herod for his adulterous relationship with Herodias. John was more than a prophet, so he began the process of separating those who truly wanted to follow Christ from those who desired to use God to serve their own ends.
- 3. Why was Jesus immersed?** One thing that is very obvious -- Jesus wasn't immersed for the forgiveness of His sins, because He had no sin -- Hebrews 4:15. This is why John the Immerser was shocked when Jesus came to the Jordan to be immersed by him. John's response was, "I have need to be immersed by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus told John that it was fitting to fulfill all righteousness, so John went ahead and immersed Him. From the book of Matthew, that is all the information we get -- that it was fitting to fulfill all righteousness. There can be much speculation as to what that entails, but the gospel of John clarifies some things for us. We do know from Matthew's account that immediately following Jesus' immersion, the Holy Spirit descended as a dove upon Jesus, and there was a voice from heaven calling Jesus the beloved Son of God. John gives us the specific point behind that in John 1:31-34. The Holy Spirit coming to rest upon Jesus following His immersion was a declaration first from God to John the Immerser that Jesus was the Christ. Since John was a forerunner of Jesus, he further proclaimed this to the entire nation of Israel that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah.
- 4. How did Jesus overcome the devil's temptations?** Some specific temptations from the devil that Jesus had to face are recorded for us in Matthew chapter 4. The lust of the flesh was appealed to when the devil challenged Jesus, at the end of a forty-day fast, to turn the stones into bread. Jesus overcame this temptation by quoting God's word as recorded in Deuteronomy 8:3. The second temptation listed by Matthew was an attempt of Satan to get Jesus to succumb to pride, basically challenging Jesus to prove that He was the fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy. Satan dared Jesus to jump off the pinnacle of the Temple, telling Him to trust that the angels would protect Him from harm. Jesus responded by again quoting from the book of

Deuteronomy -- this time chapter 6, verse 16. Finally, Satan approached Jesus from the angle of the lust of the eyes, offering Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory for just a little bit of worship before the devil. Again, Jesus withstood this temptation by quoting from Deuteronomy. It is apparent that the primary means of warfare against Satan was the word of God. Brethren, this is true for us as well! God's words need to be implanted so deeply that they direct even our subconscious thoughts, so that we appropriately respond even under great pressure. I am thankful for the example of Jesus in the flesh as He showed us how to be victorious over the devil.

5. **What is the main point of the Sermon on the Mount?** While Jesus' Sermon on the Mount contained much practical teaching about all facets of life, there is a main point that runs through the entire teaching. The Pharisees were so focused on keeping the letter of the Law, yet they completely disregarded the Spirit behind the Law. God wants us to come to *know Him* through His word -- to have a relationship with Him while understanding, believing, and living every word that He communicates to us. The Beatitudes tell us what kind of attitudes and character please God. We see that simply avoiding murder and adultery isn't what God wants; rather, He desires our thoughts to be completely pure like His thoughts are. Doing good only to those who do good to us isn't the extent of God's love, either. Instead it includes loving our enemies and communicating that love through our actions -- this is the proof that we are sons of our heavenly Father. We don't give, pray, and fast to be noticed by men, but to be pleasing to God in our relationship with Him. We don't worry about all the needs of this world, but instead trust that our loving Father will provide for our needs as we put Him first. So we ask, seek, and knock, knowing that our Father in heaven will give what is good to us as we ask Him for it. What we see the Father doing, we do in like manner, so we treat others the way we would like to be treated. We show reverence for God by doing as He commands, not just talking the talk, but walking the walk. We build the foundation of our lives upon the rock of Christ's words, knowing that nothing can separate us from our love of Him. Christ wants us all to understand that the Father is looking to make His abode in each one who is "humble, contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word." Our God is a living God who is the God of the living. Christ came to bring us back into fellowship with the Father, so we have a true relationship with Him.
6. **What was the purpose of Jesus' miracles?** The primary purpose of Jesus' miracles was to establish that He was indeed the coming Messiah. When John's disciples asked Him if He was the "Coming One," He told them to go and report to John what they saw and heard -- Matthew 11:2-5. In this context He spoke of His miracles as fulfilling the prophecies of Isaiah 35 and 61. Another example of the purpose behind His miracles is in Matthew 9:6 when Jesus healed the paralytic. He healed this paralyzed man to show that "the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." Jesus also used miracles to build momentum in the early stages of His ministry -- see Matthew 4:23-25. Finally, Jesus performed miracles to give the Pharisees the metaphorical "punch in the mouth" -- see Matthew 12:8-14, 22-29. Jesus was forcing the hand of the Pharisees and setting in motion the circumstances that would lead them to crucify Him.
7. **What is the main point of the parables?** Jesus teaches many things through His parables. However, the thread that He consistently weaves within these teachings is an emphasis on the kingdom of heaven. You can't help but notice the emphasis throughout this book on that topic. John the Immerser starts by preaching that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. When John was put into prison, Jesus picked up the torch and preached the same point. When you read Matthew 13, it is apparent that the theme of these parables is this heavenly kingdom. It also is

obvious that the kingdom isn't talking about some future reign of Jesus on earth, but is the spiritual nature of the Lord's church -- see Matthew 16:28.

- 8. What can we learn from Jesus' interaction with the "ruling Jews"?** Jesus was amazing in His interactions with people. His speech was with grace, seasoned with salt, responding perfectly in every situation. With the average person, Jesus was kind and gentle, yet always looking for and asking for a positive response to the truth. An excellent example of this is Jesus' conversation with the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16-22. Jesus had a love for this young man, and this love was communicated through His attitude in the conversation with him. At the same time, this love motivated Jesus to tell this man exactly what was needed for him to make it to heaven. Notice that this included the command, "Follow me." Jesus handled Himself differently with those who were decided enemies of God's plan. When they attempted to trap Jesus, He usually responded to their questions by asking them a question that they didn't want to answer -- see Matthew 21:23-27 (question of Jesus' authority), 22:17-19 (question regarding taxes to Caesar), 22:41-46 (Jesus asks them about the lineage of the Messiah). Jesus also intentionally pushed them in His parables, making it obvious that some of His teaching was squarely pointed at them -- see Matthew 21:33-46 (parable of the landowner). Finally, Jesus publicly exposed them in Matthew 23, calling them out by the names of their groups and assigning them the tag of "hypocrite." We can learn to be patient with people, while continually asking them to step up and take steps to follow Jesus. At the same time, we learn not to pull any punches with those who are "false teachers," exposing them both privately and publicly for their hypocrisy.
- 9. What would cause Judas to betray Jesus?** Clearly Judas once had a strong spiritual interest. He apparently was at the Jordan River listening to John the Immerser's teaching the day Jesus was immersed by John -- see Acts 1:21-22. He was one of Jesus' initial followers, and was one of the inner circle, so that Jesus chose him along with the other 11 to be apostles -- see Matthew 10:2-4. Somewhere along the line, Judas chose the allure of the flesh over the pull of the Spirit. He took the easy way instead of the right way. Once he started down that path, all of the mental gymnastics kicked into gear, attempting to find fault with Jesus, instead of honestly assessing his own sin. From the gospel of John, we find out that Judas was treasurer and was pilfering the money box (John 12:4). It seems that when Jesus defended the anointing of perfume given to Him by Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus, He hit some hot buttons of Judas. Immediately thereafter Judas went out and conspired with the chief priests, promising to turn Jesus over to them for the price of 30 pieces of silver. The betrayal of Jesus by Judas seems to be the fleshly response of Judas over the guilt of other sin in his life. Let us learn -- we need to deal with sin openly and honestly before God, or we too may end up as spiritual traitors. No easy outs -- we must train ourselves to take the right way, consistently following the leading of the Holy Spirit.
- 10. Why would Peter deny Christ?** Peter is an interesting guy. Most of us readily relate to some of the aspects of his life that are opened to us in the pages of the New Testament. Peter was a man who had a very strong spiritual interest. Among the apostles, he was in the special group of three that got to be involved in the most intimate aspects of Jesus' ministry -- see Mark 5:37 (Jairus' daughter), Matthew 17:1 (transfiguration), Matthew 26:36-38 (Gethsemane). Peter was the guy that seemed to be both quick and right with his answers to Jesus' questions -- see Matthew 16:16-17 (who do you say that I am?). Peter was a man of courage, who truly believed in Jesus' power -- Matthew 14:27-33 (walking on the water). At the same time, Peter's quick responses sometimes showed both his foolishness (Matthew 16:22-23 -- Peter's rebuke of Jesus) and his lack of faith (Matthew 14:27-33 -- walking on the water). This culminated in Peter's

denial of Jesus on the night of His crucifixion. Peter had originally made a confident assertion that Jesus could count on him to the end -- Matthew 26:31-35. When Judas showed up at Gethsemane accompanied by a large group of soldiers, Peter was ready to follow through with his bold assertion -- Matthew 26:51-52, John 18:10. However, after Jesus willingly gave Himself up, Peter's faith picture completely crumbled around him. His great courage wilted under the fear that came with the unexpected, and Peter denied Jesus three times. A righteous man who had walked with Jesus for 3 1/2 years now was broken to the point of curses and swearing coming from his own mouth. Lesson we should learn -- our faith picture needs to match God's plan as revealed in the Scriptures or we too will fall in the moment of great testing.

- 11. What was the difference between Judas and Peter?** There are a couple of major differences between Judas and Peter. It looks like Judas had mentally checked out for awhile before he betrayed Jesus. Judas schemed and planned to take Jesus out. On the other hand, Peter was willing to stand with Jesus, but he stumbled in the face of the unexpected. One was premeditated, while the other was failure under duress. Neither is excusable, but you would expect there to be hope for Peter to turn back to the Lord. This leads us to the next big difference between Judas and Peter. While both were sorry, Peter repented, but Judas did not. In his remorse, Judas went out and hanged himself, forever sealing his eternal fate. Peter was sorry also, but his sorrow led him to repentance. He was at the empty tomb on the first day of the week, looking for Jesus. Around 50 days later, Peter was the leading apostle in ushering in the church of Jesus Christ. As Jesus had prayed, when Peter repented, he was able to strengthen the brethren.
- 12. What can we learn from Jesus' attitude while on the cross?** Jesus' absolute control over His flesh is no more apparent than what is portrayed in His conduct during the excruciating circumstances of His death. When you slow down in your mind the last 24 hours of His life, you realize that Jesus was pushed far beyond anything that any of us has yet to experience. He was betrayed by one of His closest associates, and abandoned by all of His dear friends. He was forced to stand trial before three different governing authorities, being beaten and mocked all the while. Jesus watched the crowds ask for a notorious murderer to be set free, as they were shouting to crucify Him. Jesus saw Pilate wilt before these crowds, with Pilate trading the life of Christ as a matter of political expediency. Jesus was beat beyond recognition, then forced to carry His cross during the long trek up Golgotha. Jesus' body literally gave out on Him, as Simon of Cyrene was pressed into service to help carry that cross. While on the cross, Jesus experienced continued taunting both from the crowds gathered around as well as the criminals hanging next to Him. Finally, as Jesus bore our sin in His body on the cross, He felt the agonizing pain of separation from His heavenly Father. Yet through all these things, Jesus kept the right attitude. He refused the pain killers, choosing to endure the pain and keep His mind clear so He could perfectly complete His earthly mission. While on the cross, Jesus fulfilled some final prophecies, quoted Scripture, made sure His mom would be cared for, granted salvation to one of the thieves, and asked the Father to forgive those who had put Him on that cross. Above all Jesus wanted to please His Father, and He loved souls. Jesus didn't let selfishness get in the way of fulfilling the Father's plan for Him. We too need to put others above ourselves, and we need to drop the selfishness that renders us ineffective for God. We need to prepare mentally and through practice, so that we can stand even under extreme persecution and suffering.
- 13. What is the significance of the veil of the Temple being torn in two from top to bottom?** The design of the Temple was originally given by God to David, just as that of the Tabernacle was

first given to Moses. For the purpose of this discussion, let us remember that there was to be a veil separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. Under the Old Testament, the priests were allowed to enter into the Holy Place, daily performing their required duties. However, the Holy of Holies was off limits to everyone all the time, except for the High Priest on the Day of Atonement. Even at that special time, the incense from the golden altar first had to be brought into the Most Holy Place, ensuring that the smoke would hide the High Priest from the full glory of God. The point of all of this was to communicate that man in his sin is always separated from the Holy God. Thus when Christ died, and the veil miraculously split, God was communicating something very special. This shows that the way into God's presence is now forever open to those who are covered by the blood of Christ -- see Hebrews 10:19-22. (By the way, the term holy place includes the Holy of Holies in the book of Hebrews from 9:8 forward. This is true because after Christ's death, there was only one room -- no longer a separation between the two).

14. To whom is the Great Commission given? While the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 was explicitly given to the apostles, there are a couple of hints that show us this was intended for all of Christ's followers throughout history. First of all, it is important to note that the apostles are called *disciples* in this context. (All of the apostles were also disciples, but only a few disciples were set apart as apostles). This charge then, it seems, is for all of Christ's followers. This point is substantiated beyond any question when we consider the words of Jesus at the very end of this commission. He says, "and lo, I am with you always, even to the *end of the age*." Jesus is communicating that this mission is for all of His followers until His return. Let's complete the mission, so He can return, and we can head home to remain there forever.